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Anglo-French Negotiations with Russia and Russian-German Pact of 1939

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ANGLO-FRENCH NEGOTIATIONS WITH
RUSSIA AND RUSSIAN-GERMAN PACT
OF 1939

By
Joseph Del Vecchio

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

The object of this study has been first to examine briefly the post-war relations between the major European powers, particularly during the 1930's, which served as a background for the diplomatic moves between March and August of 1939. Secondly, the major part of the inquiry has been an effort to determine the fundamental national interests motivating Britain, France, Russia, and Germany in the negotiations which culminated in the German-Russian nonaggression pact of August, 1939, and to give an account of these negotiations.

In carrying out this study, the primary emphasis has been an examination of the official documents. Although not all of them pertaining to the negotiations are presently available, enough have been published so that a reasonably accurate account can be given. The French government has not published its official records, but the story of the Anglo-French negotiations with Russia is told in the published British documents while an account of the German-Russian negotiations is given in the captured German documents. The Soviet government, too, has not published its official papers of the negotiations either with the Western democracies or with Germany. However, the articles which appeared in

the controlled Soviet press, the public statements made by the Kremlin leaders, and the available British and German documents appear sufficient to explain the position of the Moscow government. These have been the major sources used in the development of this thesis.

The study has led to certain conclusions. With the German seizure of Prague in March, 1939, the Western democracies sought to find some common ground for cooperating with Russia in an attempt to stop further German aggression. However, in the protracted negotiations which followed, it soon became evident that London and Paris did not see eye to eye with Moscow on the German question. Britain and France sought an arrangement with the Soviet Union which, while devoid of any close ties, could nevertheless be used to press Germany into accepting a compromise settlement of all outstanding problems with the West. Such an agreement proved unacceptable to the Soviet government.

This failure can be attributed to the developing international situation prior to the outbreak of World War II, when the Soviet Union found herself being wooed not only by the Western democracies but by Germany as well. Under the circumstances, the leaders of the Kremlin were no longer unduly concerned about a united anti-Soviet bloc among the capitalist nations. Moreover, Stalin was now in the enviable position of carrying on negotiations simultaneously with the Western powers and with Germany. With Hitler desperately seeking an agreement with Russia, Stalin finally agreed to

sign a nonaggression pact with Germany. In signing this pact, Stalin sought to secure neutrality for the Soviet Union in a war which appeared imminent, while Hitler sought to limit the war against major powers to the western front.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Outcastes Seek Each Other

The Europe which emerged after the Treaty of Versailles was riddled with political dissensions, not only between victor and vanquished but also between victors. The Treaty was to prove less a guarantee of peace and a factor for unity among the powers and more an instrument creating situations replete with future political crises. Germany, once a proud and powerful nation, now was humbled and humiliated and bitter with resentment; in many high places the spirit of revenge predominated. France, though a victor, lived in mortal fear of a rearmed Germany and sought refuge in a strict enforcement of the Treaty buttressed with a system of alliances. Great Britain pursued a different course, since her national interests, particularly economic, were not consistent with those of France. She sought a German market for her goods and was less insistent on a strict interpretation and enforcement of the Treaty provisions. Defeated Russia was now almost wholly within the embrace of communism. Europe after Versailles thus was comprised of a defeated but revengeful Germany, an ever apprehensive France, a tractable Great Britain, and an

emerging Russian communist state.

Soviet Russia, born of revolution, and fighting desperately to survive, was dedicated to the promotion of world revolution, at least during her early history. As such she posed a sizeable threat to the major European powers, especially France and Great Britain. These states, along with others, dispatched expeditionary forces to Murmansk, Archangel, and Vladivostok. They also gave aid to the anti-communist forces within Russia, but the revolution was successful. The new state now joined Germany as an outcaste in the family of nations and every attempt was made by the victors to keep the two apart.

But Germany and Russia, having much to gain by establishing friendly relations, soon came to an understanding. On April 16, 1922, Walter Rathenau and George Chicherin, chiefs, respectively, of the German and Russian foreign offices, signed the Treaty of Rapallo. It provided for the resumption of full diplomatic, consular, and trade relations, and the waiving by Germany of all claims against Russia on account of nationalized German businesses. This agreement was hastened by the failure of the communist uprising in Germany in March, 1921, the League of Nations' decision on Upper Silesia which went against Germany, and the German fear of the possibility of an Anglo-Russian agreement.

The agreement had its origin in the nature of the international relations of the period, and it was recognized

as such by the leaders in both countries. Thus what Lenin had said in December, 1920, to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets had come to pass. That is, a German bourgeois government was being pushed towards peace with Soviet Russia against its own will because of the existing international situation.¹ The German attitude was perhaps best expressed by Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, the first German ambassador to Russia in the post-war period. He looked upon his mission as "the symbol of a curious but firm friendship between two nations whom the cruel course of history had converted into outlaws, forcing them together through thick and thin, breathing defiance against the satiated, victorious, bourgeois world."²

Close German relations with Russia were advocated as early as October, 1919, by General Hans von Seeckt, the creator of the new Reichswehr. In a letter to a friend, he wrote that an understanding with Russia was "a permanent aim of German policy."³ The military leaders saw the opportunity of rebuilding the German army and Soviet Russia was the logical place to hide such activities which were in violation of the Versailles Treaty. To this end Russia made

¹Edward Hallett Carr, German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1951), p. 40.

²Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Meyer, The Incompatible Allies (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 95.

³Carr, German-Soviet Relations, 1919-1939, p. 221.

agreements with the German War Ministry whereby German firms were granted concessions in Russia to manufacture airplane motors, poison gases, guns, shells, and tanks.¹ The German War Ministry even had an agreement with the Red Army whereby German pilots and tank experts were trained.²

For Russia, friendly relations with a defeated Germany served many objectives. Above all, with the capitalist world divided between the conquering Allies and defeated Germany, there was every opportunity through the medium of an understanding with Germany, to prevent the formation of an effective anti-Russian coalition. In addition, German capital, machinery, and technical knowledge could aid the Communists in transforming Russia into a leading world power. Close ties between the two countries would also isolate Poland, an outpost of the Western powers in eastern Europe. Internal conflict within the non-communist world, therefore, was a boon to the Communists. They thrived on it and sought by every means to perpetuate it.

At best, however, the relationship was an uneasy one. Although both nations had common enemies and common interests, there were indications of a basic incompatibility. At the very outset, Brockdorff-Rantzau expressed the view that Germany should not align herself too closely with Russia politically for this would prove an obstacle toward better relations with the West, especially with England.³ The

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, pp. 194-95.

²Ibid., p. 196

³Ibid., pp. 91-92.

possibility of a rapprochement with the Western powers on the part of both Germany and Russia bred suspicion. Each feared disloyalty of the other. This was so well recognized that diplomats in Moscow were "constantly asking themselves who would be the first to sell the partner down the river by making a deal with Poland, England, or France."¹

The foreign policy of Gustav Stresemann, the German foreign minister from 1923 to 1929, was a matter of deep concern to the Soviet leaders because he inaugurated a policy of fulfillment and accommodation toward Germany's former enemies. Under his leadership, Germany negotiated the withdrawal of French and Belgian troops from the Ruhr, signed the Locarno Pact which guaranteed the German frontiers with France and Belgium, and gained for Germany entry into the League of Nations. Although attempts were made to allay Russian fears, it did usher in a new era in the relations between Germany and Russia.

Russian leaders were highly critical of Germany's foreign policy toward the Western powers. Even before the Locarno Pact and the German entry into the League of Nations, Chicherin on May 16, 1925, warned that for the "Soviet Union Germany's choice of a definitely Western orientation and entry into the League of Nations can objectively lead only to the deterioration of relations between Germany and the Soviet Republic."² And on May 24, 1925, an editorial in

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, p. 152.

²Ibid., p. 134.

Izvestia stated that "in the present international situation, orientation toward the West means for Germany simply an acknowledgment of her present subjugation and promises her absolutely nothing positive."¹ The leaders of the Soviet Union were clearly concerned.

Toward the end of February, 1926, Germany sought to quiet Russian fears by proposing a formal treaty. The result was the signing of the Berlin Treaty on April 24, 1926. By its terms, each nation promised to remain neutral in case either were attacked by one or more powers; neither would join any kind of coalition or economic campaign directed against the other partner. This agreement represented the high point of friendly relations between the two countries before 1933. Deterioration was about to set in.

Mania for Security

The Berlin Treaty did not dispel the Russian fears, paramount after the Locarno Pacts, of a rapprochement between Germany and her former enemies. Soviet leaders deemed it necessary, therefore, to become active on many fronts in the cause of Russian security. While still seeking to remain friendly with Germany, Soviet leaders sought security in neutrality and nonaggression pacts and also in fostering closer relations with the Western powers. To this end, they signed, between 1925 and 1932, numerous neutrality and nonaggression pacts with neighbors, among them Turkey,

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, p. 131.

Lithuania, Finland, Latvia, and Estonia.

Russian fears concerning Germany were shared by other European countries, especially France. She, too, had sought security in a system of alliances similar to those of Russia. By 1927, she had concluded some form of defensive alliance or agreement with Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. With the gradual deterioration of German-Russian relations, it was perhaps inevitable that France and Russia would find common ground for establishing closer relations. In 1932 the two nations signed a nonaggression pact in which each agreed to remain neutral in case the other were attacked without provocation.

By 1932 then, German-Russian relations had cooled considerably and Russia sought closer ties with the Western powers, especially France. With Maxim Litvinov succeeding Chicherin as the Soviet foreign minister, Russian foreign policy was directed toward closer collaboration with the West, the main objective still being the prevention of an effective anti-Russian bloc. It was still to be seen, however, whether Russia and the non-communist nations, in the face of Hitler's advent to power, could keep the peace of Europe.

March of the Dictators

Although Russia by 1932 was seeking closer relations with the Western powers, she did not wish to abandon entirely friendly relations with Germany. This attitude prevailed even after Adolf Hitler had become Chancellor in January,

1933, and had outlawed and taken terrorist action against the Communist party and agents of the Communist International. Many times Litvinov and Molotov expressed sentiments to the German representatives in Moscow for maintaining friendly relations with Germany.¹ In fact, Litvinov went so far as to remark: "We don't care if you shoot your German Communists."²

However, Hitler in Germany was dedicated to revision of the Versailles Treaty and soon posed a serious problem not only to the Soviet Union but to all of Europe. Hitler wasted very little time before embarking on a course which was to plunge Europe into one crisis after another. Following the Saar plebiscite of March, 1935, which returned that area to Germany, Hitler announced the rearmament of Germany. In March, 1936, German troops marched into the Rhineland; 1938 saw Germany annex Austria and the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. There was clearly a need for some plan to arrest the German menace.

Russian foreign policy between 1933 and 1936 sought an answer in a policy of collective security wherein Great Britain, France, and Russia would form an effective counterweight. To this end the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in September, 1934; signed pacts of mutual assistance with both France and Czechoslovakia in May, 1935; and called upon the Communists in other countries to support anti-Fascist groups in what came to be called the Popular Front.

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, pp. 255-56.

²Ibid., p. 252.

But the apparent unanimity of purpose was not translated into action. There was a tendency in many European quarters to acquiesce and to capitulate to German demands because they saw in a strong Germany a successful force against communist Russia. It is true that a half-hearted attempt was made to enforce effective measures against Italy in Ethiopia; but the Civil War in Spain, the reoccupation of the Rhineland, and the German annexation of Austria clearly showed that the foreign policy of Great Britain, France, and Russia toward the dictators did not rest on a common ground. The last act was to be played out at Munich where Britain and France permitted the sacrifice of the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia in a futile effort to placate Hitler. What started out as collective security had degenerated first into collective inertia and then outright appeasement.

Munich and After

Throughout the period of increasing tension between Germany and Czechoslovakia over the Sudetenland issue, the Soviet government reaffirmed its treaty obligations toward Czechoslovakia. This view was expressed by Litvinov to the foreign press on March 17, 1938,¹ and to the French on May 12, 1938.² In fact, there is some evidence that Russia was willing to come to Czechoslovakia's aid even after that

¹Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941 (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), II, 122.

²Ibid., p. 131.

country had accepted the Munich terms on September 30, 1938.¹

The Soviet Union's position, however, did not appear to bolster that of the Western powers, especially France and Great Britain. It seemed that they were willing to make any concessions concerning Czechoslovakia to avoid a conflict with Germany. Thus at Munich they not only conceded the German demands against that state, but exerted diplomatic pressure on the officials of Czechoslovakia to accept the agreement which they had no part in formulating.

A non-participant in the Munich conferences, Russia now became openly suspicious of the Western powers. She feared that Great Britain and France were satisfied to see a strong Germany, provided she had aggressive designs against Russia. This view was expressed by Stalin to Joseph Davies, the American ambassador in Moscow, even before Munich.² The Munich Pact no doubt helped to confirm this view and forced Russia to reappraise her policy of cooperating with the West against Hitler.³

Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, said after the Munich Conference that peace had been secured. He had a rude awakening in March, 1939, however, when Germany

¹Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941 (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), II, 162.

²Joseph E. Davies, Mission to Moscow (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1941), p. 345.

³Carr, German-Soviet Relations, 1919-1939, p. 125.

invaded and occupied what remained of the Czechoslovak state.

With the occupation of Prague, the Western powers appeared ready to scrap their policy of appeasement which had proved a failure. They now sounded out Russia to determine what obligations she was ready to assume in defending the independence of other threatened European nations. But it was against a background of mutual distrust that London and Paris approached Moscow.

CHAPTER II

ANGLO-FRENCH NEGOTIATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Distrust and Indecision

In a speech to the British Parliament following the Munich Pact in 1938, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that he had secured "peace in our time." To the many who disagreed with him, the Pact was not a symbol of peace but another abject surrender to one who had an insatiable appetite for other people's territory. Unlike Chamberlain, they would have wagered that before long Hitler would be asking for more land, probably the remainder of the truncated Czechoslovak state.

On March 15, 1939, German troops occupied Prague, and the following day Hitler issued a decree establishing a protectorate over Bohemia and Moravia. By this act he destroyed the Munich Pact and laid bare for all to see, even to some of its staunchest supporters, the bankruptcy of the policy of appeasement. The harsh reality of events compelled Great Britain and France to reappraise their foreign policies and to formulate a more effective defense against Hitlerite Germany. But the apparent transition from a course of appeasement to one of effective defense could not be effected over night. The past could not simply be made to vanish; and

as it applied to Britain and France in the field of international relations, the past was to prove a burden when it came to doing business with the Soviet Union to whom these countries now turned.

During the 1930's and right up to March 15, 1939, the two major non-fascist European powers, Great Britain and France, had capitulated to the dictators at almost every turn. Many reasons have been given in explanation. One view is that the great majority of the people in many countries outside the fascist nations had reached a point where they did not take warfare as being inevitable and considered it a barbarity. Germany thus took advantage of this consideration and by organizing and maintaining a strong military force was able to reap concessions from people with these views.¹

Of no less importance perhaps is the fact that the British people were hopelessly divided over questions of foreign policy. It was a division which had been steadily growing since Japan's invasion of Manchuria in September, 1931. In the intervening period only a minority of the people had taken a position either for or against a policy of appeasement or collective security. The majority

¹Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946, The World in March, 1939, eds. Arnold Toynbee and Frank T. Ashton-Gwatkin (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), I, 34. (Hereafter cited as R. I. I. A., Survey, The World in March, 1939.)

remained undecided.¹

However undecided the majority may have been, there was one group which was leading the others down the road of appeasement. In the period immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II the major architect of this group was Chamberlain. It was his belief that the outstanding problems between Great Britain and Germany could be settled by their leaders in the same manner that disputes were settled by the business men in Birmingham. Furthermore, he took at face value Hitler's repeated assertions that his territorial claims were limited to the application of the principle of self-determination.²

But these are not the only explanations given for appeasement. A more damaging one is that it had as its basic objective a clash between Russia and Germany. In order for this plan to succeed, Germany had to be given freedom to expand in the East; and this could not be done without the destruction of the French alliances with Prague and Moscow. To this end, Austria and Czechoslovakia were allowed to fall into Hitler's hands. Once having allowed Germany to absorb these territories, the Western powers hoped that Hitler's desire to liberate the Ukraine would embroil him in a war with Russia. This was especially a cherished hope after Munich and a hope that "at the time was

¹R. I. I. A., Survey, The World in March, 1939, I, 35-36.

²Ibid., 37-38.

by no means absurd."¹ In December of 1938 Robert Coulondre, the French ambassador in Berlin, reported that many German leaders, including Joachim von Ribbentrop and Hermann Goering, had spoken to him of the necessity for German expansion in the East. He informed his government that one could see little by little the outlines of a great German enterprise, the objective of which was mastery over central Europe and the creation of a Greater Ukraine under German control. This plan appeared to be accepted by the nazi leaders, including Hitler himself. Coulondre mentioned in this respect that the Ukrainian question had been a subject of conversation for the past ten days among the staff of the National-Socialist party. The aim appeared to him well defined although no ways and means of achievement had as yet been evolved.²

Thus it is argued that there was a tacit understanding between Germany and the Western powers whereby the latter would tolerate German expansion to the East in compensation for the maintenance of the status quo in the West. It is further asserted that the abandonment of appeasement by the Western powers was motivated not by the violation of the Munich Pact by Germany but by the realization

¹Frederick L. Schuman, Night Over Europe (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941), pp. 56-58.

²Coulondre to Bonnet, December 15, 1938, French Government, The French Yellow Book, Diplomatic Documents, 1938-1939 (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1940), pp. 42-43. (Hereafter cited as French Government, French Yellow Book.)

that Germany, having allowed Hungary on March 16, 1939, to annex the Carpatho-Ukraine, no longer would use that territory to attack Russia. Those who support this view conclude with Frederick L. Schuman that "events of March 16 revealed even to Chamberlain that the Ukrainian dream was dead and that the Soviet Union would not be the next object of nazi ambition."¹

Whatever the real explanation for appeasement, the events of March 15-16 did effect a change in the foreign policy of both Great Britain and France toward Germany and Russia. This change was apparent in the speech Chamberlain made at Birmingham on March 17. His speech was a general defense of his policy of appeasement together with an observation of the changes in the international situation. He said he had no need to defend his visits to Germany in the autumn of 1938 because nothing which Great Britain, France, or Russia could have done would have saved Czechoslovakia. He remarked that his visits to Hitler led him to believe that after Munich Hitler would have no more territorial claims to make in Europe. This being the case he expressed the belief that the British people at the time wanted him to follow a policy of appeasement.² However, commenting on

¹Night Over Europe, p. 116.

²Royal Institute of International Affairs, Documents on International Affairs, 1939-1946, ed. Arnold J. Toynbee (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), I, 67-69. (Hereafter cited as R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946.)

the situation as it now existed, he said:

It is only six weeks ago that I was speaking in this city, and that I alluded to rumours and suspicions which I said ought to be swept away. I pointed out that any demand to dominate the world by force was one which the democracies must resist, and I added that I could not believe that such a challenge was intended, because no Government with the interests of its own people at heart could expose them for such a claim to the horrors of World War.

And . . . it seems incredible that we should see such a challenge. I feel bound to repeat that . . . no greater mistake could be made than to suppose that, because it believes war to be a senseless and cruel thing, this nation has so lost its fibre that it will not take part to the utmost of its power in resisting such a challenge if it ever were made.¹

These statements appeared to portend the end of appeasement and the adoption of a more vigorous policy aimed against further German expansion. But the question was: What policy would be most effective? One alternative undoubtedly was fairly obvious--closer collaboration with Russia. However, there were drawbacks here, because some leaders in the British government had keen misgivings about Russia. One of these was Chamberlain. On March 26 he wrote:

I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia. I have no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive, even if she wanted to. And I distrust her motives, which seem to me to have little connection with our ideas of liberty, and to be concerned only with getting every one else by the ears. Moreover, she is both hated and suspected by many of the smaller States, notably by Poland, Rumania, and Finland.²

But if the British ruling circles distrusted Russia,

¹R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 71.

²Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1946), p. 403.

so did the Russian leaders distrust the Western democracies. In 1938 they were fairly certain that the Chamberlain government would make some kind of agreement with Hitler. This belief was heightened, if not confirmed, by the Munich Pact. However, it appears that the belief had not yet been adopted finally and unanimously by the Soviet leaders.¹ Their main preoccupation after Munich was to determine whether Germany in the role of aggressor would be aided either directly or indirectly by Great Britain and France, or whether these nations would help in destroying Germany.²

In the weeks preceding the occupation of Prague, many harsh statements were made by Russian leaders condemning the Western powers. It was left to Stalin, however, to voice the gravest and most definitive suspicions. This he did in an address to the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party on March 10, 1939. He accused the Western powers of rejecting a policy of collective security for one of non-intervention for the sole purpose of promoting war between the aggressor nations and Russia so that at the end, with the belligerents weakened, they could impose the conditions of peace. The aggressor was allowed to take Austria and the Sudetenland after which the Western powers used the press to lie about the weakness of the Russian armed forces and internal difficulties. All this was done in an attempt to egg Germany on to attack the Soviet Union.

¹R. I. I. A., Survey, The World in March, 1939, I, 49.

²Ibid., 46.

Stalin warned "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."¹

Thus, as late as March 10, five days before Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia, it was Stalin's conviction that Britain and France were not much interested in arresting Germany's expansion moves nor in preventing war. He believed that they desired a war in which they, not being participants, could emerge as arbiters.

This, then, was essentially the nature of the relations between the democratic powers and Russia prior to the negotiations which were soon to get underway in an effort to prevent further German aggression in eastern Europe.

Initial Anglo-French Moves

With Czechoslovakia having fallen into the German orbit, there was increased diplomatic activity between Great Britain, France, and other European nations concerning the possibility of new German moves, this time against Poland, Romania, and Lithuania. Warnings came from many quarters. In Paris, a representative of the French foreign office told Sir Eric Phipps, the British ambassador, that he expected Germany to move soon against Danzig and

¹Royal Institute of International Affairs, Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1933-1941, ed. Jane Degras (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), III, 319-20. (Hereafter cited as R. I. I. A., Soviet Documents.)

Memel.¹ In London, the Romanian minister informed the British Foreign Office that Germany had served Romania with a virtual ultimatum concerning a trade agreement.² From Berlin, the British chargé d'affaires reported that at a meeting which had taken place with the Lithuanian minister for foreign affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister, demanded that Memel should be handed over "graciously to Germany."³ And from Berlin Coulondre reported an official of the German Propaganda Ministry as saying that "we have before us so many open doors, so many possibilities, that we no longer know which way to turn, or what direction to take."⁴

These warnings concerning future German moves proved to be timely. On March 21, in Berlin, Ribbentrop had some complaints and demands to make of the Polish ambassador, Joseph Lipski. After remarking that a "certain constraint had gradually manifested itself in German-Polish relations," Ribbentrop complained about anti-German incidents in Danzig by Polish students and the anti-Reich tone of the Polish papers. He also pressed for the return to Germany of

¹Phipps to Halifax, March 17, 1939, E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (eds.), Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Third Series (London: His Majesty's Stationery, 1951), IV, 363. (Hereafter cited as Woodward & Butler, Documents.)

²Halifax to Hoare, March 17, 1939, Ibid., 367.

³Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, March 20, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 398.

⁴Coulondre to Bonnet, French Government, French Yellow Book, p. 106.

the city of Danzig and for an extra-territorial highway and railway connection across the Corridor linking Germany proper with East Prussia. In reporting to his home government, Lipski warned that "Germany has resolved to carry out her Eastern programme quickly, and so desires to have Poland's attitude clearly defined."¹ As for Romania, a trade agreement was signed between that country and Germany on March 23.² That same day Germany formally annexed the Memel Territory.³

With distress signals now flying over many European countries and the tenor of diplomatic dispatches showing increasing anxiety, there was a clear need for unity and effective action among the anti-German forces. The French government agreed "that France and Great Britain should decide on a common attitude and considers that if German enterprise succeeded (even if directed for the moment only towards the East) it would result in German hegemony over Europe with all the menaces which this would entail to vital interests of France and Great Britain."⁴

The two immediate danger spots seemed to be Poland and Romania. From Paris, the British ambassador reported that Josef Beck, the Polish foreign minister, had asked

¹R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 113.

²Ibid., 117-18.

³Ibid., 115-16.

⁴Campbell to Halifax, March 20, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 397.

the French government whether it would help in case of a German attack against Danzig. The French government had agreed to give aid provided a defensive alliance could be negotiated between Poland and Romania.¹ The French considered the latter state the last obstacle in the way of German control of the resources of central and eastern Europe and expressed readiness to aid her with or without the assistance of other nations.² Similar inquiries by Poland and Romania were made of the British government.

The British and French first focused their attention on Romania. On March 17, Sir Howard Kennard, the British ambassador in Warsaw, inquired of Beck if the Polish-Romanian Treaty of 1931 would be effective against Germany. Beck replied that "that alliance with its military conventions only envisaged Russia as aggressor."³ Kennard saw Beck again the following day and asked him what the attitude of Poland would be toward any aggressive German moves against Romania. Beck replied that he would have to go into the matter more fully with the Romanian government and with his own. When Kennard reminded him of the remark he had made on March 17 that the alliance between Romania and Poland aimed only at Russia, Beck replied "that this was so but

¹Phipps to Halifax, March 18, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 372.

²Campbell to Halifax, March 20, 1939, Ibid., 397.

³Kennard to Halifax, March 17, 1939, Ibid., 363.

that of course the Polish Government would be vitally interested in any threat to Roumanian independence."¹ The British ambassador saw Beck again on March 20 at which time Beck was as evasive as ever, saying that Romania had not informed Poland of any danger. Beck's vice-minister of foreign affairs, however, viewed the situation with more seriousness.²

Meanwhile, Britain had made contact with the Soviet government. This approach followed the statement made in London on March 15, by the Russian ambassador, Ivan Maisky. He said at the time "that at present there is no conflict of interest between the U. S. S. R. and the British Empire in any part of the world . . . that in the last resort the fate of peace or war in our time depends on the kind of relations between London and Moscow."³ On March 17 Vicount Halifax, the British foreign minister, called upon the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Seeds, to inquire immediately of the Soviet government "whether they can give any indication that they would, if requested by Roumanian Government, actively help the latter to resist German aggression."⁴

¹Kennard to Halifax, March 18, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 371.

²Ibid., 401.

³W. P. and Zelda K. Coates, A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1944), p. 603, quoting Daily Telegraph and Daily Herald, March 16, 1939.

⁴Halifax to Seeds, March 17, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 361.

The following day Seeds put the question to Maxim Litvinov, the Russian commissar for foreign affairs. After remarking that a reply would be made later, Litvinov had some precise questions to ask, among which were the following: Did Seeds have any indication of the course which Great Britain would take in the matter? Did Great Britain wish the Soviet Union to take an engagement while leaving her own hands free? What was the nature of the British reply to the German note announcing the fait accompli with regard to Czechoslovakia? Seeds did not answer all these questions. He told Litvinov that the basis of any decision by Great Britain would rest on the attitude of those countries concerned. He added that Chamberlain's speech of March 17 at Birmingham set forth the British government's attitude toward Germany's action against Czechoslovakia. Litvinov also wanted to know why the Romanian government had not approached the Soviet Union directly. To this "most awkward question" Seeds had no answer.¹

The Soviet government's reply was made on March 18. Seeds reported Litvinov as saying that "no good purpose would be served by various Governments enquiring of each other in turn what action others would take before making up their own minds." The Soviet government instead proposed a meeting in Bucharest of delegates appointed by the British, French, Soviet, Polish, and Romanian governments to discuss the

¹Seeds to Halifax, March 18, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 372.

possibilities of common action.¹ The Soviet government thought that holding the conference in Bucharest would have a psychological effect on both Bucharest and Berlin.²

On March 19, Halifax told Maisky that Britain had no desire to waste time in long diplomatic exchanges. However, there were two difficulties with Litvinov's proposed six-power conference: first, Britain could not under the present circumstances send a responsible minister to the conference; and secondly, to hold such a conference without prior certainty that it would be successful was dangerous.³ Maisky was told that the British government was presently working on a formula whereby Britain, France, Poland, and Russia could publicly assert their unity, thereby achieving the same objectives that Litvinov sought to achieve in a conference. This proposed declaration would serve both as a warning to Germany and as a rallying point for the smaller states.⁴ Maisky informed his government that the British considered the Soviet proposal for a six-power conference "premature."⁵

The reasons the British gave for rejecting the Soviet government's proposal for a six-power conference are

¹Seeds to Halifax, March 19, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 385.

²Halifax to Seeds, March 19, 1939, Ibid., 392.

³Halifax to Seeds, March 19, 1939, Ibid., 392.

⁴Ibid., 392-93.

⁵Seeds to Halifax, March 21, 1939, Ibid., 429.

not convincing. The nature of Chamberlain's speech at Birmingham on March 17, the British note to the Soviet government on March 18, and the generally feverish diplomatic soundings of other European governments appeared to belie them. Under these circumstances, it appears incredible that the British government should reject the proposed six-power conference because (1) it couldn't send a responsible minister and (2) it feared that holding such a conference without prior certainty of success would be dangerous. Clearly the British government was exhibiting an inconsistent attitude. While it recognized the seriousness of the German threat, there was also hesitation to make definite commitments with the Soviet Union.

Having rejected the call for a six-power conference, Britain now proposed a Four-Power Declaration by France, Russia, Poland, and Great Britain. It was to read: "We the undersigned, duly authorized to that effect, hereby declare that, inasmuch as peace and security in Europe are matters of common interest and concern, and since European peace and security may be affected by an action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European State, our respective Governments hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action."¹

When this proposal for a declaration was presented

¹Halifax to Phipps and Seeds, March 20, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 400.

to Litvinov, he said that agreement on it could be more easily obtained by a conference. It was also his belief that Poland would not accept.¹ Nevertheless, one day later the Soviet government accepted the British proposal, provided Poland and France did likewise.² France accepted on March 23.³

The proposal soon encountered difficulties, however. When it was first presented to Beck, he expressed misgivings that the Soviet Union would be one of the parties, and said that Poland might be able to associate herself with Britain and France if the Soviet Union were omitted.⁴ In its reply, the Polish government rejected the proposal for fear that it would provoke a German attack on Poland. Instead, through its ambassador in London, the Polish government proposed a bilateral understanding with Great Britain.⁵ The ambassador warned that "a rapprochement between Poland and Russia might have disastrous results."⁶

On March 29 Maisky was told that Great Britain was no longer pursuing the Four-Power Declaration and that along with France it was considering another course of

¹Seeds to Halifax, March 21, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 429.

²Ibid., 467.

³Campbell to Halifax, March 23, 1939, Ibid., 490-91.

⁴Kennard to Halifax, March 22, 1939, Ibid., 453.

⁵Halifax to Kennard, March 24, 1939, Ibid., 500.

⁶Ibid., 502.

action. Great Britain now sought to ascertain the nature of the resistance that Poland and Romania were ready to follow with a view toward giving assurance to these two countries. Halifax also told Maisky that Poland and Romania "would no doubt be glad of the sympathy and indeed of the active assistance of the Soviet Union, in whatever way might seem most suitable and effective."¹ Thus the second attempt to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union ended in failure.

The British and French governments were very sensitive to Polish and Romanian misgivings about Russia. The Poles were not pressed to accept the Four-Power Declaration. Poland and Romania were considered the cornerstone of any effective anti-German coalition. This was evident from some of the statements made by the British and French foreign ministers. George Bonnet, the French foreign minister, told the British that whatever the plan, Poland's cooperation was so necessary that "it was desirable . . . to go to the utmost limit, even to the extent of threats, to bring Poland in."² For his part, Halifax said that "in any scheme, the inclusion of Poland is vital as the one strong Power bordering on Germany in the East, and the inclusion of Roumania is also of the first importance, since Roumania may be the State primarily menaced by Germany's plans for

¹Halifax to Seeds, March 29, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 544.

²Ibid., 426.

Eastern expansion."¹

Following the rejection of the Four-Power Declaration by Poland, the British and French governments decided on a new course of action. They now proposed to aid both Poland and Romania if the independence of either state were threatened by Germany. This aid would be contingent, however, on two factors: (1) their willingness to resist; and (2) the conclusion of a mutual defense treaty aimed at Germany.² In the ensuing negotiations between Poland and Romania, there was evidence of much distrust of each other. Romania feared that an eventual agreement between Poland and Germany would inevitably lead to an Hungarian attack against her.³ For her part, Poland did not wish to antagonize Hungary. So in the end, this attempt failed too.

The question naturally arises: Did not the British and French governments think the Soviet Union could be of help in thwarting Germany? The answer is they did, but in a peculiar sort of way. The Soviet Union was to be kept on the sidelines ready to jump into the fray at the nod of one of the probable victims of aggression. But meanwhile, there was to be no prior agreement with her calling for automatic action because this might provoke a German attack. In other words, Russian assistance was desired only when

¹Halifax to Kennard, March 27, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 516.

²Ibid.

³Hoare to Halifax, April 2, 1939, Ibid., 578.

and if it was called for. There were to be no firm commitments with her. Perhaps Seeds best summed up this attitude when he expressed the wish for Anglo-Soviet relations to be "friendliness and contacts but no obligations."¹ In the weeks to come, contacts would be numerous, obligations would be nil, and friendliness would be all but absent.

The British government made no further approach to the Soviet Union again before April 15. Meanwhile, Poland replaced Romania as the focal point for a possible German attack. On March 30, the British ambassador in Warsaw was instructed to determine whether the Polish government would be in accord with a statement that Prime Minister Chamberlain was prepared to make in the House of Commons the next day concerning a British and French guarantee to Poland.² Beck accepted without hesitation.³ The Soviet ambassador wasn't informed of this statement until a few hours before it was made.⁴ The statement by Chamberlain was as follows:

As the House is aware, certain consultations are now proceeding with other Governments. In order to make perfectly clear the position of His Majesty's Government in the meantime before those consultations are concluded, I now have to inform the House that during that period, in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's

¹Seeds to Halifax, March 28, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, IV, 524.

²Halifax to Kennard, March 30, 1939, Ibid., 546.

³Kennard to Halifax, March 30, 1939, Ibid., 548.

⁴Halifax to Seeds, March 31, 1939, Ibid., 557.

Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.

I may add that the French Government have authorised me to make it plain that they stand in the same position in this matter as do his Majesty's Government.¹

On April 13, Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that Britain and France were extending guarantees also to Romania and Greece.² Unquestionably, the British and French governments had concluded that an understanding with Russia could wait. However, in granting these guarantees they committed themselves beforehand to fight any further German aggression. They indirectly brought to the Soviet government the advantages it might have gained by a direct agreement with the Western powers. Britain and France had actually thrown away a major bargaining point which they could have used to good advantage not only with Poland and Romania but also in the forthcoming negotiations with the Soviet government.

Britain and France had given these guarantees without consultations with the Soviet government. However, they now embarked on negotiations with that government, the main objective of which was to get it also to bolster these guarantees.

Declarations or Triple Alliance?

It was obvious that Great Britain and France frowned

¹R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 126.

²Ibid., 201-02.

on close collaboration with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, this did not preclude some measure of common effort. An attempt along this line was suggested by Seeds to Halifax on April 6. He felt some good could be achieved if Halifax informed the Soviet ambassador of the possibility of considering Litvinov's proposal for a conference of some kind.¹ Again on April 13 Seeds expressed the hope that some means could be found to prevail on Poland and Romania to accept the idea of some form of Soviet military assistance. "Such acceptance to be notified now and not put off until an outbreak of war when this country might be tempted to follow counsels of prudence or worse."²

Meanwhile, in London and Paris, the Soviet ambassador, while critical of British and French foreign policy, expressed a desire on the part of the Soviet government to cooperate in maintaining peace. In London, Maisky told Halifax he could not understand why Britain and France had not made their aid to Poland and Romania conditional on their adoption of a reasonable attitude towards the acceptance of Russian help. He further remarked that bilateral pacts were not enough, that there was a need for cooperation among all countries in a system of collective security.³ On April 14 Maisky informed the British Foreign

¹Seeds to Halifax, April 6, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 45.

²Seeds to Halifax, April 13, 1939, Ibid., 104.

³Halifax to Seeds, April 11, 1939, Ibid., 83.

Office that the Soviet government was prepared to give assurances to Romania. The Soviets wished to know, however, the best methods and the part various powers were willing to assume in helping Romania.¹ Statements in a similar vein were also made in Paris by the Soviet ambassador.² At least outwardly there were expressions from British, French, and Russian sources for some measure of collaboration. The way seemed to be clear for further negotiations.

Both the British and French made proposals to Moscow. The French were the first to make an approach. On April 14 Bonnet proposed to the Soviet ambassador an Annex to the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935. This Annex provided for Russian assistance to France should she find herself at war with Germany either through a direct attack upon her or through rendering help to Romania or Poland. Although the French government later joined in support of the British proposal, it did not completely withdraw its own.³

It was on April 15 that the British government conveyed its proposal in a note to Litvinov.⁴ The note indicated that in light of Stalin's speech of March 10 that the Soviet Union stood ready to render aid to nations which are victims of aggression and which will fight for their

¹Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 201-02.

²Seeds to Halifax, April 14, 1939, Ibid., 199.

³Phipps to Sargent, April 20, 1939, Ibid., 261.

⁴Seeds to Halifax, April 15, 1939, Ibid., 215.

independence, "it would therefore seem to be in complete accord with this policy were the Soviet Government now to make a public declaration on their own initiative in which, after referring to the general statement of policy alluded to above and to statements recently made by His Majesty's Government and the French Government, they would repeat that in the event of any act of aggression against country concerned, the assistance of the Soviet Government would be available, if desired, and would be afforded in such manner as would be found most convenient."¹

The Soviet reply to the British proposal was made on April 17. In essence, the Kremlin submitted the following proposals: (1) a triple alliance between Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union providing for mutual assistance in case of aggression against any of the contracting powers; (2) guarantees of military assistance by Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union to all European states located between the Baltic and Black Seas; (3) the simultaneous signing of the political and military agreements.² These proposals left no doubt that if there were to be any agreement between the Soviet government and the Western powers, every "i" would have to be dotted and every "t" crossed.

It was fairly obvious that Downing Street, while seeking some measure of collaboration with the Soviet Union,

¹Halifax to Seeds, April 14, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V. 206.

²Seeds to Halifax, April 18, 1939, Ibid., 228-29.

was not, however, prepared to conclude any definite agreement. Following his visit in London from April 23 to 26, it was the opinion of Grigore Gafencu, the Romanian foreign minister, that "the British Government, aware of Poland's opposition and of Roumania's reservations . . . suggested the use of circumlocution and ambiguity."¹ The Polish ambassador in London wrote in a similar vein when he reported to his home government on April 26, that a political treaty of reciprocal aid between Russia on the one hand and Britain and France on the other was "unacceptable to Great Britain and not desired by France."² Halifax himself told Gafencu that since Poland and Romania would want to accept Russian help, "it was desirable not to cold-shoulder Soviet Russia too much."³ And speaking to Beck about relations with the Soviet Union, Halifax asked if the problem was not "how to get a maximum degree of collaboration from Soviet Russia without entailing dangerous consequences."⁴

While reflecting to some degree the reserve of the British government, the Quai d'Orsay nevertheless indicated a desire to conclude some kind of an agreement with the Soviet Union. Concerning the negotiations then underway,

¹Grigore Gafencu, The Last Days of Europe, trans. E. Fletcher-Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 126.

²L. B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-1939 (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1948), p. 122.

³Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 312.

⁴Ibid., 7.

Gafencu has written that "the British Government was inclined to leave the initiative to the French Government, which showed real ardor and a lively desire to bring them to a head."¹ There was further evidence of this desire in the note handed to the British ambassador in Paris on April 24 concerning the Soviet proposals of April 18. In this note, the Paris government expressed the view that an agreement could be reached with Russia only on a basis of reciprocity. This approach was somewhat different from that put forth in the British proposal of April 15 which in effect called upon Moscow to give unilateral guarantees to Poland and Romania.²

But before making a reply to the Soviet proposals of April 17, the British sought action on another diplomatic front. Having introduced military conscription on April 26, it now suggested to the French government that it make an attempt to establish contact with the Italian government. This proposal was conveyed to Bonnet on April 27 at which time he informed the British ambassador that Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, had expressed to the French ambassador the Italian desire for a free port at Jibuti, two Italian directorships on the Suez Canal Board, and the extension of the 1896 agreement regarding Tunis.³

¹Gafencu, Last Days of Europe, p. 127.

²Phipps to Halifax, April 24, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 295.

³Phipps to Halifax, April 27, 1939, Ibid., 347.

As for the possibility of Franco-Italian negotiations, the French ambassador was reported to have said that "it would be utterly criminal to let this chance slip."¹

These diplomatic feelers in the direction of Mussolini, who had committed his share of aggression in Europe and Africa, smacked of more appeasement, especially in light of his seizure of Albania on April 7. It would not appear that this move was consistent with British pronouncements against aggressors and the negotiations then underway with the Soviets.

As it concerned negotiations with Moscow, an important change took place. On May 3 Litvinov was replaced by Vyacheslav Molotov as commissar for foreign affairs. In reporting to his government, the British ambassador said that Litvinov's removal might imply the abandonment of a policy of collective security with which he was closely associated. It was his belief, however, that the communist government would follow a policy of collaboration "to a degree which may be found embarrassing." Although the British ambassador didn't think that the Soviet government was prepared to come to terms with the Axis Powers, he, nevertheless, expected difficulty in dealing with Molotov.²

There has since been much conjecture about the significance of Litvinov's departure. It has been said

¹Phipps to Halifax, April 28, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 800.

²Seeds to Halifax, May 12, 1939, Ibid., 542-43.

that the date of his resignation must be regarded as the turning point in the relations between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. Litvinov stood for collective security and so long as he remained in office certain groups within the Soviet hierarchy still thought Hitler could be checked.¹ It has also been said that Joseph Stalin was already thinking about a new course of action in case negotiations with the Western powers failed. Any agreement with Germany would necessitate Litvinov's removal. It was rumored that Andrei Zhdanov, Leningrad party boss, Premier Vyacheslav Molotov, and possibly Marshal Klementi Voroshilov were said to favor a deal with Hitler should London fail to meet the Soviet terms.² In his final report on November 6, 1939, the former Polish ambassador in Moscow wrote that Litvinov's removal was the signal for an agreement with Germany and the instigation of war.³

It may or it may not be true that Litvinov's dismissal was a signal for a change in Soviet foreign policy. It was probably not such a definite about face. What can be said is that the Soviet leaders had concluded that, with the British and French hesitating to come to a definite agreement over measures to take against further German aggression, it was necessary to dismiss Litvinov, the

¹R. I. I. A., Survey, The World in March, 1939, I, 49.

²Schuman, Night Over Europe, p. 233.

³R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 435.

foremost promoter of collective security during the 1930's. This would make it possible not only to continue negotiations with the Western powers but also to capitalize on any overtures that the Germans might make towards them. Thus, the Soviet Union would be in a favorable position from which she could carry on talks simultaneously with Britain and France on one side and Germany on the other.

Coincident with Litvinov's removal, there were fresh rumors concerning the possibility of a German-Russian rapprochement. There was nothing new about these rumors. As far back as 1934 William C. Bullitt had given such a warning.¹ Now with Litvinov out the warnings were varied and persistent. On May 7 the French ambassador in Berlin, Coulondre, reported to his government that a person close to the Fuehrer and other high nazi officials had alluded to the possibility of a German understanding with Russia. This informant told him that Hitler would achieve his ends without the Allies "having any reason, or even any intention to intervene." He went further and commented that "we shall soon see that something is brewing in the East." Seeing a close relationship between what he had reported and Litvinov's resignation, the French ambassador commented that "especially as regards Russia, one cannot help being struck by the coincidences between the intentions attributed to the Fuehrer

¹Joseph Alsop and Robert Kintner, American White Paper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1940), p. 52.

and the resignation of M. Litvinov."¹ On May 8, 1939, the British ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, conveyed to his government much the same information. He also reported that the German press comment on Molotov's appointment had been without the usual anti-Bolshevik abuses.² And from Moscow, Seeds reported a lack of direct press attacks on Germany and also the belief of some of his foreign colleagues who viewed Litvinov's dismissal as a blow to the Western powers.³

It was against such a background of rumors, coupled with a degree of French flexibility and continued British reserve, that a reply was framed to the Soviet proposals of April 17. The Paris government expressed the view that there was a need for reciprocity in the negotiations with the Kremlin and that any new proposal similar to the one addressed to it on April 15 would result in failure. However, the French expressed a willingness to support the new British proposal.⁴ On April 25 Seeds, too, expressed the view that to repeat the British proposal of April 15 "would merely confirm them in the belief that we are trying to evade associations with this country's efforts."⁵

¹Coulondre to Bonnet, May 7, 1939, French Government, French Yellow Book, pp. 145-46.

²Henderson to Halifax, May 8, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 463.

³Seeds to Halifax, May 7, 1939, Ibid., 460.

⁴Phipps to Halifax, May 3, 1939, Ibid., 404-05.

⁵Seeds to Halifax, April 25, 1939, Ibid., 319.

In consultations with other governments, the British made it known that their negotiations with the Soviet government were dictated by the following basic considerations: (1) acceptance of Soviet help only where desired and to forms acceptable to the countries concerned; (2) reluctance to impose guarantees on any country; and (3) erection of a barrier against further aggression in eastern Europe. Halifax stated that the Soviet government's reply of April 18 took little account of "practical difficulties." He still felt that the British proposal of April 15, with perhaps some modification, was the best plan.¹

On May 8, Seeds saw Molotov and conveyed to him the British reply to the Soviet proposals of April 18. Seeds first told Molotov that the Soviet proposals were unacceptable because (1) they would require too long to negotiate, and (2) they provided for automatic assistance to Poland in disregard of that nation's wish against any immediate and public association with the Soviet Union for fear it would provoke a German attack. Seeds then gave Molotov a copy of the new British proposal emphasizing that it called for Soviet assistance only after Britain and France had become involved in war in fulfilment of their guarantees to Poland and Romania.² The British proposal was as follows: "It is suggested that the Soviet Government should make a public

¹Halifax to Phipps, April 23, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 267-68.

²Seeds to Halifax, May 9, 1939, Ibid., 484-85.

declaration on their own initiative, in which after referring to the general statement of policy recently made by M. Stalin and having regard to the statements recently made by His Majesty's Government and the French Government, accepting new obligations on behalf of certain Eastern European countries, the Soviet Government would undertake that in fulfilment of these obligations, the assistance of the Soviet Government would be immediately available if desired and would be afforded in such manner and on such terms as might be agreed."¹

At this meeting on May 8 Seeds wrote that Molotov subjected him to a "relentless cross examination." He wanted to know whether Britain meant to start military conversations at once. Seeds replied that Britain considered a Soviet declaration without starting military talks was all that was required at the moment, but that the London government would be glad to discuss such points if the Soviets gave the British proposal for a declaration friendly consideration. Molotov also wanted to know whether Britain had guaranteed Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland. Seeds at first tried to evade an answer by replying that this subject was outside his field, but when Molotov persisted he finally remarked that the Low Countries had always been considered vital to Britains' defenses. In the further course of the conversation, Molotov told Seeds that Soviet policy had not

¹Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 487.

changed, but added ominously that "it was liable to be altered if other States changed theirs." Seeds reported to his government that he had had a "somewhat trying interview."¹

Certainly the British had good reasons for believing that the Communists would not accept any proposal which was not based on complete reciprocity as it concerned all states bordering on the Soviet Union. Even before the start of the negotiations, Soviet leaders were suspicious of British and French actions. Seeds interpreted as much in Stalin's speech of March 10, when he reported that "the chief care of the rulers of this country must be to prevent it from being drawn into a conflict which does not concern it."² And referring to Stalin's passage where he advised his party members "to be cautious and not allow Soviet Russia to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire," Seeds warned against thinking that the Soviet Union was simply waiting for an invitation from the Western democracies to help stop aggression.³ Again on April 1 following the British rejection of the Soviet proposed six-power conference and the abandonment of the Four-Power Declaration, Litvinov told Seeds that the "Soviet Government had had enough and would henceforward stand apart free of any commitments."⁴ Under these

¹Seeds to Halifax, May 9, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 470-71.

²Seeds to Halifax, March 20, 1939, Ibid., IV, 417.

³Ibid., 419.

⁴Seeds to Halifax, April 1, 1939, Ibid., 574.

circumstances, it appeared that even a proposal envisioning a mutual assistance pact and guarantees to all states bordering on the Soviet Union could only at best hope to dispel some of the Soviet leaders' suspicions of the Western powers, let alone achieve an agreement.

Critical comment on the latest British proposal was forthcoming almost immediately from Tass, the Soviet news agency. On May 10 it stated that, while the British and the French called for aid should they become involved in war in carrying out their guarantees, they did not offer aid to the Soviet Union on a basis of reciprocity should the Soviet Union become involved in war in carrying out any obligations she might undertake toward any eastern European state.¹

As though to set these fears at rest, Chamberlain on May 10 stated to the House of Commons that it was not the intention of the British government to have the Soviet Union commit herself to war without Britain and France first becoming involved.²

However, this statement failed to reassure the Russians. An article which appeared in Izvestia on May 11, and which Seeds reported must be taken as representing the views of the Soviet government, maintained that only in concluding a definite alliance could any effective barrier be erected. It reiterated the Russian fear of becoming

¹R. I. I. A., Soviet Documents, III, 330.

²Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941, II, 243.

involved in war without British and French aid. Furthermore, Poland and Romania did not constitute all the nations bordering the Soviet Union, and yet the Western powers were primarily interested only in guaranteeing these countries. The article concluded:

Once again the U. S. S. R. is put in an unequal position. In his speech in House of Commons on May 10 British Prime Minister spoke of co-operation and of alliance with the U. S. S. R. But co-operation presupposes reciprocity as its natural basis. Where there is no reciprocity there is no possibility of establishing real co-operation.¹

Unquestionably, the Soviet government was concerned that Britain and France, in being selective about guarantees to only a few states, were leaving the way open for a possible German attack against the Soviet Union through the Baltic states. This consideration was dominant in the Soviet government's reply of May 14, which rejected the British proposals of May 18 for the following reasons: (1) they did not contain the principle of reciprocity with regard to any direct attack against the Soviet Union by an aggressor; (2) they failed to extend the guarantee system to the other states bordering the Soviet Union, namely, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia; and (3) they invited aggression toward the Soviet Union by failing to extend to her a guarantee against direct attack and by failing to extend the guarantee system to the Baltic States.²

¹Seeds to Halifax, May 11, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 520-21.

²Seeds to Halifax, May 15, 1939, Ibid., 558.

In this same reply, the Stalin government set forth its terms for an agreement. It made it clearly understood that any effective barrier against further aggression could only be achieved by (1) the conclusion of a three power mutual defense pact between France, Britain, and the Soviet Union; (2) the extension of guarantees by these three powers to the states of central and eastern Europe threatened by aggression, including Latvia, Estonia, and Finland; and (3) a definite agreement between the three powers as to forms and extent of assistance to be given to each other and to the guaranteed states so that the pact could be effective.¹

The Soviet leaders, in effect, were pressing for a specific military pact, along with a definite agreement for making it operative should the occasion demand it. It was very different from what the British and French governments had thus far proposed.

Shortly after Moscow submitted its new proposals, there were further consultations between the Western powers, new expressions of protest from countries opposed to accepting unsolicited guarantees, and new indications of a possible German-Russian rapprochement.

Warnings came from both the British and French ambassadors in Berlin. On May 18 Henderson reported that he had little doubt the Germans were doing all they could to secure the Soviet Union's neutrality. He had heard himself

¹Seeds to Halifax, May 15, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 558-59.

from one source that General Sirovy, the former prime minister of Czechoslovakia, had paid a visit to Moscow in the interest of Germany. In this communication with his government, Henderson included a note written to him by the British military attaché in Berlin which included very important information given to the attaché by a retired German officer. It was to the effect that Generaloberst von Fritsch had come out of retirement and that after studying the present German difficulties he had written a letter to one of the highest men in the nazi leadership stating that the only solution for Germany was an agreement with the Soviet Union. The attaché also had heard from many sources that the German army was "vigorously renewing its efforts of a few years ago to arrive at a military alliance with Russia."¹

Much the same warning was forthcoming from the French ambassador in Berlin. On May 22 Coulondre reported to his government that Ribbentrop thought the Polish state could not possibly endure much longer, that it would sooner or later be partitioned by Germany and the Soviet Union. According to Ribbentrop, such a partition "was closely linked with that of a rapprochement between Berlin and Moscow." Coulondre stated that while Hitler was opposed to such an agreement with the Soviet Union, Ribbentrop, the German High Command, and the industrialists were pressing for it. He concluded that although Hitler had thus far resisted these appeals, "there

¹Henderson to Halifax, May 18, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 594-95.

is nothing to indicate that he will not change his mind."¹

Although these new warnings did make some impression on the British Foreign Office, they failed nevertheless to introduce any real sense of urgency with respect to the early conclusion of an agreement with the Soviet Union. Instead, Downing Street during this period was renewing its attempts to impress upon Germany the possibility for a peaceful settlement of the Danzig dispute. On May 19, in an interview with the German ambassador in London, Halifax warned him that any aggressive move by Germany against any state guaranteed by Britain would mean war. However, Halifax advanced the opinion that with the passage of time the temperature might drop, making it possible to settle the Danzig question. He also suggested to the ambassador that any conciliatory speech by Hitler, without the usual "accompaniments of insults to democracy," would receive a favorable response in British official circles despite the inevitable criticism that the speech was another one of empty words.²

Halifax discussed the Danzig question again the next day in Paris with Bonnet and Edouard Daladier, the French premier. He not only suggested a possible peaceful solution of this question, but also again urged the French to examine their problems with Italy in an attempt to woo her away from

¹Coulondre to Bonnet, May 22, 1939, French Government, French Yellow Book, p. 163.

²Halifax to Henderson, May 19, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 600-03.

Hitler. Daladier did not think that the proper time for this had arrived.¹ However, on May 27, 1939, the British ambassador in Paris was asked to determine if the French government was willing to allow the British to sound out the Italians on their willingness to negotiate their differences with France. These diplomatic maneuvers concerning Italy and France finally resulted in failure.²

These moves by the British Foreign Office would seem to indicate that it still had hopes of avoiding a conflict by once again appeasing Hitler and Mussolini. There did not seem to be any great anxiety about the outcome of the Anglo-French negotiations with the Soviet government. However, there was very definite anxiety in both the House of Commons and in the French foreign office.

In a speech in the House of Commons on May 19, David Lloyd George stated that the British did not know where they were nor what they wanted. He said that there was a great desire, if possible, to do without Russia, and that "for months we have been staring this gift horse in the mouth."³ He asked: "Why do we not make up our mind, and make it up without any loss of time, that we should come to the same terms with Russia as we do with France?"⁴

¹Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 608-14.

²Halifax to Phipps, May 27, 1939, Ibid., 703.

³Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 165.

⁴Ibid., p. 167.

Winston Churchill also was critical of the Chamberlain government with respect to the negotiations with the Soviet Union. He saw nothing wrong with the Soviet proposal for a triple alliance. As to the willingness to be associated with Russia only in time of war and not in time of peace, he asked: "If you are ready to be an ally of Russia in time of war . . . why should you shrink from becoming the ally of Russia now, when you may by that very fact prevent the breaking out of war?" He went on to say that the British cabinet would not be extending its obligations if it gave guarantees to the Baltic States. "You are in it up to the neck already, and the question is how to make your system effective, and effective in time."¹

This anxiety was also reflected in the French foreign office. In consultations between the French and British officials on May 21 in Paris concerning the status of the negotiations with the Soviet diplomats, Daladier expressed the view that an agreement with the U. S. S. R. would halt instead of provoke a German attack. He expressed fear of a possible German-Russian agreement and warned that no agreement could be signed with the Soviet government unless it was treated on the same basis as Poland. He pressed for a mutual defense pact with the Soviet Union, stating that since any attack on the Soviet Union by Germany would most likely not occur without bringing Polish and Romanian guarantees into play, no increased obligations would be assumed by signing the

¹Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 168-69.

pact with the Soviets. Halifax replied that this assumption was not correct since the guarantees to these countries would not apply if they did not resist German aggression.¹ Thus, under the guarantee system that the Western powers had set up, a German attack on the Soviet Union with the connivance of Poland and Romania would not obligate Britain and France to give assistance to anyone.

Some of these fears on the part of the Moscow government were expressed by Maisky to Halifax in Geneva on May 22. He reiterated the previous Soviet criticisms of the British and French proposals in that they did not provide for assistance to the Soviet Union in case of a German attack against her with the connivance of the Baltic states or Poland and Romania.² He again stressed that a triple alliance of mutual defense between Britain, France, and the Soviet Union was the only deterrent to any future German aggression.³

On May 27 the British ambassador and the French chargé d'affaires presented new proposals to Molotov. The Western powers now proposed that in case of direct aggression against any one of the negotiating powers, there would be an obligation of mutual assistance. They further proposed that the Soviet Union was to give full assistance and support to

¹United Kingdom Delegation to Cadogan, May 21, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 624-25.

²United Kingdom Delegation to Cadogan, May 22, 1939, Ibid., 631.

³Ibid., 633.

them should they become involved in hostilities while resisting aggression against another state under the following circumstances: (1) by going to the aid of a state, to which they had, "in conformity with the wishes of that State," given a guarantee or (2) by going to the aid of a state which had requested assistance in order to resist a violation of its neutrality. France and Great Britain, under like circumstances, would be obligated to render assistance to the Soviet Union. It was also proposed that the three governments would negotiate a military agreement concerning methods of mutual support and assistance. The pact would continue for five years.¹

These proposals met the Soviet government's wish for a triple alliance of mutual assistance. However, as it concerned aid to those countries bordering on the Soviet Union, namely, Estonia, Finland, and Latvia, the note was less satisfying. Referring to this aspect of the new proposals, Molotov told Seeds that it was typical of "that 'reserve' . . . which was calculated to ensure the maximum of talk and the minimum of results." He also criticized the proposals because they did not provide for two simultaneous agreements, one political and the other military. Molotov expressed the opinion that France and Great Britain wanted to continue conversations ad infinitum.²

¹Halifax to Seeds, May 25, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 679-80.

²Seeds to Halifax, May 27, 1939, Ibid., 701-02.

In a further meeting with Seeds on May 29 Molotov reiterated the Soviet demand for a military pact to be signed simultaneously with the political agreement. He also raised the question of the Baltic states which could possibly come to an understanding with Germany just as Czechoslovakia had done. Seeds reported Molotov as asking: "Did we mean not to cover German absorption of such States nominally with their consent?" Seeds replied that Britain would not impose guarantees on nations against their will. Following this interview, Seeds wrote that he was dealing with a man "totally ignorant of foreign affairs" and one who had a "rather foolish cunning of the type of the peasant."¹

On May 21 in a speech to the third session of the Supreme Soviet, Molotov examined the international situation. He said that Britain and France had showed some desire to resist aggression. However, he went on to say that "as yet it cannot even be said whether these countries are seriously desirous of abandoning the policy of non-resistance to the further development of aggression." He said that the willingness of the Western powers to counter aggression in some areas did not mean that aggressive moves could not be made in other areas.² Here he no doubt had in mind the failure of the latest British and French proposals to provide for guarantees to Estonia, Finland, and Latvia.³

¹Seeds to Halifax, May 30, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 722.

²R. I. I. A., Soviet Documents, III, 334.

³Ibid., 337.

Therefore, by the end of May the British and French had accepted the principle of a tripartite pact instead of unilateral declarations. However, there still remained the serious problem of the number of states to receive guarantees. The Russians appeared eager to guarantee the Baltic states, but the British and French were opposed because these countries had lodged protests against these proposed guarantees. The question concerning the Baltic states now came to the forefront in the negotiations.

Baltic States and Indirect Aggression

On June 2, the Soviets replied to the Anglo-French proposed agreement of May 27. Molotov again reiterated the necessity for a mutual assistance pact between France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union; called for guarantees to Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, as well as to Poland, Romania, Turkey, Greece, and Belgium; and proposed that the political agreement should come into force simultaneously with the military agreement.¹

At about the same time as these proposals were advanced, there were further indications of a possible German-Russian agreement. On June 1, Coulondre reported from Berlin that he had learned on good authority that Hitler was willing to risk war only if the Soviet Union remained neutral. Otherwise, he would give way. Coulondre advised Bonnet "that the conclusion of an Anglo-Franco Russian pact should

¹Seeds to Halifax, June 2, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V, 753-54.

be pushed forward as quickly as possible."¹ From Berlin on June 8, Henderson reported that "Göring somewhat ominously observed that Germany and Russia would not always remain on unfriendly terms."² And on June 10 Seeds reported from Moscow that the German embassy had been very active and that the German ambassador that same night was leaving for Berlin.³

The major stumbling block at this stage was still the question of guarantees to the Baltic states. The Soviet government insisted on British and French guarantees to these countries because it feared that an avenue would be left open for a possible German attack against the Soviet Union without any obligations of assistance on the part of the Western powers. On June 7 Chamberlain told the House of Commons that it was "manifestly impossible to impose a guarantee on States which do not desire it . . ."⁴ In an earlier statement, however, Churchill had supported the Soviet contention, remarking that "there is no sense in having a crack in the peace diving-bell."⁵

The reluctance of the three Baltic states to accept guarantees was well known. They had lodged many protests throughout the course of the Anglo-French talks with the

¹Coulondre to Bonnet, June 1, 1939, French Government, French Yellow Book, p. 172.

²Henderson to Halifax, June 8, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 14.

³Seeds to Halifax, June 10, 1939, Ibid., 22.

⁴Halifax to Seeds, June 7, 1939, Ibid., V, 788.

⁵Coates, History of Anglo-Soviet Relations, p. 610.

U. S. S. R. Now as the question became still more important they lodged additional protests. On June 7 in a note to the British Foreign Office, the Estonian government made it clearly understood that "the Estonian Government would be compelled to consider such proposals as an unfriendly act directed against the neutrality of Estonia."¹ That very same day Estonia and Latvia signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. Within a week it was the Latvian minister's turn to lodge his protest against the acceptance of any compulsory guarantees.² And the British minister in Helsinki reported on June 20 that Field Marshal Baron Mannerheim had told him Finland would not accept a compulsory guarantee from the Soviet Union. He remarked that in this the Finnish people were united and that the Finnish army would fight any invasion.³

With negotiations having hit a snag, Halifax now recalled Seeds to London for consultations.⁴ However, when Seeds became ill, his trip home was cancelled. It was then decided to send Sir William Strang of the British Foreign Office to Moscow to aid Seeds in the negotiations.⁵

On June 8 in an interview between Sir Alexander

¹Halifax to Orde, June 17, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 96.

²Halifax to Orde, June 12, 1939, Ibid., 49.

³Snow to Halifax, June 20, 1939, Ibid., 121.

⁴Halifax to Seeds, June 6, 1939, Ibid., V, 776.

⁵Halifax to Seeds, June 7, 1939, Ibid., 787.

Cadogan of the British Foreign Office and the French ambassador in London, the question of indirect aggression was discussed. Cadogan said that Britain wanted consultation whenever threats developed to the states not receiving guarantees. The French ambassador did not think that this proposal would satisfy the Soviet government. In relation to the British decision to send Strang to Moscow, Cadogan reported that the French ambassador "seemed to hanker after the idea of sending some distinguished personage to Moscow to carry on the negotiations, and he seemed to hint that the announcement of the arrangements which we had now decided on was rather unfortunate."¹ Maisky did suggest to Halifax that he should go to Moscow, but Halifax replied that while it would give him much pleasure, he did not feel that he could at the time absent himself from London.²

In Moscow the British and French ambassadors and Strang conveyed to Molotov the reply to the Soviet proposals of June 2. The Western powers opposed any guarantees to the Baltic states. They complained that whereas the Soviet government wanted guarantees given to all countries on the Soviet Union's frontier, it made no mention of guarantees to Switzerland and the Netherlands which were important to the security of Great Britain and France. As it concerned aggression through states which had received no guarantees,

¹Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 3-4.

²Halifax to Seeds, June 12, 1939, Ibid., 51.

the British and French governments suggested consultations between the contracting powers to decide on the course of action. The Western powers also registered disapproval with the Soviet proposal that the political agreement was to come into effect simultaneously with the military agreement.¹

On June 16 Molotov replied to the Anglo-French proposals of the day before and stated that the refusal of the Western powers to extend guarantees to the Baltic states would place the Soviet Union in a "position of inequality, humiliating for the Soviet Union . . ." ² Since no agreement seemed possible on the question of the Baltic area, Molotov suggested that this question be postponed and that the treaty be confined to an arrangement for mutual assistance in the event of direct aggression.³

The Western leaders still refused to guarantee the Baltic states because they said these countries were against accepting compulsory guarantees. But this was not the real reason. Neither did they base their policy on a desire to leave open a channel for a possible German attack against the Soviet Union because such an eventuality was considered to be remote by the British chiefs of staff.⁴ One wonders if they based their policy upon a refusal to face the possibility

¹Memorandum to Seeds, June 12, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 34-39.

²Seeds to Halifax, June 16, Ibid., 86.

³Seeds to Halifax, June 17, 1939, Ibid., 90.

⁴Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, V,

of a German-Soviet agreement. Was it that they didn't want to pay a price for Soviet collaboration which might have entailed a growth of Soviet power in central Europe? Schuman appears to be correct in stating that "it was not that the Western diplomats loved the 'independence' of the Baltic States, but that they feared and hated the Soviet colossus even while they sought its help."¹

New proposals dealing with the question of the Baltic states were submitted to Molotov on June 21 by the British and French ambassadors.² Molotov replied the next day stating that the new proposals were unacceptable. He again emphasized that any treaty must include a listing of the guaranteed states plus the provision for a common guarantee by Britain, France, and the Soviet government to all eight states mentioned by that government in its draft of June 2. In answer to a question by the French ambassador, Molotov replied that he would consider a proposal that the guaranteed states be listed in a separate document.³

With negotiations now clearly deadlocked, there were harsh words from both sides. In an interview with Maisky on June 23, Halifax asked him if the Soviets really wanted an agreement. In answer to Maisky who had asked why Halifax had asked this question, the latter replied: "Because . . .

¹Schuman, Night Over Europe, p. 251.

²Seeds to Halifax, June 22, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 140-42.

³Ibid., 143.

throughout the negotiations the Soviet Government had not budged a single inch and we had made all the advances and concessions." Halifax went on to remark that the communist way of negotiating was very similar to that of the Nazis.¹

On June 29. Zhdanov, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Supreme Soviet, published an editorial in Pravda. He expressed the belief that the Western powers did not want a treaty on terms of equality with the Soviet Union. He wrote that the negotiations had been going on for seventy-five days and that sixteen of these had been used by the Soviet government preparing answers to various English proposals while the remaining fifty-nine days had been spent by delays on the part of the English and French. He asked: "Is it a serious endeavor to utilize the negotiations as well as the delay in the negotiations for some different purposes having nothing in common with the creation of a front of pacific powers?" He wrote that the reluctance of Britain and France to guarantee the Baltic states against their wishes was an "artificially invented 'stumbling block' in the negotiations."²

On July 1. new Anglo-French proposals were submitted to Molotov. The Western powers now agreed that guarantees to the Baltic states would operate automatically in case of

¹Halifax to Seeds, June 23, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 152-53.

²R. I. I. A., Soviet Documents, III, 352-53.

a direct attack against them. It was suggested that the list of guaranteed states should be printed in a special annex to the treaty. However, the Western powers now called upon Moscow to guarantee Switzerland and Holland also. Molotov remarked that the Soviet Union had no diplomatic relations with these countries. Since this presented a new problem, the Kremlin now considered the possibility of establishing normal relations with the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and Switzerland. Molotov also pointed out that the proposals did not cover the case of indirect aggression similar to Germany's action against Czechoslovakia.¹

In its reply on July 3, the Soviet Union agreed to the inclusion of the list of states in an unpublished protocol, but refused to include in this list Holland, Switzerland, and Luxemburg. It also proposed that the guarantees should function automatically in the event of either direct or indirect aggression. Indirect aggression, as it was to be defined in the unpublished protocol, would be understood to mean "an internal coup d'etat or a reversal of policy in the interests of the aggressor."²

Although there was now agreement on many points, there were still obstacles to be overcome, especially that concerning a definition of indirect aggression. The Times commented on July 5 that "the negotiations now stand like

¹Seeds to Halifax, July 1, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 230-31.

²Seeds to Halifax, July 4, 1939 Ibid., 251.

an iceberg: the eight-ninths that is agreed lies submerged and at times forgotten; the ninth still defying agreement, sticks out in a remarkably craggy formation."¹

In a meeting on July 8 Molotov still insisted (1) that the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Luxemburg could not be included in the list of guaranteed states without some further compensation for the Soviet Union; (2) that the words "direct or indirect" should be included in the published pact with the definition of indirect aggression included in a secret annex; and (3) that the entry into force of the political agreement was dependent on the conclusion of the military agreement.² In another meeting on July 9, much the same ground was covered with still no agreement reached on the basic questions still at issue.³

At this point in the negotiations, the definition of what constituted indirect aggression was all-important. The Soviets wanted it defined to cover any action accepted by any of the guaranteed states "under threat of force by another Power, or without any such threat involving the use of territory and forces of the State in question for purposes of aggression against that State or against one of the contracting parties, and consequently involving the loss of, by that State, its independence or violation of its

¹Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 193.

²Seeds to Halifax, July 9, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 309.

³Seeds to Halifax, July 10, 1939, Ibid., 310-12.

neutrality."¹ The British sought to define the word "aggression" to cover the question of indirect aggression. It was to be understood as "covering action accepted by the State in question under threat of force by another Power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality . . ."²

At a meeting on July 16, Molotov was told that Britain and France agreed that a definition of indirect aggression and the words "direct and indirect" could be included in Article I and published. Nevertheless, the Western powers still insisted that indirect aggression should be defined so as to cover only action taken by a state against its will under the threat of force which endangered its independence and neutrality. This in effect was a rejection of the Soviet formula which also included the words "without threat of force," and "use of territory and forces." The Moscow government wanted to cover a case like that of President Hacha who surrendered to Hitler shortly before the German occupation of Prague. The Western powers said they wanted to avoid any formula which could be construed as signifying the intention of interfering in another country's internal affair. The Western powers now dropped Switzerland, Netherlands, and Luxemburg from the list of guaranteed states.

¹Seeds to Halifax, July 10, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 313.

²Halifax to Seeds, July 6, 1939, Ibid., 277.

For his part, Molotov at this same meeting insisted on the acceptance of his formula for indirect aggression. He repeated that there could not be two agreements but only one political-military agreement. He made it clear that unless the Western powers agreed to this there was no need of continuing the conversations. He also asked whether Britain and France were willing to open military conversations.¹

The question of indirect aggression was a vital one. Russia feared that Germany by an internal coup d'etat could seize control of some of the bordering states. She wanted a definite agreement with the Western powers whereby Germany would be countered if such a move were attempted.

The English and French made a further concession on July 23 when they agreed to the simultaneous entry into force of the political and military agreements.² As it concerned the issue of indirect aggression, however, neither side offered any compromise, although there were indications that the Quai d'Orsay was willing to agree to the Soviet formula.³ Nevertheless, Molotov suggested that, since the question of indirect aggression did not raise "insuperable difficulties," military talks could begin. Seeds sought to impress Molotov with the necessity for first concluding the political

¹Seeds to Halifax, July 18, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 375-77.

²Seeds to Halifax, July 24, 1939, Ibid., 457.

³Seeds to Halifax, July 22, 1939, Ibid., 450.

agreement. But Molotov was unyielding and asked if the British and French were ready to begin military talks before the question of indirect aggression was resolved.¹

Following this interview with Molotov, Seeds wrote: "It is, I am convinced, safe to say that every member of the Politbureau consider the present British Government as imbued with a spirit of 'capitulating' if possible to Axis Powers but that the most influential section thinks, nevertheless, we can be squeezed by our press and public and by Russian pressure, relentlessly applied, into an agreement with this country."²

Collapse of Negotiations

The climax of the negotiations was fast approaching. On July 27, Seeds informed Molotov that the Western powers were ready to begin military talks immediately. In answer to a query from Molotov, Seeds replied that Britain would not change its formula for indirect aggression.³ Another but unsuccessful attempt to resolve the issue of indirect aggression was made on August 2.⁴

The British and French military missions arrived in Moscow on August 11, 1939, and there were soon ominous signs that they had come in vain. On August 19 Pravda

¹Seeds to Halifax, July 24, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 457-59.

²Ibid., 461.

³Seeds to Halifax, July 28, 1939, Ibid., 521-22.

⁴Seeds to Halifax, August 3, 1939, Ibid., 572.

published an article which had previously appeared in the London Daily Worker of August 7. It sought to show that Great Britain was secretly negotiating with Germany concerning a settlement of the Danzig question. It was to be another Munich. That same day an announcement was made of a trade agreement between Russia and Germany.¹

Before leaving for Moscow, the British military mission was instructed to go slowly with the conversations and to watch the progress of the political negotiations. They were to treat the Russians with "reserve" until the political agreement was reached.² Seeds regretted this because he reported that the "Soviet military negotiators were really going out for business."³

Military talks began on August 12, and Marshal Klementi Voroshilov, the Russian war commissar, inquired about the powers of negotiations the missions had. Neither military mission had been given plenipotentiary powers. In fact, the British mission didn't even have written credentials.³

At a further meeting, Voroshilov also wanted to know whether Poland would permit Russian troops on their soil. Although they already knew the answer, the British and French delegations did not give it to Voroshilov. Instead

¹L. B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 203.

²Seeds to Halifax, August 13, 1939, Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 763.

³Seeds to Halifax, August 12, 1939, Ibid., 674.

the talks were recessed until a reply could be given. The British mission had been informed before leaving London that the Poles opposed any direct relations with Russia for fear that the Russian troops once in would never leave.¹ Just before its mission left for Moscow, the French had tried to persuade the Poles to accept Russian military aid. The answer was "no." Leon Noel, the French ambassador in Warsaw at the time, has written that the Daladier cabinet had no right to believe in the possibility of a Polish-Soviet military agreement. In fact, it was apparent to Noel that General Joseph Doumenc, the head of the French mission, was told to avoid such questions by the Russians.²

Following Voroshilov's inquiries, the French once again approached Beck. He remained obdurate. On August 19 he gave Noel the following note:

This is for us a question of principle. We neither have, nor wish to have, a military agreement with the U. S. S. R. We concede to no one, under any form, the right to discuss the use of any part of our territory by foreign troops.³

However, this unwillingness on the part of the Poles to accept Soviet military aid was not the decisive factor which doomed the negotiations. They collapsed with the signing of a nonaggression pact between Germany and Russia on

¹Woodward and Butler, Documents, Third Series, VI, 772.

²Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 205, quotes M. Leon Noel, L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne (1946), pp. 420-23.

³Ibid., p. 209.

August 23. Shortly thereafter the Allied military missions left Moscow. Failure was complete and irrevocable.

CHAPTER III

GERMAN-RUSSIAN NEGOTIATIONS

Significance of German-Polish Relations

The growing European crisis over Danzig, and the ensuing realignment of powers, soon made it evident that the Soviet Union occupied the pivotal position. She shortly became the object of keen diplomatic attentions by two opposing camps: the Western powers and Germany. Britain and France were the first to sound out the Soviet government on an agreement. But even after intensive and prolonged negotiations the attempt ended in failure. This was in contrast to Germany's success in reaching an agreement with the Soviets, even though negotiations were started somewhat later and the contacts between their diplomats were relatively fewer.

However, any understanding of German-Russian relations in the period preceding the outbreak of World War II is impossible without a consideration also of Germany's relations with Poland after the Munich Pact. With the Sudetenland firmly in his grasp, Hitler next began to concentrate on Danzig. In a meeting on October 24, 1938, at Berchtesgaden, Ribbentrop told the Polish ambassador that Hitler desired a clarification of Germany's relations with all her neighbors.

As it concerned Germany and Poland, the first thing to be considered was the question of Danzig. Ribbentrop told Lipski that "Danzig was German--it always had been German, and it would always remain German." The German foreign minister looked toward a solution based primarily on the return of Danzig to Germany and a German extra-territorial motor highway and railway across the Corridor.¹

In a reply to these proposals, Beck proposed a bilateral Polish-German agreement to replace the League of Nations guarantee concerning Danzig. This agreement should guarantee not only the status of the Free City of Danzig but also the rights there of the German majority and the Polish minority. Beck warned that any other solution or attempt by Germany to incorporate the Free City into the Reich "must inevitably lead to conflict."²

The question of Danzig was discussed again on January 5, 1939, at Berchtesgaden by Beck and Hitler. At this time the Fuehrer expressed the view to Beck that Danzig should return to Germany politically but remain with Poland economically. Hitler also mentioned the necessity for German access to Danzig across the Corridor. For his part, Beck said the problem of Danzig was "extraordinarily difficult" as Polish public opinion had to be taken into special account.³

¹R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 88.

²Ibid., 92.

³Ibid., 99-100.

It was becoming increasingly clear that Poland had no intentions of yielding Danzig to Germany. Ribbentrop visited Warsaw later that month and in an interview with Beck again pressed for a solution to the Danzig question; but he met with no success.¹ Again in Berlin on March 21, Ribbentrop met with the Polish ambassador and once more pressed for Polish acceptance of the German proposals on Danzig and the Corridor. Ribbentrop said that "up to now the Fuehrer could not but be astonished at the peculiar attitude adopted by Poland on a number of questions. It was important that he should not gain the impression that Poland simply did not want to reach a settlement."² It will be noticed that these demands on Poland followed only a few days the occupation of Prague by Germany.

On March 26 Lipski told Ribbentrop that Poland was willing to do everything to facilitate communication and trade between Germany and East Prussia across the Corridor. He added that "all facilities granted on Polish territory could, however, only exist within the limits of Polish sovereignty, and therefore extraterritorial status for ways of communication could not be considered." As for Danzig, Poland again proposed a joint Polish-German guarantee.³

These concessions did not satisfy the Berlin government. The next day Ribbentrop summoned Lipski and protested

¹R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 104.

²Ibid., 110.

³Ibid., 119-20.

against what he said had been demonstrations and speeches against Germany in Danzig.¹ Thereupon the German ambassador to Poland, Hans von Moltke, was told by Beck that "any intervention by the German government aimed at changing the status quo in Danzig will be regarded as an aggression against Poland." Beck suggested that the problem could be settled by an agreement between the two powers.²

It was fairly obvious by now that despite the increasing pressure Germany had applied since October, 1938, a deadlock was at hand. Ribbentrop had more than once stated the German demands with respect to Danzig and the Corridor, and Beck in turn had consistently rejected them. Some have tried to explain the failure in terms of the personalities involved. One of these was Baron Ernst von Weizsacker, state secretary in the German Foreign Office, who later wrote: "And how indeed could two persons of such outstanding vanity as Beck and Ribbentrop be expected to work together?"³

With negotiations deadlocked, the crisis began to heighten. Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons on March 31 that Great Britain and France were extending guarantees to Poland. This was followed on April 6 by an announcement in London of a reciprocal Anglo-Polish defensive agreement which was to be in force pending the completion of

¹Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 100.

²Ibid., p. 101.

³Ernst von Weizsacker, Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsacker, trans. John Andrews (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951), pp. 172-73.

a permanent treaty.

On April 11 in a directive to his Commander-in-Chief, Hitler stated that although Germany sought to continue good relations with Poland, a threatening attitude by that nation might drive Germany to seek a final settlement. In this case it would be necessary to smash the Polish armed forces, seize Danzig at the very outset, and seek to limit the war to Poland.¹ This was followed on April 27 by a memorandum to the Warsaw government in which Germany stated that Poland's new agreement with Great Britain was inconsistent with the German-Polish Declaration of January 26, 1934.² In a speech to the Reichstag on the following day Hitler condemned the Anglo-Polish agreement and said that the responsibility for the unrest in Europe lay with the "propaganda in the service of international warmongers . . ."³

A reply to Hitler was forthcoming from Beck on May 5 in a speech to the Polish parliament. He said that Germany had asked Poland to make unilateral concessions which "a self-respecting nation does not make." Although his country was still willing to conduct negotiations directed toward a peaceful settlement of the problems with Germany, she would not have peace at any price.⁴

¹R. I. I. A., Documents, 1939-1946, I, 131.

²Ibid., 254-61.

³Ibid., 237-38.

⁴Ibid., 270.

Poland's intransigence definitely influenced Germany's foreign policy. It has since been ascertained that Hitler told his commanders-in-chief on August 22, 1939, that he had first wanted to fight in the West. However, the failure to reach an agreement with Poland on Danzig altered this plan. He further stated:

It became clear to me that Poland would attack us in case of a conflict with the West. Poland wants access to the sea. The further development became obvious after the occupation of the Memel region, and it became clear to me that under the circumstances a conflict with Poland could arise at an inopportune time.¹

The possibility of a German-Russian agreement now became known to the French ambassador in Berlin. On May 7, he reported to his government the essential details of a conversation that had taken place the day before between a member of the embassy and one of Hitler's close associates. "Were you not struck, in his last speech," remarked the German, "by the fact that he made no reference whatever to Russia?" And becoming excited, he exclaimed: "There have already been three partitions of Poland; well, believe me, you will witness a fourth!"²

These words were indeed prophetic. Although Hitler had not perhaps definitely made up his mind, he was at least giving some consideration to an understanding with Russia, should the situation demand it.

¹Office of U. S. Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946), III, 582.

²French Government, French Yellow Book, pp. 148-49.

Eddies in the Diplomatic Stream

Germany and Russia had many times in the past found it advantageous to maintain friendly relations. This was especially true after World War I when both were pariahs among the family of nations. With Hitler's rise to power, however, Russia's friendship was spurned and National-Socialism dedicated itself to a war against the communist menace. Nevertheless, even during the early years of nazi rule there were statements by leading Nazis that the day might come when friendly relations with the Soviet Union could again prove beneficial to Germany. In writing to a young German Communist during this period, Paul Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, said that "the day will come when Nazism and Communism will fight side by side the decadent powers of the West."¹ And in 1934 Hitler remarked to Hermann Rauschning: "Why should I not conclude a pact with Russia when, by doing so, I can improve our position? An alliance with Russia will be the last trump card in my hand. Maybe this will become the most daring gamble of my life."²

Despite these sentiments, a German-Russian understanding seemed very remote during the early years of nazi rule when the Soviet Union, out of fear of Germany, sought security in alignment with the Western powers. However, as

¹T. H. Tetens, Germany Plots with the Kremlin (New York: Henry Schuman, Inc., 1953), p. 51.

²Ibid., p. 51.

every Hitler success underscored the reluctance of Britain and France to stop him, Soviet leaders were forced to reappraise their policy of collective security. This was particularly true after Munich.

The stage appeared to be set for a possible shift in Soviet foreign policy. There was an awareness on the part of the German Foreign Office, shortly after the Munich Pact, that a crisis had developed between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies. They felt that the Kremlin was now confronted with an important problem: Were the Allies now establishing Germany as a counter-weight against her? Would it not serve Russian interests now to come to some kind of agreement with Germany?¹

Later events were soon to show that the leaders in the Kremlin were perhaps indeed asking themselves such questions. During the summer of 1938, in fact, even before Munich, Litvinov and Friedrich Werner Count von der Schulenburg, the German ambassador in Moscow, reached an understanding to end the derogatory statements aimed at the two heads of state. There was a further understanding in October to the effect that the press and radio of both states should stop condemning the other country. Gustav Hilger, former counselor of embassy in the German embassy in Moscow, has written that "the consequences of the agreement were the first visible indication that a change in the relations between the Soviet Union

¹C. De Witt Poole, "Light on Nazi Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, XXV (October, 1946), 141.

and Germany was in the offing."¹ A further indication of closer relations was forthcoming in late December, 1938, with the renewal of the German-Soviet trade agreement.²

German leaders, however, were to get a much clearer sign of Russian intentions from a speech Stalin made on March 10, 1939. He said that the members of the United States, British, and French press would have Russia believe that Germany was ready to march into the Ukraine. "It looks as if the object of this suspicious hullabaloo," continued Stalin, "was to incense the Soviet Union against Germany without any visible grounds." He further added that Soviet foreign policy stood "for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries . . . so long as these countries maintain like relations with the Soviet Union, and so long as they make no attempt to trespass on the interests of our country."³

The significance of this speech evidently was not lost on the Germans. At the time of the signing of the German-Russian Pact, Ribbentrop told Stalin that Hitler had interpreted the speech as expressing his desire for better relations with Germany. Stalin remarked to Ribbentrop: "That was precisely my intention."⁴ And in a speech to the

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, pp. 288-89.

²Ibid., 289.

³R. I. I. A., Soviet Documents, III, 319-21.

⁴A. Rossi, The Russo-German Alliance, August, 1939-June, 1941 (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), p. 9.

Supreme Soviet on August 31, 1939, Molotov said that contrary to the views held by some short-sighted people in Russia, Stalin "even then suggested the possibility of different, unhostile, and good-neighbourly relations between Germany and the USSR."¹

The importance of Stalin's speech of March 10, and the other friendly contacts which had taken place between the Germans and the Russians, was enhanced on April 17 when Alexei Merekalov, the Soviet ambassador in Berlin, made his first visit to the Wilhelmstrasse since presenting his credentials on June 5, 1938. The ambassador explained that his government had not exploited the difficulties between Germany and the Western democracies. Weizsacker also related that Merekalov voiced the view that "there exists for Russia no reason why she should not live with us on a normal footing. And from normal the relations might become better and better." Weizsacker for his part said that "we had always had the desire for mutually satisfactory commercial relations with Russia."²

The stage was now set for further contacts between the two governments. Although no final decision appeared to have been made concerning the nature of the ultimate outcome of the warming-up process, both governments nevertheless viewed such contacts as worthwhile and profitable.

¹R. I. I. A., Soviet Documents, III, 366.

²Raymond Sontag and James Beddie (eds.), Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1948), pp. 1-2.

Path to Agreement

Just when Hitler or Stalin finally decided to make an agreement has been debated. Hilger has written that no one could possibly determine at which time either dictator made a decision.¹ Others have said that Stalin's speech of March 10 was decisive.² Whatever the answer might be, there were further indications during the months to come of a possible German-Russian rapprochement.

Some officials of the German foreign ministry heard that in April, 1939, Hitler was thinking of coming to terms with the Soviet Union. It was said that Hitler respected Stalin more than any of his other adversaries and considered him as his equal. Further impetus in this direction was forthcoming with the dismissal of Litvinov on May 3. The question was asked: "Was it because he [Stalin] wanted to get rid of him as an exponent of Soviet friendship with the Western democracies?"³

In an attempt to evaluate fully the meaning of Litvinov's dismissal, Hilger was recalled to Berlin where on May 10 he had an interview with Hitler. Hilger explained that he thought Litvinov had been dismissed because he had failed to get an understanding with Great Britain and France and that Stalin thought these two countries were anxious to

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, p. 288.

²Rossi, Russo-German Alliance, pp. 9-10.

³Weizsacker, Memoirs, p. 186.

see the Soviet Union "pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them in the event of war." In answering Hitler's question concerning Stalin's readiness to come to an agreement with Germany, Hilger simply mentioned Stalin's speech of March 10. Hitler gave no views of his own at this time.¹

The Soviet ambassador's visit to the Wilhelmstrasse was followed by others from the Soviet diplomats in Berlin. On May 5 a meeting was held in Berlin between Georgi Astakhov, counselor of the Soviet embassy, and Dr. Karl Schnurre, an economic expert in the German Foreign Office, at which time there were further discussions on the relations between the two countries. Astakhov asked if the Germans would soon resume the trade talks which had been broken off that February. He also attempted to determine whether Litvinov's dismissal would cause any change in the German attitude toward the Soviet Union.²

Astakhov and Schnurre met again on May 17. This time Astakhov remarked on the lack of German press attacks on Russia, and the lack of conflicts in the foreign policy between the two countries. In answer to a question concerning the Anglo-Soviet negotiations, he said significantly "that under the present circumstances the result desired by England would hardly be achieved."³

¹Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, p. 296.

²Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 5.

The results of these first meetings, although only exploratory, did establish a basis for further talks. It was soon evident that, whereas the Germans were primarily interested in a commercial agreement, the Russians desired also a political agreement. On May 20 Schulenburg called on Molotov in Moscow to resume the trade negotiations. Molotov replied that the unfavorable progress of the talks earlier in the year had given the Soviet government the impression that the Germans had not been earnest in the matter and that it "had only played at negotiating for political reasons." Molotov went on to say that the Soviet government would agree to resume talks only if the necessary "political bases" for them had first been constructed. He made no attempt, however, to explain what he meant by "political bases."¹

Before this meeting with Molotov, Schulenburg was directed to maintain "extreme caution."² After the meeting he was told to "sit tight" and wait to see if Molotov would speak out more openly.³ The Germans were both puzzled and fearful. Schulenburg reported from Moscow on May 22 that Molotov apparently awaited definite proposals of a political nature. However, he warned that extreme caution was necessary because he feared that any such proposals by Germany might be used by the Kremlin only "to exert pressure on Great

¹Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 6.

²Schulenburg to Weizsacker, May 22, 1939, Ibid., p. 8.

³Weizsacker to Schulenburg, May 21, 1939, Ibid., p. 7.

Britain and France."¹

At the end of May, even with negotiations deadlocked between the Western powers and the Soviet Union, Weizsacker expressed the belief that an agreement "will not be easy to prevent." It was his opinion that there was room, however, "to inject ourselves with an impending and disturbing effect by use of a more unmistakable sort of language."² There is some evidence that even Hitler at this time feared that an agreement between the Western nations and Russia would lead to a Russian move against Germany in Poland.³ And Ribbentrop on May 29 expressed the view that the ultimate success of any talks with the Moscow government was "admittedly very doubtful."⁴

However strong these German doubts might have been, the German ambassador in Moscow was advised on May 30 by his government that a decision to negotiate with the Soviet Union had been made.⁵ In a message to the State Secretary on June 5, Schulenburg again expressed a warning concerning the Russian use of German proposals to put pressure on Britain and France. However, it was apparent to him that the way was

¹Schulenburg to Weizsacker, May 22, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 8.

²Weizsacker to Schulenburg, May 27, 1939, Ibid., p. 9.

³C. De Witt Poole, "Light on Nazi Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, XXV (October, 1946), 142.

⁴Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 10.

⁵Weizsacker to Schulenburg, May 30, 1939, Ibid., p. 15.

still open for further negotiations.¹

The Germans now pressed for a resumption of the trade talks. On June 17 Hilger had a meeting with Anastas I. Mikoyan, the Soviet commissar for foreign trade, and explained that Germany was willing to resume the trade talks. Mikoyan rejected the proposal, saying that the Germans had not yet given complete assurances that in resuming the talks they were not carrying on a political game.² It was only after further consultations that the trade talks were resumed in Berlin. An announcement to this effect appeared in the entire Soviet press on July 22.³

Meanwhile, on the political front there were increased indications of a possible German-Russian agreement. On June 15 the Bulgarian minister in Berlin informed the German Foreign Office that Astakhov had paid him a visit on June 14 without any apparent reason. He reported Astakhov as saying that, among the possible alternatives, a rapprochement with Germany was "closest to the desires of the Soviet Union." Astakhov added that "if Germany would declare that she would not attack the Soviet Union or that she would conclude a nonaggression pact with her, the Soviet Union would

¹Schulenburg to Weizsacker, June 5, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 19.

²Tippelskirch to German Foreign Office, June 18, 1939, Ibid., p. 23.

³Schulenburg to German Foreign Office, July 22, 1939, Ibid., p. 32.

probably refrain from concluding a treaty with England."¹

Shortly thereafter Schulenburg told Molotov that Germany desired normal relations with the Soviet Union. As evidence of this, he cited the lack of anti-Russian sentiments in the German press, the signing of nonaggression pacts with the Baltic countries, and the desire for the resumption of economic negotiations. Molotov was also told that the Germans considered the Berlin Treaty of 1926 still in force. Schulenburg complained, however, that he did not understand what Molotov meant when in the last conversation he spoke about "creation of a new basis of our relationships."² On June 30 Schulenburg was instructed not to carry on any additional political conversations until further notice.³

Both sides still appeared to be somewhat wary and suspicious of the other's motives. The Germans feared that any proposals made by them would be used by the Russians to press the English and French. The Russians feared that Germany's main objective in the sporadic conversations was the disruption of negotiations between the Soviet government and the Western powers. But regardless of the suspicion, the international situation was such that neither wanted to disrupt the diplomatic probings because of a belief that

¹Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 20-21.

²Schulenburg to German Foreign Office, June 29, 1939, Ibid., p. 26.

³Weizsacker to Schulenburg, June 30, 1939, Ibid., pp. 27-28.

some satisfactory arrangement might ensue.

By the end of June neither had Molotov explained further what he meant by a political understanding nor had the Germans advanced proposals of a political nature which they knew the Russians wanted. But this impasse was later broken.

In a meeting on July 26 in Berlin with Astakhov and Barbarin, the Soviet trade representative, Schnurre mentioned the possibility of close collaboration with the Soviet government. He said he could envision this happening in three stages: (1) collaboration in economic affairs, (2) improvement in political relations, and (3) the re-establishment of good political relations. Schnurre said that this third step was possible "because controversial problems of foreign policy . . . did not . . . exist in the whole area from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and the Far East." He pointed out also that both countries were opposed to the capitalistic nations. "It would appear paradoxical," said Schnurre, "if the Soviet Union as a Socialist State, were to side with the Western democracies."¹

A memorandum of this discussion was forwarded to Schulenburg in Moscow on July 29. He was advised to see Molotov and to give further explanations concerning German intentions. As regards the Polish question, he was instructed to say that "we would be prepared to safeguard all

¹Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 32-33.

Soviet interests and to reach an understanding with the Moscow Government." Germany was also ready to recognize Soviet interests in the Baltic states.¹

At the end of July Hitler received plans from the Army general staff concerning an attack on Poland. Shortly thereafter, he designated August 26 as the date for the attack against Poland.² Coulondre had reported from Berlin on June 1 that General Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the general staff, and General Walter von Brauchitsch, commander-in-chief of the army, had told Hitler that Germany would not have much chance of winning a war if Russia were a participant against her.³ If the report were true, then upon fixing a definite date for the attack on Poland Hitler put himself in a position where an agreement with Russia became an extremely urgent matter. At the beginning of August Hitler made it increasingly clear to the Soviet leaders that he desired an agreement with the Soviet government.

On August 2, Ribbentrop told Astakhov that better relations between Germany and the Soviet Union could be secured if Russia refrained from interfering in German internal affairs and also abandoned a policy directed at vital German interests. Ribbentrop stated that there was no problem between the Baltic and the Black seas which could

¹Weizsacker to Schulenburg, June 29, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 36.

²Rossi, The Russo-German Alliance, p. 21.

³Coulondre to Bonnet, June 1, 1939, French Government, French Yellow Book, p. 171.

not be solved and that as to the Baltic "there was room for the two of us . . . and that Russian interests by no means needed to clash with ours there." Then with reference to Poland, Ribbentrop declared that, if need be, matters could be settled in a week. However, he hinted at an agreement with the Soviet government concerning the fate of Poland.¹ In a note to Schulenburg, Ribbentrop said that if Moscow should officially express a desire for improving relations, then the German government "would be interested in an early definite settlement."²

Germany's intentions, relative to an agreement with the Soviet Union, were spelled out in some detail by Schulenburg to Molotov on August 3. Schulenburg reaffirmed the plan that Schnurre had outlined to Astakhov and Barbarin on July 26 for an improvement in German-Russian relations. In answer to Molotov's requests for assurances concerning Germany's good intentions, Schulenburg said that Germany was ready to "so orient our behavior with regard to the Baltic states, if occasion arose, as to safeguard vital Soviet Baltic interests." And as for Poland, Germany hoped for a peaceful solution; but if this were impossible, Soviet interests here would also be protected. For his part, Molotov told Schulenburg that his government sought better relations with

¹Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, August 3, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 39.

Germany.¹

The Russians were playing a masterful diplomatic hand. They not only had succeeded in carrying on negotiations simultaneously with both the Western democracies and Germany, but they had managed also to avoid any definite commitments to either side. Their great advantages were the apparent inability of London and Paris to accept the possibility of a German-Russian rapprochement and the increasing evidence that Germany desired a political agreement with the U. S. S. R. Therefore, the Russians were in a position to make the best possible agreement with the highest bidder. They were no longer the beggars; they were now the choosers.

Even as late as early August the Soviet leaders had the Germans guessing about a German-Russian agreement. Schulenburg reported to Berlin on August 4 that he thought the Soviet government was then determined to sign with the British and French, provided they met all Soviet demands. He went on to say that it would take a considerable effort on the part of Germany to reach an agreement with Russia.² However, a few days later he reported that throughout the negotiations with the western diplomats Molotov had sat "like a bump on a log." He also wrote: "I believe that we put a few good fleas in the ears of the Soviets, anyhow."³

¹Schulenburg to German Foreign Office, August 4, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 40-41.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Schulenburg to Schliep, August 7, 1939, Ibid., p. 42.

There was a further clarification of views on August 10 in a meeting in Berlin between Schnurre and Astakhov. Schnurre was told again that the Soviet government desired improved relations with Germany. Schnurre remarked that since his government was still in the dark concerning Soviet interests, the time was not yet at hand for a discussion of concrete problems. However, as it concerned Poland, Schnurre said that because of new provocations it was possible that "a solution by force of arms would have to take place." Astakhov was told that it was important for Germany to know the position of the Soviet government on the question of Poland before any adjustment of interests between the two countries could be effected. Since German interests in Poland were limited, they need not conflict with Soviet interests, even in the event of war.¹

With the Germans now pressing the Russians for definite information concerning their vital interests, the Soviet leaders made a definite move. On the same day that it started military talks in Moscow with the western military missions, the Kremlin agreed to begin discussions with the Germans on outstanding questions.²

Ribbentrop wasted no time. On the same day that the Soviets agreed to conduct discussions, he forwarded to Schulenburg in Moscow a list of important items for

¹Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 44-45.

²Schnurre to Schulenburg, August 14, 1939, Ibid., p. 48.

communication to Molotov. Once again the Russians were to be told that ideological differences did not constitute a barrier to friendly relations; that there was no problem between the Baltic and Black seas which could not be settled; that the capitalistic powers were the enemies of both nations; and that the Polish problem was such as to "make a speedy clarification of German-Russian relations desirable." The German ambassador was asked at this time to secure a meeting for Ribbentrop with Stalin. Molotov was to be told that such a meeting was desirable since it could hasten an agreement.¹

The Germans were now knocking hard on Moscow's door, but the Soviet leaders were not to be hurried. Schulenburg saw Molotov on August 13 and reported that Molotov now believed that the Germans were sincere in seeking better relations with the Soviet Union. In this connection, Molotov asked what steps Germany was willing to take toward influencing Japan in bettering relations with the Soviet Union. But of much greater importance was his inquiry concerning Germany's attitude toward the conclusion of a German-Russian nonaggression pact. As it concerned Ribbentrop's trip to Moscow, Molotov said that it would require adequate preparation if any results were to be forthcoming.² Schulenburg now

¹Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, August 14, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 50-52.

²Schulenburg to German Foreign Office, August 16, 1939, Ibid., pp. 54-56.

thought that an agreement was possible.¹

The German reply to Molotov's inquiries was forthcoming immediately. The next day Ribbentrop instructed Schulenburg to tell Molotov that Germany was ready to sign a nonaggression pact and also to extend joint guarantees to the Baltic states. An unmistakable note of urgency was struck in the part of the following instructions which Schulenburg was requested to read to Molotov:

The Fuhrer is of the opinion that, in view of the present situation, and of the possibility of the occurrence any day of serious incidents (please at this point explain to Herr Molotov that Germany is determined not to endure Polish provocation indefinitely), a basic and rapid clarification of German-Russian relations and the mutual adjustment of the pressing questions are desirable. For these reasons the Reich Foreign Minister declares that he is prepared to come by plane to Moscow at any time after Friday, August 18, to deal on the basis of full powers from the Fuhrer with the entire complex of German-Russian questions and, if the occasion arises, to sign the appropriate treaties.²

The very nature of the talks now assumed a note of extreme urgency, with Germany pressing for an immediate agreement. Under these circumstances, it was not difficult for Stalin to negotiate a favorable agreement.

Final Agreement

There was now a frantic effort by the Germans to conclude a pact. Molotov told Schulenburg on August 18 that the "actual prerequisites" for an understanding were present.

¹Schulenburg to Weizsacker, August 16, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, p. 57.

²Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, August 16, 1939, Ibid., p. 58.

He stated two major provisions for the improvement of relations: (1) conclusion of a trade and credit agreement and (2) the conclusion of a nonaggression pact together with a special protocol defining the vital interests of the signatory parties. Molotov also suggested that both sides prepare a draft of a nonaggression pact as well as the secret protocol. With regard to Ribbentrop's trip, Molotov again said it would require preparations.¹

The pace was still too slow for the Germans. On August 18, Schulenburg was instructed to press Molotov about immediate permission for Ribbentrop to proceed to Moscow because the Polish crisis was at such a stage that hostilities could break out any day. Molotov was to be told that an economic agreement had been reached that very day in Berlin thus fulfilling one of the Soviet government's first conditions for improved relations. Ribbentrop was ready to proceed to Moscow with full powers to conclude a nonaggression treaty.²

On August 19, Schulenburg saw Molotov twice. At the first meeting, Molotov again said that Ribbentrop's trip required preparation. About a half hour after his first conference with Molotov, Schulenburg was asked to see him again. He was now handed a Soviet draft of a nonaggression pact

¹Schulenburg to Ribbentrop, August 18, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 59-61.

²Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, August 18, 1939, Ibid., pp. 61-62.

and told that Ribbentrop could come to Moscow either on August 26 or August 27.¹

But this date was too late for the Germans, and a different tack was now tried. No less a personage than Hitler himself now entered the picture. On August 20 he sent Stalin a message in which he accepted the Russian draft of the nonaggression pact, but considered it important that questions concerning it should be clarified as soon as possible. Hitler informed Stalin this could be done if Ribbentrop could go to Moscow. Hitler warned that "the tension between Germany and Poland has become intolerable," and suggested that Ribbentrop be received in Moscow on August 22 or at the latest August 23.²

Schulenburg conveyed this request to Molotov at 3:00 P.M. on August 21.³ A reply was delivered two hours later in which Stalin agreed to receive Ribbentrop on August 23.⁴

Stalin's reply did not come any too soon to please Hitler. Goering has told how Hitler called him one morning about three o'clock and expressed concern over the lack of a

¹Schulenburg to German Foreign Office, August 19, 1939, Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 64-65.

²Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, August 20, 1939, Ibid., pp. 66-67.

³Schulenburg to German Foreign Office, August 21, 1939, Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁴Ibid., p. 68.

reply. About one half hour later, the phone rang again. It was Hitler jubilantly announcing that Stalin had agreed to receive Ribbentrop.¹ The story is told that upon receiving Stalin's message, Hitler went wild with joy, hammered the wall with both fists, and shouted triumphantly, "Now I have the world in my pocket!"²

Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow on August 23, and the agreement, although signed on August 24, was dated August 23. It contained the following seven major terms: (1) Neither party was to undertake any act of force, any aggressive act either alone or in conjunction with other powers, against each other. (2) If one of the parties were to come under the attack of a third power, the other contracting party would not support the third Power in any way. (3) The two parties would consult with each other concerning questions of common interest. (4) Neither would join any group of powers directed against the other part. (5) In case of disputes arising between the two powers, there would be a friendly exchange of views or, if necessary, an arbitration commission to achieve an agreement. (6) The agreement was to last ten years, and could be extended another five years provided one of the parties did not denounce it one year before its expiration date. (7) The agreement was to be ratified in the shortest possible time. It was to become effective

¹C. De Witt Poole, "Light on Nazi Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, XXV (October, 1946), 142.

²Hilger and Meyer, Incompatible Allies, p. 300.

immediately upon its signature.¹

In addition to this agreement, there was signed also a secret additional protocol in which Germany and Russia agreed to spheres of influence. As it concerned the Baltic states, the northern boundary of Lithuania was to represent the boundary of the spheres of influence between the two nations. In Poland, the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San, were to constitute the boundary between the two contracting parties. The question of an independent Polish state was to await further political developments. The problem, however, was to be resolved by friendly agreement. As to southeastern Europe, Russia's primary interest in Bessarabia was recognized.²

With these agreements, Germany was now prepared to launch the grand assault against Poland. Within a few days, Europe was plunged into war. World War II had begun.

¹Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, pp. 76-77.

²Ibid., p. 78.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Any conclusions relative to the German-Russian Pact of 1939 must necessarily take into consideration the basic foreign policies pursued by the interested powers during the 1930's. This was a period of German and Italian aggression, British and French capitulation, and Russian efforts at collaboration with the West. Germany was a problem to Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, but these three nations had failed to find a common basis for cooperation against German aggression. The result was a growth of mutual suspicion and distrust.

With the seizure of Prague, there were soon outward indications that the Western powers were abandoning appeasement. They sought to underline this change of policy by extending guarantees to three of the smaller nations of eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, and Greece) which seemed threatened by new German aggressive moves. These guarantees were given, however, without prior consultations with the Soviet government and it was only later that Britain and France sought to enlist Soviet aid in defending these states.

In giving the guarantees, London and Paris deprived

themselves of some freedom of movement in their negotiations with Russia. Since it doesn't seem credible that British and French leaders were unaware of the nature of this move, the question must then be asked: Why did they take this step which placed them in a diplomatic straightjacket, especially as it concerned future negotiations with the Moscow government?

There is an indication here that the Western leaders never contemplated any definite and binding agreement with Moscow. At the very outset, and at the time when there was perhaps still some possibility of an agreement, London and Paris advanced proposals which did not indicate any strong desire for comprehensive pact. And this was at a time when they were in no strong position to bargain and when the Soviet leaders thought that the Western democracies were still capable of further appeasement. Under these circumstances, only the most precise proposals incorporating a triple alliance, a military convention, and iron-clad guarantees to all possible victims of German aggression had any chance of Soviet acceptance. Such proposals were advanced not by London and Paris, but by Moscow.

This was the type of pact that the Soviet leaders pressed upon the democratic states from the very beginning of the negotiations. The Western powers hesitated at almost every turn, and although they made one concession after another, they always seemed to leave a safe margin of disagreement which required further negotiations.

Somehow the English and French reasons for not accepting the Soviet proposals do not seem to ring true. Certainly there were times during the negotiations when the behavior of the British government was prejudicial to the conclusion of an effective pact with Moscow. This would seem to be indicated by the numerous British efforts to effect a Franco-Italian rapprochement; by the talks in London in late July and early August between Sir Horace Wilson, chief industrial adviser to the British government, and Helmuth Wohlthat, one of Goering's close advisers; by the solicitous attitude of the British ambassador in Berlin; and by the reluctance to press Poland and Romania to accept some form of Soviet assistance.

The argument can be advanced that the British and French, after making one concession after another, had reached the point where no further concessions could be made without endangering the sovereignty of other states. This was the reason given by the English and French for rejecting the Soviet definition of indirect aggression. This argument would be more valid if it could be shown that England and France had always been concerned about the independence and integrity of other states.

The simple fact is that they had not. Britain and France not only had failed to take effective action against Mussolini's seizure of Ethiopia and Hitler's seizure of Austria, but they had actually been participants in the Munich Conference which led to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

In none of these instances had London and Paris shown any deep consideration for the integrity of these nations. However, when it came to pressing Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states to accept conditions which could possibly lead to a pact with Russia, they balked. The question is inevitable: Why were they now so eager to respect the wishes of these small nations, whereas in the past they had ignored the wishes of others?

The answer is inescapable. It was not in the interest of the Western democracies to force these countries to accept terms which could have possibly led to a comprehensive agreement with the Soviet Union. While no doubt Russian aid would have been welcomed in the event of war, the Western nations were unwilling to pay Stalin's price because they feared the possible growth of Soviet power in central Europe. Instead, they sought an agreement which, while devoid of any close ties with the Soviet Union, could at the same time be used to bring pressure upon Germany to accept a negotiated settlement of all outstanding problems with the West.

London and Paris might have achieved their goal if there had been no possibility of an agreement between Germany and Russia. However, their chances for a limited agreement became progressively worse with every new German overture to the Russians. With Hitler finally pressing for an agreement, Stalin concluded that an agreement with Germany instead of with the Western democracies would better serve the interests of the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, Britain and

France found it impossible to compete with Hitler and a diplomatic defeat followed.

One of the chief aims of the Russian leaders all along was to prevent the formation of an anti-Soviet coalition among the capitalist nations. To this end, they first cultivated close ties with Germany and then, with Hitler's rise to power, sought friendly ties with Britain and France. It was highly desirable in the scheme of things that Soviet Russia should align herself either with the Western nations or Germany. And if it ever became possible to join one bloc and at the same time avoid war, that would be even better.

This possibility presented itself when the English and French gave guarantees to Poland, Romania, and Greece. In effect, the commitments indirectly gave Russia the advantages she would have bargained for in negotiations with the Western powers. More than this, however, the stage was now set for a possible war between the Western democracies and Germany. In the circumstances, a nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union became a distinct possibility because it would be mutually satisfactory. For Germany it could mean the major enemies in the war would be on only one front, the west, and for the Soviet Union it could mean achieving neutrality in a war which could possibly result in the self-destruction of the capitalist nations.

The leaders in the Kremlin did not look upon such an eventuality as a certainty but only as a possibility. They could not be entirely sure that the Western nations would

in the end honor their obligations to Poland, Romania, and Greece. There was still some suspicion that if the opportunity presented itself, Britain and France would once again appease the dictators. Therefore, she had to guard against this because it could possibly have resulted in a united front against her.

This possibility was minimized, however, at the very moment when the men in the Kremlin realized that there was a chance for an agreement with Germany. From this point on, apparently Moscow's first choice was not an agreement with the Western democracies but with Germany. Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders had to guard against concluding a premature pact, because they feared Hitler would use it to force concessions from England and France. In order to achieve this objective, the Soviet government conducted negotiations independently and simultaneously with Berlin and the Western capitals. Only when the European situation, with particular reference to Danzig, had reached the stage where the Western nations were likely to become involved in war with Germany, did Stalin decide to conclude the pact with Hitler.

Stalin had little trouble deciding when the moment had arrived to conclude the pact with Germany. During August Hitler became increasingly impatient about the Danzig question to the point where he was willing to agree to almost any terms the Russians proposed for a nonaggression pact. There was certainly more than a hint to Stalin that following any agreement between the two nations Germany would take

aggressive action against Poland.

The Moscow government was now in a position to conclude a very favorable agreement with Germany. Here was the opportunity for Stalin to get from Hitler what he could not possibly get from Britain and France: a sphere of influence in the Baltic states, a part of Poland, and the chance for penetration into the Balkans--all without becoming engaged in war.

Stalin had expressed the view on March 10, 1939, that the role of appeasement pursued by the Western democracies was directed at embroiling Germany and Russia in a war. This fear was present among some of the Russian leaders even during the subsequent negotiations with Britain and France. They assumed that a double-cross by the British and French governments was a distinct possibility. In the end, however, it was Stalin, and not Britain and France, who made the final appeasement which permitted Hitler to annex still more territory and to wage war against the West instead of the U. S. S. R.

With the signing of the German-Russian nonaggression pact, Europe and then almost the entire world were plunged into war.

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APPENDIX

"August 23, 1939.

"Treaty of Nonaggression Between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

"The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following agreement:

"Article I

"Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other powers.

"Article II

"Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third power.

"Article III

"The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

"Article IV

"Neither of the two High Contracting Parties shall participate in any grouping of powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

"Article V

"Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties

shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

"Article VI

"The present treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not denounce it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

"Article VII

"The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

"Done in duplicate, in the German and Russian languages.

"Moscow, August 23, 1939.

"For the Government of the
German Reich:
v. Ribbentrop

"With full power of the
Government of the U.S.S.R.:
V. Molotov

"Secret Additional Protocol

"On the occasion of the signature of the Nonaggression 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 conclusions:

"1. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas 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 U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognized by each party.

"2. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the U. S. S. R. 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.

"Moscow, August 23, 1939.

"For the Government
of the German Reich:
v. Ribbentrop

"Plenipotentiary of the
Government of the U.S.S.R.:
V. Molotov"¹

¹Sontag and Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941,
(Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1948), pp. 76-
78.

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