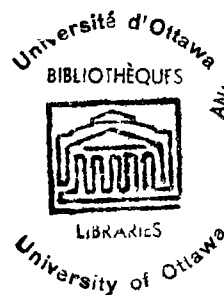


GERMAN - SOVIET RELATIONS IN 1939

by Carl B. van Husen

Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals essentially with the developments in the German-Soviet relations which led to the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 23, 1939. It attempts both to describe and explain the intense diplomatic activities of the period between the complete German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.

There is no suggestion made that this is an absolutely original topic of historical research. This topic, in fact, has attracted the attention of many writers. Immediately after 1945 numerous publishers were eager to inform the general public about the background of the outbreak of the Second World War, without waiting for the publication of the essential source material. After 1950, when the first collections of documents began to appear, many other authors were attracted by this fascinating topic. Some years later, when all the sources whose publication could be expected during this generation became available, a new series of monographs appeared on the market. The time

has now arrived, at a distance of almost twenty-five years to make a general assessment of that fateful pact. This thesis attempts to re-examine all the available evidence and in addition to take into consideration the various interpretations by many authors.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ADAP - Akten der Deutschen Auswartigen Politik  
Documents on German Foreign Policy
- DBFP - Documents on British Foreign Policy

## CHAPTER I

### NATURE OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL AND THE RESPECTIVE DIPLOMATIC SERVICES

The conclusion of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 23, 1939, has become not only the subject of controversy amongst historians, but also a favourite topic of political writers and propagandists. This controversy deals with single aspects of the pact as well as with the interpretation of its meaning and bearing on subsequent events.

It was in 1948 that Czechoslovakia was forced into the Soviet sphere of power, an event which led to the conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The publication, with the official sanction of the American Government, of the captured German documents in 1948 under the indicative title Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941 forced the Soviets into a defensive position. Moscow would probably have preferred to make the world forget the whole affair, but the charges continued to be more and more pressing. Counter-charges were made almost immediately. It is not surprising that in the years following many authorities have taken pains to elucidate this complex matter.

As early as 1945, at the Yalta Conference, Stalin himself volunteered a plausible explanation for his decision in 1939. At that time he insisted that he would not have made the agreement with Hitler, had it not been for the Munich Conference of September 1938, from which the Soviet Union had been excluded. This statement was made to the American Secretary of State, James Byrnes,<sup>1</sup> more in sorrow than in anger, probably in an attempt to explain and to apologize rather than to accuse. The more militant attitude of the Soviets came only after the Americans started to press the charges. Stalin's explanation has been used extensively and quite a few new arguments have been brought forward.<sup>2</sup>

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1 J.F. Byrnes, Speaking Frankly, New York, Harper, 1947, p.283.

2 M.Gus, Američtí imperialisté-inspirátoři mnichovské politiky, Prague, Orbis, 1953, throughout. W.P. Potjomkin, ed., Geschichte der Diplomatie, vol. 3, Part 2, Berlin, SWA, 1948, p 308f. - "Geschichtsfälscher", Neue Welt, Berlin, Feb 1948, (No.3) p.3f. - W. Basler, "Die British-Französisch-Sowjetischen Militärbesprechungen in August 1939", Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft, 5 (1957), p 18-39. - W. Basler, "Zur Vorgeschichte des Deutsch-Sowjetischen Nichtangriffspaktes, 1939", Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft, 1954 (Supplement 1), p.126-161.

The conclusion of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, according to these Soviet interpretations, had been "a great diplomatic success of the Soviet Government" in as far as it "thwarted the plans of the reactionary diplomats of Great Britain and France aiming at the isolation of Soviet Russia".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Pact had frustrated the plan of the Western Democracies to encourage Hitler to attack the Soviet Union.

The Western accusations against the Soviet Union use basically the simple fact that Stalin concluded an alliance with a regime which after 1945 had been proven to be responsible for unparalleled crimes against humanity. Furthermore, Moscow is blamed for having refused to accept the outstretched hand of Great Britain and France in the spring and summer of 1939 and thus became also responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

Anyone interested in any aspect of Soviet history especially after 1928, faces acute problems: the greatest of these is the scarcity of documentary evidence. Another

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<sup>3</sup> W.P. Potjomkin, ed., Op.Cit., p.355.

<sup>4</sup> Earl of Halifax, Fulness of Days, London, Collins, 1957, p.207 f.

is the untrustworthiness of Soviet statistics. Observers in the west, be they historians or so called 'sovietologists' and 'Kremlinologists', have developed several techniques in overcoming the almost complete lack of first hand contemporary sources.

First of all, western archives contain voluminous documentary collections dealing with the Soviet diplomatic and political hierarchy. Minutes, recordings and dispatches convey many details about the western contacts with the Soviets. However, authors of these papers are almost exclusively non-Soviet diplomats and other officials. With the exception of official minutes, counter-signed by the Soviet party, all these documents have to be analyzed and checked against other independent evidence. Soviet memoranda, public pronouncements, speeches and declarations represent another group of evidence which helps in arriving at an explanation of Soviet foreign policy. Of course, extreme care has to be applied in order not to take a publicly announced policy for the real aims possibly hidden behind it. Furthermore, as in the case of Hitler's early writings, the goals set by Lenin and his successors have to be taken into account, since these were never disclaimed by the ruling hierarchy. Finally, the deeds of the Moscow

leaders as witnessed by the world can be used in certain cases as analogy, especially if a systematic breach of international agreements or any other long range pattern can be depicted.

This material is all that is available to Western historians. Thus it is not surprising that it was collected on several occasions for the use of students and writers. The outstanding example is the three volume edited by Jane Degras, Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy published between 1951 and 1953.

The working material concerning the other party to the Agreement is fortunately abundant. The most important source is the series of German captured documents for the years 1918 to 1945, published since 1950 under the auspices of the Governments of the United States, Great Britain and France: Akten Zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik.<sup>5</sup> The three Western powers, after the surrender of Germany in 1945, seized almost all German state archives pertaining to the period after 1871 and transferred them to Great Britain and the United States. Documents of the German

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<sup>5</sup> Akten Zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918 - 1945, Series D (1937-1945) Vols IV, VI, VII, Baden - Baden Imprimerie Nationale, 1950-1956 (subsequently quoted as ADAP).

Foreign Ministry form the greater part of this collection, but certain documents originating from other departments such as the Ministry of War, were included. An English edition has been published and was also used in this thesis.<sup>6</sup> A French translation published by Plon is a selection from the German edition.

It would be more correct to consult the original documents in their entirety now stored in Alexandria, Va., and in the cellars of the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, instead of consulting a selection as published by the three former enemies of Germany. It was not judged feasible to search in the thousands of uncatalogued original documents.

One can have some confidence that the collection represents an adequate and fair selection. The preface to this series assures the reader that the editors had "complete independence in the selection and editing of the documents". Since among the editors are names such as Bernadotte E. Schmitt, John W. Wheeler-Bennett and Maurice Baumont, one has the assurance that this claim is

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<sup>6</sup> Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945  
Series D, Vols IV, VI, VII, London - Washington, 1951 -  
1956 (subsequently quoted as German Documents).

a genuine one. Moreover, there were no voices raised in Germany by historians nor by any surviving authors of these materials as to the authenticity of the published texts. Only two criticisms have been heard so far, one from the United States and one from Germany.<sup>7</sup> These criticisms, however, are concerned with the form rather than the contents.

Documents from the archives of other powers involved in the making of the German-Soviet Pact offer a welcome addition to the available documentation. First of all, the Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, published by the British Government, had to be used quite extensively. This series, to be sure, cannot be considered as a counterpart of the German series, for the very reason that the former was not published by a foreign government. Although the preface also claims a complete independence of the editors in the selection, one is then surprised to find

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<sup>7</sup> G.L. Weinberg, "Critical Note on the Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945", The Journal of Modern History, XXIII (1951), p.38-40. - K.D. Erdmann "Aktenpublikationen zur Neuesten Geschichte", Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht, 3 (1952), p.507-511, 8 (1957), p. 236-250.- Cf. R.J. Sonntag, "The Last Months of Peace, 1939", Foreign Affairs, 35 (1956), p.507-524.

a certain number of textual omissions. It must be said to the honour of the editors that these omissions are carefully indicated. For these reasons the rather satisfied German critic of the German series concludes that the final judgment of the British series must wait the test of time, perhaps several decades.<sup>8</sup>

The archives of the Quai d'Orsay for the period before the Second World War are almost non-existent. Individual documents were secured by certain officials fleeing the German invasion, the rest was destroyed by the Germans. Many bits and pieces can be found dispersed in the nine volumes comprising the minutes of the Investigation Committee of the French Parliament after 1947, Les Evénements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945. Others are published in the numerous memoirs of French statesmen and diplomats, notably of the former ambassador in Moscow and Berlin, Robert Coulondre, and the former Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet. Whereas Coulondre's testimony is generally accepted as quite objective and

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<sup>8</sup> K.D. Erdmann, Op.Cit., Cf. W.N. Medlicott, "La Marche vers la guerre, 1939", Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, 6 (1956), p.3-21.

detached, the testimony of G. Bonnet, including certain contemporary texts, is considered as a crude falsification which cannot stand any scrutiny.<sup>9</sup>

Some documents, artfully arranged to prove a point can be found in the 'coloured' books issued by the various governments, for example, The French Yellow Book, and the British Blue Book.

Many memoirs and apologetic writings by German, French and British contemporaries have been used to supplement this documentary evidence. An outstanding work in this category is the book by G. Hilger and A.G. Meyer The Incompatible Allies, 1953.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> F.L. Ford and C.E. Schorske, "The Voice in the Wilderness: Robert Coulondre", The Diplomats 1919-1939, G.A. Craig and F. Gilbert, eds., 1953, p.555-578. - Sir Lewis Namier, In the Nazi Era, London, Macmillan, 1952, p.168-181. Whereas Namier in his "Appendix" (p.183-198) suspected G. Bonnet of rather curious machinations with historical documents, B. Celovsky has proven page by page and chapter by chapter, that Bonnet's memoirs are without any historical value. B. Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags - Anstalt, 1958, throughout.

<sup>10</sup> For a critical review of Hilger and Meyer, see K.D. Erdmann, "Zur Geschichte der Deutsch-Sowjetischen Beziehungen vom Ersten zum Zweiten Weltkrieg", Zeitschrift für Ostforschung, 9 (1960), p.107-114.

Two contemporary diaries have been used extensively, since they must be considered at least as reliable as any published collection of official documents : The well-known Ciano's Diaries, and the Notes for a Journal by Maxim Litvinov. Whereas there is no doubt about the authenticity of the first publication, the private diary of Litvinov presents some problems. A bulky manuscript reached in an obscure way the prominent British historian E.H. Carr who examined its physical make-up as well as its content very carefully and concluded that, in all probability, it is a genuine text written day by day by the former Soviet Minister of External Affairs.<sup>11</sup>

Among the critical and most serious attempts to deal with the subject matter one has to mention the Survey of International Affairs, the Eve of War, 1939, by A. and V.M. Toynbee, E.H. Carr's German-Soviet Relations between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939. M. Belloff's Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941, and G.L. Weinberg's

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<sup>11</sup> Bertram D. Wolfe, "The Litvinov Diaries", Commentary, New York, August, 1956, takes a more critical stand.

Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941.<sup>12</sup> In addition, writings of varied character, ranging from contemporary analysis to partisan pamphlets, were used in instances where a detail was missing or where documentary evidence was contradictory.

In order to be able to interpret properly the mass of available sources at least a short examination has to be made of the respective diplomatic services which at the time produced the great majority of these documents. The Soviet and the German Foreign Ministries had one thing in common. They were mere administrative agencies accepting orders not only for the general lines, but also for the details. Evidence is found in many of the available documents that even the high ranking diplomats had little latitude in policy making. Every single act, interview, and discussion had to be authorized in advance.<sup>13</sup> German diplomats accredited

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<sup>12</sup> For a critique of Carr and Weinberg, see K.D. Erdmann, "Zur Geschichte der Deutsch-Sowjetischen Beziehungen vom Ersten zum Zweiten Weltkrieg".

<sup>13</sup> "In accordance with the instructions given to us I invited the Soviet Chargé d'Affairs, Astakhov to dinner last night at Ewet's reported the Chief of the East-European Division in the Wilhelmstrasse on July 27, 1939." German Documents, VI, p.1006. - M. Litvinov's Notes for a Journal, E.H. Carr, ed., London, Deutsch, 1955, reflect accurately the impotence of the Commissar for Foreign Affairs in any decision making.

in Moscow were reduced to mere reporters of their discussions with Soviet officials, adding here and there rumours, even gossip, and only occasionally daring to suggest the next step. Whenever an unexpected subject was brought up by the other party in an arranged conversation, the reporting official almost invariably tried to sidetrack the issue or make some general non-committal statement.

The general lines of the German foreign policy in 1939 were designed exclusively by Hitler. There were no cabinet decisions concerning foreign policy for the simple reason that there were no cabinet meetings held. Whenever necessary, Hitler called certain members of his cabinet together with military experts and high ranking members of the party, and invariably announced to them his decision in the form of a monologue. Discussions were short and restricted to details.<sup>14</sup> His Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, transmitted Hitler's decisions to the senior officials of his department. Before 1938 Ribbentrop had some autonomy as the head of the so-called 'Ribbentrop Aussenstelle', a shadow foreign ministry behind the Wilhelmstrasse administered by Freiherr von Neurath. His nomination to the post of

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<sup>14</sup> See A.L. Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, London, Odhams Press, 1959, 776 p.

foreign minister in February 1938 made him in fact Hitler's executive officer for foreign affairs.<sup>15</sup>

The Secretary of State Ernst von Weizsäcker was the administrator of the department reporting directly to Ribbentrop. Within the department itself two distinct groups were noticeable: the professional diplomats and the Ribbentrop appointees who were taken over by the department after the dissolution of the 'Aussenstelle' in 1938. The latter group was constantly trying to unseat the professional diplomats and a growing tension developed over the period of the next six or seven years. Curiously enough, this tension seemed not to have harmed the functioning of the traditionally efficient German foreign service. This rivalry did not produce any attempts to change or at least influence the given course of Hitler's foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Erich Kordt, Nicht aus den Akten, Stuttgart, Union, 1950; Wahn und Wirklichkeit, Stuttgart, Union, 1948.- Ernst von Weizsäcker, Memoirs, Chicago, Regney, 1951. - Gordon A. Craig, "The German Office from Neurath to Ribbentrop", The Diplomats 1919-1939, p.406-436.

<sup>16</sup> In the certainly well selected German Documents there is evidence of only one basic disagreement between Ribbentrop and the professional diplomats. See Weizsäcker's record of his meeting with Ribbentrop on August 19, 1938, in German Documents, II, No.374.

Hitler's Germany was represented in Moscow by Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, a career diplomat with an East German agrarian background. He was ideally suited for this post at a time when the German-Soviet relations were at their lowest point. Cool and emotionally well balanced, he saw his restricted role in a proper perspective, making no radical suggestions to improve the relations with Moscow. Until 1938 his duties involved daily routine and only occasionally social or official contacts with Soviet officials. Immediately after the conclusion of the Munich Agreements in September 1938, his dispatches contain surprisingly accurate analyses of the Soviet mood and inclinations. Only then his sincere beliefs in the need for German-Soviet co-operation became apparent. However, he under-estimated the importance of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine in Soviet foreign policy, even immediately before Hitler's invasion of Soviet Russia. During the critical years of 1939-1941 he never succeeded in comprehending Hitler's real intentions. Frustrated by his vain efforts, he joined the anti-Hitler underground and ended on the gallows after July 20, 1944.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Carl E. Schorske, "Two German Ambassadors: Dirksen and Schulenburg", in The Diplomats, 1919-1939, p.477-511.

Hitler alone was responsible for the direction of the German attitude towards the Soviets. Indeed the expression 'German foreign policy' is grossly inaccurate. At any instance, especially after the changes in the Wilhelmstrasse and in the Ministry of War in February 1938, Hitler was the indisputable leader in every sphere of German national life. There was only a handful of men who dared openly to oppose his views, and these were gradually removed. In 1939, all of Hitler's collaborators accepted him as their infallible leader without too many reservations, and, in fact, their expert advice was quite often slanted to fit Hitler's own views.<sup>18</sup>

Mein Kampf today has to be regarded as a sincere exposition of what Hitler thought during his imprisonment in 1924. On the whole, the goals declared in this ponderous and oversimplifying piece of political philosophy were never disapproved by any of Hitler's actions after 1933, with the single exception of his aggression against

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<sup>18</sup> The British Ambassador in Berlin, Nevile Henderson describes in a very penetrant way this phenomenon of complete submission. See his Wasser unter den Brücken, Zurich, Rentsch, 1949, 325 p.

Western Europe. The Non-aggression Pact with Moscow cannot be viewed as a deviation from his principles.<sup>19</sup> The majority of Western statesmen and to an extent also the Soviets, believed that Hitler would be forced radically to change his professed views, once becoming a responsible statesman himself. The whole scheme of Mein Kampf may have appeared to the contemporary readers as nothing but a fantastic product of a young man imbued with visionary fanaticism, especially since immediately after World War I many other apparently irrational theories were produced.

Hitler did not wait too long to prove all his would-be critics wrong. In November 1933 he declared emphatically : "I did not become Chancellor of the Reich

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19 In this connection A.J.P. Taylor brought a novel theory of his own. In The Origin of the Second World War (London, Hamilton, 1961), he refuses to blame Hitler alone for the disastrous events, claiming that from a historical point of view, "every statesman failed to provide peace and prosperity to the world" and that his book is a story "without heroes and perhaps without villains". "The War of 1939", concluded Taylor, "far from being premeditated, was a mistake, the result on both sides of diplomatic blunders". For a violent criticism of this interpretation see P.A. Reynolds "Hitler's War", History, Vol.46 (Oct.1961), p.212-217; and especially H. Trevor - Roper in Encounter (July 1961). A brilliant review of the whole controversy between the Taylor and Trevor-Roper was published by V. Mehta in The New Yorker, Dec. 8, 1962.

in order to act differently from what I have been preaching during the last fourteen years".<sup>20</sup> Of course, the same observers put aside even this as a mere gesture toward the German people. After the conclusion of the war in 1945 one of them observed wryly:

"There is one nice thing about the Germans. They always give you a warning whenever they plot a 'mauvais coup'. Unfortunately, it does not help any, since their plans are so monstrous that nobody takes them seriously".<sup>21</sup>

Mein Kampf has only a few basic theories and axioms: the 'Dolchstoss legende', the hindrance and destructive influence of Jews, Hapsburgs, Social Democrats, and the second rate human beings of Slavic origin on free development of the German nation. Bolshevism appeared to him as a world-wide Jewish conspiracy. Since in 1924 the vast territory of Eastern Europe, in his view to be at any rate the prime target of a German attempt to secure the necessary 'Lebensraum' for the German nation, was inhabited by inferior people and ruled by Jewish Bolshevism, Hitler had multiple reasons to consider the destruction and the invasion of Soviet Russia as the first commandment of his quasi-religion. Thus it is not surprising that

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<sup>20</sup> His speech in Weimar, Nov. 2, 1933 Völkischer Beobachter, Nov. 3, 1933.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Reynaud, Au Coeur de la mêlée, 1930-1945, Paris, Flammarion, 1951, p. 56.

Hitler reserved one entire chapter of his product to the dilemma "Ostorientierung oder Ostpolitik". The keystone of his foreign policy was clearly stated:

"And so we National Socialists anxiously draw a line beneath the tendency of our foreign policy of the pre-war period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless Germanic movement to the south and west of Europe, and turn our eyes toward the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-war period and shift to the land policy of the future.

However, if we speak of soil in Europe to-day, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states.

Here fate itself seems desirous of giving us a sign. By handing Russia to Bolshevism, it robbed the Russian nation of that intelligentsia which previously brought about and guaranteed its existence as a state (. . .). To-day the Germanic nucleus of Russia's upper leading strata can be regarded as almost totally exterminated. It has been replaced by the Jew. Impossible as it is for the Russian by himself to shake off the yoke of the Jews by his own resources, it is equally impossible for the Jew to maintain the mighty empire forever. The character of the Jew is not that of an organizer, but of a ferment of decomposition. The giant empire in the east is ripe for collapse. And the end of Jewish rule in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state. Fate choose us to witness a catastrophe, which will become the most formidable confirmation of the accuracy of the folkish racial theory." 22

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22 A. Hitler, Mein Kampf, München, Eher, 1940, p.742-743. Translated by the author.

Of the possibility of a German-Russian alliance against Western Europe, he wrote:

"Contemporary Russia, devoid of its leading Germanic strata cannot be considered as an ally in the struggle for the freedom of the German nation, even if one leaves out the cherished intentions of its new masters. From a purely military viewpoint, the situation would be totally disastrous in case of war of Germany and Russia against Western Europe, and probably against the rest of the world. The fighting would take place on German and not on Russian soil, without Germany being able to receive from Russia the minimum of effective support".<sup>23</sup>

In August 1939 Hitler was eager for the conclusion of a treaty with the Soviets. It will be demonstrated in the main part of this work that this move was merely an expedient manoeuvre which did not imply a change of heart. Here it would be sufficient to quote from his letter of June 21, 1941, to Mussolini in which he informed the Duce about his decision to attack the Soviet Union.

"Since the moment I arrived, after long contemplation, at this decision, I feel free again. The alliance with the Soviet Union, despite the sincere effort to bring about a final detente, was to me often quite a burden. For somehow I felt that it was a break with my entire origin, my concepts and previous obligations. Now I am happy to be rid of this agony".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 747-748.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred Seidl, Die Beziehungen Zwischen Deutschland und der Soviet Union, 1939-1941, Tübingen, Laupp, 1949, p.407.

For the analysis of the German-Soviet relations, leading to the conclusion of the Pact of August 23, 1939, the fact that Hitler was the only genius pacti on the German side has to be remembered as much as the knowledge of Hitler's fundamental attitude toward Soviet Russia.

Basically, the machinery of the Soviet diplomacy was very similar to that of the Wilhelmstrasse - except that it was much more complicated. The German legislative apparatus under Hitler, the Reichstag, became rapidly and quite ostensibly a mere facade for Hitler's personal rule. The Supreme Soviet and its Presidium had the same fate. This cannot be proven more convincingly than by the invariably unanimous votes taken both in the Reichstag and in the Supreme Soviet. The Nazi and the Soviet executive organs were also quite similar in the actual powers which they exercised. Hitler's cabinet hardly ever met for a plenary meeting and the Council of the People's Commissars existed on paper only.<sup>25</sup> Political parties both in Germany and in Soviet Russia exercised the real power both internally and externally.

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<sup>25</sup> For an excellent analysis of the functioning of the Soviet governmental apparatus, see Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia 1929-1941, Vol. II, London, Oxford University Press, 1949, p.385 f. - Henry L. Roberts, "Maxim Litvinov", in The Diplomats, 1919-1939, p.344-377.- M. Litvinov, Op.Cit., p.7-18.

Whereas Hitler, however, became after 1934 the only speaker for his party, the top organs of the Communist Party in Soviet Russia seemed to exercise quite extensive power. To start with, the Party's Central Committee met regularly in formal meetings and issued detailed communiqués. Its executive was the Politburo, founded during the October revolution and consisting originally of five members, namely, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Kamenev and Krestinsky. In 1939 among its known members were Stalin, Andreev, Kaganovitch, Kalinin, Mikoyan, Voroshilov and Zhdanov. Although Stalin was merely a member of the Politburo, his exclusive position in the Soviet hierarchy emanated partly from his position as secretary-general to the Party's Central Committee, and partly from the fact that in the late twenties he was recognized as Lenin's successor. It would be probably a hasty conclusion to assume that the Comintern, with its foreign members so remarkably attached to the common cause of Communism had little to say in the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Politburo.

The opposite number to the Wilhelmstrasse was in Moscow Narkomindel, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. Maxim Litvinov, the holder of this portfolio

between 1930 and 1939, although a pre-revolutionary member of the Party and subsequently member of the large Central Committee of the Party, never became a member of the Politburo. The professional diplomats under Litvinov carried out orders received from above. Reputedly, Stalin frequently used to by-pass the Narkomindel altogether and dealt directly with the representatives of the Foreign department of the State Political Directorate (G.P.U.) or the Soviet military intelligence, having representatives in all of the foreign posts.

As far as it can be ascertained at no time did Litvinov pursue his own policy. His position was administrative, not responsible. His policy was handed to him by Stalin or the Politburo.<sup>26</sup> There is no other explanation for Litvinov's durability during the numerous purges which swept away many prominent members of the 'old guard', as well as four of his assistants, almost all the heads of departments in his ministry and the leading diplomatic personnel abroad.

In dealing with the Soviet side of the German-Soviet Agreement it has to be kept in mind that the general

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<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is made very convincingly by H.L. Roberts, "Maxim Litvinov", in The Diplomats, p.344 f. Moreover Litvinov's admiration of Stalin is apparent from his Journal.

policies toward Hitler and the Western Powers were designed in Moscow by the Politburo and Stalin, and that Litvinov and his diplomats were in charge of their execution.

## CHAPTER II

### OUTLINE OF GERMAN-SOVIET RELATIONS

BEFORE MARCH 1939

#### A. From Brest-Litowsk to the Munich Agreement

The signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in August 1939 is one of the most portentous events in the modern diplomatic history. It created an alliance of two most improbable partners. Hitler's Mein Kampf, his numerous speeches and policy declarations made him appear as the foremost enemy of world Bolshevism. Very few observers had reasons to doubt his sincerity, especially in the light of his overt intentions towards the Ukraine. Stalin, on the other hand, as the chief representative of the Communist Movement, was generally regarded as the first opponent of fascism of which the 'Nazi' philosophy was an offspring. Moreover, the rapid spread of the world communist movement after the First World War was brought to a halt in Germany, and Hitler's "Machtübernahme" apparently ended any further communist ambitions in this direction. The Soviet distrust of Hitler's Germany accounted for some sympathy towards Soviet Russia in many

left-wing circles of Western Europe and North America.

However, under these mutual animosities there were undercurrents, then hardly detectable, hiding the potentialities of a rapprochement. The international events of 1938 and of the first half of 1939, which will be analyzed in detail in this thesis, are to be regarded as the last open stage of the complex process which brought these undercurrents to the surface.

The regimes in Germany and Soviet Russia were dictatorial. Any reversal of policy, however radical, could be brought about with relative ease by the dictators. There was no need for a solid justification of any change in foreign policy, however radical, to gain the approval of the electorate. A few demagogical indictments of a third power or more or less fictitious accusations of some "forces occultés" were quite sufficient. The masses were largely conditioned by the accepted charismatic nature of the dictators, which did not allow for errors in their judgment. Disagreements and doubts could not be expressed openly and were at any rate confined to a selected few who had no power to change the given course of events.

Equally significant was the long tradition of the quite peculiar relations between Germany and Russia. The basically continental German state, located between the Western Powers and Russia was to a considerable extent responsible for the vacillating attitude of Germany toward Russia during the German struggle for the status of a world power. Frederick the Great and Bismarck had tried to use the Russian presence as a tool in the intricate European play of power with some success. The Treaty of Brest-Litowsk is a culmination of this type of German-Russian diplomacy of the old style which was used by both Germany and Russia against the Western European powers. Moreover, in 1917, for the first time, German and Russian diplomats came together as representatives of two outcast regimes. This single event is a milestone in modern European history, which was more responsible for the survival of the Bolshevik Revolution than any other factor.<sup>27</sup>

After the Treaty of Versailles, Germany and Russia were again in a very similar position, Germany

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<sup>27</sup> For the background to and the consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litowsk see J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, Brest-Litowsk - The Forgotten Peace, London, Macmillan, 1938, 478 p.

as a result of its deliberate bid to become a great world and colonial power, was totally defeated. During the following years, Germany was expected to pay dearly for its failure in this daring venture. Reparations, occupation by victorious armies, internal chaos and general disintegration of morale were the outcome.<sup>28</sup> Russia, with its October Revolution, became an enigma of Europe, which could not be trusted and which, after awkward and vain attempts to bring her on a more respectable path, had to be isolated.<sup>29</sup> The two outcasts of the international society met in 1922 and signed the Treaty of Rapallo.

Rapallo was not a "grand alliance". However, two facts stand out. Again the two European "bêtes noires" came together and became partners, respectable to nobody but at least to each other. And then, Rapallo inaugurated the most important phase of German-Soviet relations, the co-operation of the Reichswehr with the Red Army.<sup>30</sup> The technical aspect of this co-operation

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<sup>28</sup> For this period see W.H. Dawson, Germany under the Treaty, London, Allen and Unwin, 1933, and J.W. Wheeler0 Bennett, The Wreck of Reparations, London, Allen and Unwin, 1933.

<sup>29</sup> Max Beloff, Op.Cit., Vol. 1, throughout.

<sup>30</sup> See H. Speidel, "Reichswehr und Rote Armee", Vierteljahrsthefte für Zeitgeschichte, January, 1953, p.18 f.

appears to-day as totally inconsequential. However, its psychological impact on the minds of the leading military men, both in Germany and Soviet Russia, during the two decades was of considerable significance. The spirit of Rapallo survived even the shattering effects of the abortive Communist uprising of October 1923, and surprisingly also the Treaty of Locarno of 1925, by which Germany became at least a nominal partner of Western European powers. The Treaty of Berlin of 1926 was not only a confirmation of the Rapallo Pact, but it revived at the same time Bismarck's concept according to which Germany could and had to face both the East and the West.

In the following years it seemed that nothing had changed much since the pre-war days. The Weimar Republic tried to steer a middle course using the alliance with Russia as a lever to gain concessions from the Western European powers and, at the same time, using Locarno as a reminder to Moscow that Germany was not too dependent upon its eastern alliance. It looked as if Russia were still governed by the Czars, as if the Spartacus putsch had never happened, and as if the new Soviet regime had never any ambitions west of the Curzon line.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For an excellent analysis of the German-Soviet relations between the two wars see P. Kluge "Deutschland und Russland Zwischen den Weltkriegen" Historische Zeitschrift, 171 (1951).

Then came the year of 1933. With Hitler's appearance on the German scene, the relations between Moscow and Berlin became less frequent and at the same time more tense and unfriendly. Finally, after the German military occupation of the Rhineland, the formal remilitarization of the Reich and with the open clash between Soviet and German interests in Spain, the relations reached their lowest point. Diplomatic contacts, to be sure, were still maintained, while the Treaty of Berlin was never formally revoked.

With the first signs of appeasement by Great Britain and France towards Hitler, the scene began slowly to change. First indications, however vague, of a revival of the spirit of Rapallo became slowly apparent.

The year 1938 was inaugurated with the surprisingly smooth "Anschluss" of Austria to the Reich. The subsequent Agreement of Munich became the turning point in the history of the inter-war period. Hitler's diplomatic victory gained in Munich over the two west European allies, placed the Soviet Union again in diplomatic isolation. The Litvinov era, characterized by the entrance of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations and by the very active part which the Soviet Union tried to play on the inter-

national scene, came suddenly to an end. Litvinov in view of the more and more apparent signs of appeasement of Hitler by Great Britain and France, tried not only to predict the future course of Hitler, but, in a very subtle way, to threaten the Western European powers with the possibility of a Soviet-German agreement. In an interview with a foreign correspondent in December 1937, he is reported to have said :

"Hitler and the generals who control Germany read history. They know that Bismarck warned against war on two fronts. They know that he urged the reinsurance policy with Russia. They believe that the Kaiser lost the First World War because he forgot Bismarck's admonitions. When the Germans are prepared at last to embark upon their new adventures, these bandits will come to Moscow to ask us for a pact". 32

According to this report he also predicted the "Anschluss". When Hitler invaded Austria without serious fears of interference from France and Great Britain, the Soviet Union predictably remained calm. Litvinov in a conversation with the United States Ambassador Davies and the British Ambassador Milston on March 14, observed wryly that he had predicted the "Anschluss" and that the

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32 J.T. Whitaker, We Cannot Escape History, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.207-208. - For a detailed account of the role of Soviet Russia before and during the Munich crisis, see B. Celovsky, Op.Cit., and H.K.G. Rönnefarth, Die Sudetenkrise in der Internationalen Politik, 2 Vols.

responsibility for it fell entirely upon the western powers.<sup>33</sup>

After the "Anschluss" the Kremlin possibly tried to prevent its isolation and proposed a common front with France and Great Britain against Hitler's expansionism. On March 17, Litvinov issued a press release in which he emphasized the fact that the Soviet Union during the last few years had tried with perseverance to save world peace within the framework of collective security, and that it had warned repeatedly against a passive attitude towards aggression. The "Anschluss" he added, proved that these warnings were not only correct but also in vain. The Soviet Union, and this was quite a concrete proposal, was prepared to discuss "within or without the League of Nations" any necessary steps towards the "collective preservation of peace".<sup>34</sup>

This statement was sent in the form of a diplomatic note through official channels to the Governments of Great

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<sup>33</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, Soviet Union, Washington, 1952, p.533 f. - Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 3rd Series, Vol. I, No.85 (subsequently quoted as DBFP). - J.E. Davies, Als USA - Botschafter in Moskau, Zurich, 1943, p.219.

<sup>34</sup> DBFP, I, No.90. - Dokumente und Materialien aus der Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges, Moskau, 1948-49, Vol. 1, No.7.

Britain, France, the United States, and Czechoslovakia. The proposal was not taken up in the western capitals.<sup>35</sup> Moscow's reaction was bitter. Litvinov in a conversation with Davies predicted Hitler's conquest of Europe, which would leave the Soviet Union untouched. He claimed that there was still time to stop Hitler, provided a change in British attitude. Davies was so much impressed by Litvinov's bitterness, that in a dispatch to Washington he spoke about the possibility of a German-Soviet alliance.<sup>36</sup>

In the following months, Litvinov tried to excuse the Soviet impotence in the current events which threatened Czechoslovakia by his usual proposals of a common anti-German front. In his Leningrad speech of June 23 he deplored the lack of willingness on the part of France and Great Britain to co-operate with Soviet Russia and attempted an analysis of the present status of German-Soviet relations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Chamberlain's statement in the House of Commons Hansard, Vol. 333, Col.1406. On March 20, Chamberlain wrote to his sister that he suspected the Russians of an intrigue which would involve the West in a war against Germany: "Our secret service doesn't spend all its time looking out of windows". K.G. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, London, Macmillan, 1946, p.347 f.

<sup>36</sup> J.E. Davies, Op.Cit., p. 229 f, 341.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Degras, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, Vol.III, p.282 f.

The German Ambassador, von der Schulenburg, reported to Berlin the contents of this speech in detail, and concluded : "The speech lacks remarkably in aggressiveness and attempts to leave all possibilities open. The attempt to find an objective attitude towards the policy of the Third Reich is remarkable".<sup>38</sup>

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38 ADAP, I, No.627.

B. From the Munich Agreement to  
March 1939

In the Munich crisis of September 1938 Western aversion towards a Western-Soviet front against Hitler became obvious to Moscow. Whatever the motives and sincerity of such an anti-German common front, in Soviet eyes it could hardly continue to play any substantial role. Upon Litvinov's return from Geneva to Moscow, there were undoubtedly discussions concerning the re-appraisal of the Soviet foreign policy. The German Chargé d'Affaires, von Toppelskirch, reported to Berlin from Moscow on October 3, 1938, about the apparent fiasco of Litvinov's policy and the probability of a new course of the Soviet external affairs.<sup>39</sup> He indicated the possibility of Litvinov's dismissal. Anxiety and uncertainty are said to have prevailed among Soviet leaders in the face of Litvinov's fruitless efforts during the Czechoslovak crisis. Moreover, it was felt in the German Embassy that a more positive attitude on the part of Soviet Russia toward Germany might appear, arising out of the consideration that France had lost much of her value as an ally and that a more aggressive attitude on the part of Japan might be expected.

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<sup>39</sup> ADAP, IV, No. 476.

In Berlin too the Munich Agreement led to a re-consideration of German-Soviet relations. The agonizing re-appraisal of the role the British played during the period of the Munich appeasement, with the almost immediate re-armament plans, were viewed by Hitler with distrust. In his view, this was some indication that the Western Powers considered the agreements only as a means of gaining time for the preparation of the inevitable clash of arms.<sup>40</sup> The new developments demanded in Hitler's opinion extreme caution lest the war on two fronts became a reality if the Soviet Union preferred to remain hostile. Thus the occupation of the remaining part of Czechoslovakia became also a strategic necessity. However, any further eastward movement of the German frontier could not leave the Soviet Union indifferent.

And while Hitler was still arranging for a variety of schemes that should provide the necessary pretext at the appropriate moment he was preparing a new aggression. The next 'final demand' in Hitler's series of claims was served

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<sup>40</sup> ADAP, IV, No.253.

on the Polish Ambassador on October 24, 1938, and was repeated and elaborated in the usual manner until the outbreak of war.<sup>41</sup> Hitler's creation of a 'Polish Problem' could not leave the Soviet Union unconcerned.

Shortly after Munich, Potjemkin, Litvinov's deputy, accused France of her weakness in the Czechoslovakian crisis and told Coulondre, then French Ambassador in Moscow:

"Mon pauvre ami, qu'avez-vous fait?. Pour nous, je n'aperçois plus d'autre issue qu'un quatrième partage de la Pologne".<sup>42</sup>

And on October 16, Litvinov himself told Coulondre:

"L'U.R.S.S. n'a désormais qu'à assister, à l'abri de ses frontières, à l'établissement de l'hégémonie allemande sur le Centre et le Sud-est de l'Europe. Et si d'aventure les puissances occidentales s'avisaient enfin de vouloir l'arrêter, elles devraient s'adresser à nous car, ajoute-t-il en me jetant un regard aigü, nous aurions notre mot à dire".<sup>43</sup>

The more serious problem facing the Soviets was that of working out an over-all policy to secure their interests in the post-Munich Europe. In the post-Munich

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<sup>41</sup> ADAP. V, No.81

<sup>42</sup> R. Coulondre, De Staline à Hitler, Paris, Hachette, 1950, p.165.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.171.

constellation, the Soviets could not afford to ignore a re-examination of their relations to Germany.

After Munich, the Soviet policy statements lack consistently any affirmation of solidarity towards those powers willing to oppose German aggression. According to Stalin the Second Imperialist War had in fact already begun.<sup>44</sup> The new attitude of the Soviet Union was expressed by Stalin and Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, and by others on the occasion of the November celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1938. Since the Democracies could not form any united front against the Fascist Powers, they concluded, the creation of a strong Red Army would be the supreme aim of the Soviets. As the maintenance of peace was no longer possible, Soviet Russia was not to be mortgaged with obligations in favour of capitalist states, but would rather look after her own safety. The failure of the Western Powers to follow the principles of Soviet policy was leading straight to war, and in Schulenburg's words, to the chaos which was desirable to further the World Revolution.<sup>45</sup> Schulenburg quite correctly indicated in his analytical report that

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<sup>44</sup> See the political report by von der Schulenburg of Nov 18, 1938, in ADAP, IV, No. 480.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,

it was now the Soviet's policy to avoid any conflict, to gain safety and time. Repeatedly he pointed out that Moscow was trying to remain uncommitted and that an underlying and continuous preparedness to arrive at an objective attitude toward the Third Reich was striking.

The easing of strained relations between the totalitarian powers was carefully arranged. Hitler's increasingly bitter references to the West were matched by a corresponding decrease of resentment in regard to Soviet Russia. In October 1938, Schulenburg and Litvinov agreed to keep the names and personalities of Hitler and Stalin out of mutual press polemics.<sup>46</sup> But the beginning of the year 1939 brought the decisive change. Hitler had a noticeably long conversation with the Soviet Ambassador at the reception of the diplomatic corps on January 2, 1939, and this fact was widely commented on in Moscow.<sup>47</sup> Previously, Hitler used to snub the diplomatic representatives of the Soviet Union.

The other area where a rapprochement could be effected inconspicuously and as a preparation for some more

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<sup>46</sup> E.H. Carr, German-Soviet Relations between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1951, p.125-126.

<sup>47</sup> M. Beloff, Op.Cit., II, p.217.

practical political decisions were the economic relations between Berlin and Moscow. These talks started late in 1938. Both Germany and the Soviet Union were eager to step up the production of war material in order to be able to face the allegedly inevitable war. The economies of the two countries were considered to be complementary, Russia could fill the gap in Germany's supply of raw material, especially petroleum, timber, non-ferrous ores and food stuffs, while Germany could supply Russia with manufactured goods of high quality.<sup>48</sup> For the German economists, it was essential that the Soviet Union could offer gold as payment.

In 1935 Hjalmar Schacht, German Minister of Finance, offered the Soviets a ten years' credit of 500 million RM. Many German economic experts felt uneasy when the Soviets presented their list of desired goods which included cruisers, submarines and active support of Soviet industry by such German key firms as Zeiss-Jena and I.G. Farben. The result of protracted negotiations was the signing of a trade and payments agreement on April 29, 1936, which on December 29, 1936, was extended to the end of 1937. Only on March 1, 1938, the Russians took up this agreement again which was extended on December 19, 1938, to

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<sup>48</sup> See ADAP, IV, Chap, VI.

include the year 1939.

The Germans took another step in the economic area. They suggested to go beyond a simple extension of the existing pact. A series of discussions were held between German and Russian economic negotiators in Berlin. The Soviet Government agreed in principle to the resumption of credit negotiations as suggested by Schulenburg by the end of October.<sup>49</sup> The willingness to negotiate was conveyed to Emil Wiehl, the Director of the Economic Policy-Department of the German Foreign Office, on January 11, 1939, by Alexey Merekalov, the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin. Wiehl made a number of requests, the fulfillment of which formed the condition for the granting of credit to the Soviets. He gave the Russian a list of raw materials to be delivered by the Soviet Union. The Russians insisted that the talks should be conducted in Moscow in order to display the desire of both sides to arrive at an improvement and a reactivation of German-Soviet economic relations.<sup>50</sup>

Because of the urgent need for Russian raw materials, Ribbentrop agreed to send Karl Schnurre, Head of the East European Department of the Economic Policy Section of the

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<sup>49</sup> ADAP, IV, No. 478.

<sup>50</sup> For the economic negotiations, see ADAP, IV, Chapter VI.

German Foreign Ministry, to Moscow for about ten days. At the end of his conversation with Wiehl, the Soviet Ambassador gave assurance that he regarded the sending of Schnurre as a good omen for the progress of negotiations.<sup>51</sup>

An unexpected difficulty arose which showed that it was not easy for the Germans and Russians to overcome distrust. The Wilhelmstrasse was by no means unanimous in its attitude toward a reorientation of German-Soviet relations. Ribbentrop wanted to avoid an obvious demonstration of good relations with the Soviets which might affect his future negotiations with Poland. On January 5, 1939, Hitler made his proposals on the question of Danzig and the Polish Corridor to Joseph Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister. Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw was supposed to secure Polish acceptance of Hitler's proposals and to achieve Polish adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact. Polish national feeling was to be compensated for the loss of Danzig by a firm anti-Soviet combination with Germany.<sup>52</sup>

Thus at the very time when Hermann Göring and the Ministry of Economics were pressing for closer economic collaboration with the Soviets, Ribbentrop was preparing for a

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<sup>51</sup> ADAP, IV, No.485.

<sup>52</sup> G. Craig and F. Gilbert, Op.Cit., p.497-498.

state visit to Warsaw to crown his anti-Soviet Polish-German combination. To avoid any possible Polish suspicion, Schnurre was to proceed together with Ribbentrop to Warsaw for economic talks and to leave for Moscow only after Ribbentrop's visit.

Ribbentrop's reception in Warsaw was extremely cool. Before he started serious talks with the Poles, the "Daily Mail" and the French Press published exaggerated statements concerning Schnurre's proposed visit to Moscow to develop a comprehensive plan for Russo-German economic collaboration. Ribbentrop exploded :

"At the moment when I want to achieve basic collaboration between Germany and Poland against the Soviet Union, they knife me in the back with this scandalous, disruptive report. Schnurre should return to Berlin at once".<sup>53</sup>

The German Embassy in Moscow was instructed to conduct the negotiations with Soviet Commissar for Foreign Trade Anastas Mikoyan, whom Schulenburg called a very important Soviet personality. Schulenburg reported that the Soviet Press did not publish a single word about the affair and that in his opinion certain circles in the West and in Poland had an interest in the maintenance of German-Soviet antagonism.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> G. Craig and F. Gilbert, Op.Cit., p.498.

<sup>54</sup> ADAP, IV, No.487.

The effect of the failure of the negotiations conducted in Moscow between February 10 and March 8, 1939 was far reaching in as much as it clearly illuminated the Soviet-German relations at this time. The Russians, not without reason, felt that the Germans had not been sincere, for Hitler's policy was still vacillating. Until March 1939 his principal aim was to solve the problem of Danzig and the Corridor in agreement with the Poles. When Poland refused to follow Hitler's repeated invitations to join a crusade against the Bolsheviks and to take a share of the Soviet Ukraine, Hitler and von Ribbentrop may have begun to change their plans of expansion. If Poland did not wish to sacrifice Danzig and take a slice of the Ukraine at Russia's expense, Germany might just as well come to terms with the Soviets at Poland's expense. However, such a train of thought developed rather slowly and it is difficult to determine the precise moment at which Hitler and Stalin made up their minds to work towards a full understanding. Both sides had to overcome mutual distrust, suspicions and enormous doubts. This great caution and restraint explains also the difficulty of the economic negotiations. Mikoyan and Schnurre remained in contact over a credit and trade agreement which was ultimately signed on August 19, 1939. It was to be the signal for the non-aggression pact.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM MARCH TO JUNE 1939

The month of March 1939 brought decisive developments in the German-Soviet rapprochement. For Moscow the time of passive observation was over. A war between Germany and Poland, whose outcome could not be doubted, would make the radically anti-Bolshevik Germany a neighbour of the Soviet Union. The threat to Soviet Russia's security would take gigantic dimensions. If, to consider the other possibility, Warsaw and Berlin should come to an agreement then the anti-Soviet tendencies of such a combination would also give much cause to anxiety. Two choices were open to Stalin, either to come to an agreement with Hitler or to conclude a pact with the West.

There can be no doubt that the first step toward a basic change in the German-Soviet relations was taken by the Soviet Union. The French, British and American press reported from time to time about German plans to seize the Ukraine and on the other hand exaggerated the anti-Nazi moves of the Communist parties in Western Europe. Suddenly a voice of authority declared publicly that these were malicious rumours spread by Western agents who wished to stir up trouble between Germany and Soviet Russia. It was Stalin himself who acquitted Germany of such base designs expressing

his belief that the German plans regarding the Ukraine belonged to the past. He made this statement in a lengthy speech on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union to the XVIIIth Congress of the Bolshevik Party on March 10, 1939.<sup>55</sup> This speech was of the utmost importance; and the events of the next few months might have given less cause for surprise if more attention had been paid, outside the Soviet Union, to what he had to say on the subject of foreign affairs.

The bourgeois politicians know that the first imperialist war led to the victory of the (Communist) revolution in one of the largest countries. They are afraid that the second imperialist war may also lead to the victory of the revolution in one or several countries.

But the chief reason is that the majority of the non-aggressive countries, particularly England and France, have rejected the policy of collective security, and have taken up a position of non-intervention, a position of "neutrality". The policy of non-intervention reveals an eagerness, a desire, not to hinder the aggressors' nefarious work: not to hinder Japan, say, from embroiling herself in a war with China, or, better still, with the Soviet Union; not to hinder Germany, say from getting bogged down in European affairs, from embroiling herself in a war with the Soviet Union; to allow them to weaken and exhaust one another; and then when they have become weak enough, to appear on the scene with fresh strength, to appear of course "in the interest of peace", and to dictate conditions to the enfeebled belligerents...

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<sup>55</sup> The Text of Stalin's speech in J. Degras. Op.Cit., III, p.318-319. A Rossi gives a good analysis; A Rossi, The Russo-German Alliance, August 1939-June 1941, London, Chapman and Hall, 1950, p.7. For German reaction see von Schulenburg's report to Berlin in ADAP, VI, No.1.

Or take Germany, for instance. They let her have Austria, the Sudeten region, they abandoned Czechoslovakia to her fate, thereby violating all their obligations, and then began to lie vociferously in the press about the weakness of the Russian army and riots in the Soviet Union, egging the Germans on to march further east, promising them easy pickings and prompting them: "Just start war on the Bolsheviks and everything will be all right". It must be admitted that this too looks very much like urging on and encouraging the aggressor.<sup>56</sup>

Stalin then warned Great Britain and France that now they would have to bid very high for Soviet support, and give concrete pledges of their trustworthiness. Simultaneously he extended an invitation to Germany with whom "no visible grounds of conflict" existed.

Certain European and American politicians lost patience waiting for the (German) march on the Soviet Ukraine. One might think that the districts of Czechoslovakia were yielded to the Germans as a price of an understanding to launch war on the Soviet Union, but that now the Germans are refusing to meet their bills and they are sending them to Hades.<sup>57</sup>

Stalin concluded his outline of Soviet foreign policy by laying down the tasks for the party. This conclusion contained two particularly important points : that the Soviet Union would "continue the policy of peace and strengthening business relations with all countries", and that Russia

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<sup>56</sup> Degras, Op.Cit., p.318-319.

<sup>57</sup> Degras, Op.Cit., p.320.

should be cautious and not be drawn into conflicts of war-mongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chest-nuts out of the fire for them.<sup>58</sup> Finally, he stated that there were no "visible grounds" for conflict with Germany and she, too, might obtain improved relations with the Soviet Union. Stalin's speech did as yet not announce any positive decision of Soviet policy, it kept all options open and hinted more plainly than before that they were open.

This speech has to be interpreted as a direct offer to Hitler to enter into concrete talks.<sup>59</sup> And in fact, it was taken up in Berlin as such. When five months later, the German-Soviet Agreement was signed, both parties referred to Stalin's speech as being the turning point from which the road led directly to the Non-Aggression Pact.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.322.

<sup>59</sup> Both A. Rossi and G.L. Weinberg, while disagreeing in detail about the significance of Stalin's speech, conclude that this was the decisive step towards concrete negotiations. G.L. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941, Leiden, Brill, 1954, p.12. A Rossi, Op.Cit., p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Ribbentrop signing the Pact on August 23, 1939, confirmed that Hitler had interpreted the speech as an offer. Stalin replied "That was precisely my intention". - Molotov at the occasion of the ratification of the Pact by the Supreme Soviet on August 31, 1939, declared "We see now that Comrade Stalin's declaration has on the whole been understood in Germany and that the Germans drew practical deductions from it". See also Ribbentrop's testimony at the Nuremberg Trial, ADAP, VII, No.213. - Degras, Op.Cit., III, p. 366 f. - A. Rossi, Op.Cit., p. 9.

Five days after Stalin's speech, on March 15, 1939, Hitler occupied Prague and set off a series of extremely important developments. The Western Governments now came to the conclusion that no promises of Hitler could be trusted and no further German aggression tolerated. They immediately sent to Berlin exceedingly vigorous protests.<sup>61</sup> And only three days later the Soviet Union handed to the German Ambassador in Moscow a strongly worded note, which was published in "Mirovoe Khoziaistvo", protesting against the German action and refusing to recognize the incorporation of the Czech lands in the Reich.<sup>62</sup> The Soviet Government stated that,

in order to avoid conveying a false impression of indifference, they do not consider it possible to pass over in silence the German notification regarding the Czecho-Slovak affair. The Soviet Government cannot recognize the constitutional alterations in Czecho-Slovakia as legal, since they were carried out without consulting the people.

It is quite likely that such an obvious breach of an international agreement by Hitler gave Stalin some material to ponder. In view of the subsequent developments of German-Soviet talks, however, one has to conclude that Hitler's

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61 ADAP, VI, No.9,16,19,20.

62 ADAP, VI, No.43.

move was taken in Moscow realistically as a fait accompli, and that the Soviet protest was a mere diplomatic routine.

The Soviet note contained a discussion on international ethics, which deserves to be quoted as an example of Soviet hypocrisy:

The principle of national self-determination, not infrequently referred to by the German Government, presupposes the free expression of the will of the people, which cannot be replaced by the signatures of one or two individuals. In the present case there was no expression of the will of the Czech people in the form of a plebiscite.

In the opinion of the Soviet Government, the actions of the German Government, far from eliminating any danger to the general peace, have on the contrary created and enhanced such danger, disturbing political stability in Central Europe, enlarged the elements contributing to the state of alarm already created in Europe, and dealt a fresh blow to the feeling of security of the nations.

Some tentative diplomatic exchanges followed between the Soviet and the British Governments.<sup>63</sup> However, a Soviet proposal for an immediate military conference of six anti-Fascist Powers, namely Britain, France, Poland, Roumania, Turkey and Russia, was rejected by Great Britain

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<sup>63</sup> For the British-Soviet negotiations in Spring and Summer 1939, see the analysis by Ernst Deuerlein "Die gescheiterte anti-Hitler Koalition", Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau, 1959, 9 (11), p.634-650.

as being premature.<sup>64</sup> Instead the British Government proposed a pact between Great Britain, France, Soviet Russia, and Poland for mutual consultation in the event of an act of aggression against European peace and security. This plan was accepted by Moscow, but rejected by Poland.<sup>65</sup> Poland did not hide her antagonism, and to her any form of Russian aid or guarantee was suspect. Instead of the Four-Power declaration, Poland accepted a British assurance of support for her independence given by Chamberlain in the House of Commons on March 31. The British guarantee to Poland was preceded by a rejection on Poland's part of German demands concerning Danzig and the Corridor and of suggestions for Polish collaboration against the Soviet Union. Moscow was critical about the British guarantee and commented in an unfriendly manner the British position taken in the Czechoslovakian crisis. On April 6, while German pressure on Poland was being intensified, a reciprocal Anglo-Polish defensive arrangement was announced from London.<sup>66</sup> This agreement was concluded during a visit

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<sup>64</sup> DBFP, IV, No.421,433 - A strong criticism of this British attitude is expressed by G.L. Willard "Les Responsabilités des dirigeants anglais en 1939" La Pensée, 1955 (60) p.13-25.

<sup>65</sup> M. Beloff, Op.Cit., p.230-231.

<sup>66</sup> For the negotiations leading to the British guarantee to Poland see DBFP, Vol. IV, Chap, VI. For German reaction see ADAP, VI, No.136, 137.

to London by Beck, Poland's Foreign Minister, who showed his usual reluctance to have any dealings with the Soviet Union. A slight détente in the German-Polish tension followed due to Hitler's reluctance to launch a war in which Germany would have to fight on two fronts. The conditions for a German approach to the Soviet Union were now plainly in existence.

An important factor in the development of German-Soviet talks in 1939 was the German-Japanese relationship.<sup>67</sup> The foreign policy of the Third Reich since 1935 has been dominated by efforts to keep in check the threats of Communism as represented by the Comintern. For this purpose Hitler found allies in Italy and Japan with whom he concluded on November 25, 1936, the anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>68</sup> The purpose of this pact was the

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<sup>67</sup> The important role of Japan in the German-Soviet negotiations was analysed for the first time in P.W. Fabry, Der Hitler-Stalin-Pact, 1939-1941, Darmstadt, Fundus, 1962, p.14-17. - An extensive documentation concerning the German-Japanese negotiations are found in ADAP, VI, and VII. - For a good account of the role of Ribbentrop in pressing for the military triangle Berlin-Rome-Tokyo, see F.L. Huillier, "Joachim von Ribbentrop" Revue d'Histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale, 1956, 6 (22) p. 1-9.

<sup>68</sup> For the text of the Pact and the secret protocol see H. Rönnefarth, Konferenzen und Verträge, II, Bielefeld, Ploetz, 1953, p.341-343.

exchange of information concerning the activities of the Communist International and the preparation of common preventive measures. The pact contains no mention of an action against the Soviet Union; it was confined to ideological questions and to the elimination of internal operations of the Comintern.

In the course of time it became obvious that Japanese military circles hoped to transform the Anti-Comintern Pact into a military alliance against the Soviet Union. The creation of Manchukuo in 1932 and the China war affected directly Russian spheres of interests in the Far East. In July 1938 there was a series of clashes between the Soviet and Japanese armed forces near the Munchurian border.<sup>69</sup>

Naturally the Japanese militarists took great interest in the anti-Soviet policy of the Third Reich and hoped that the Germans would assist them by forcing the Soviets to retain large armies in Europe. The signatories of this pact expected that other nations would join it and a tight circle around Soviet Russia might ensue.

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<sup>69</sup> ADAP, VI, No. 688.

On January 2, 1938, Ribbentrop outlined to Hitler his concept of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo triangle as a basis for his external policy, which had to be exploited much more effectively in the future.<sup>70</sup> At this early point, Ribbentrop recognized the advantages of a military alliance between the three ideological partners and his concept has been proven right in Hitler's eyes, during the coming Czechoslovakian crisis. In summer 1938, Hitler, committed to his plan of establishing a German hegemony in Europe seized Ribbentrop's idea as a basis for a diversion of British forces to the Far East.

In October 1938 Ribbentrop proposed to the Japanese military attaché in Berlin, Oshima, such a military pact.<sup>71</sup> The Japanese Government, however, considering its costly engagement in China, the immediate dangerous neighbourhood of Soviet Russia, and its most cherished plan of pushing the United States out of the Pacific area, was not willing to add to its political enemies Great Britain.<sup>72</sup>

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70 P.W. Fabry, Op.Cit., p.15.

71 ADAP, I, No.607, The documents dealing with Ribbentrop's proposal were not found in the German documentation. Their content was, however, reconstructed from other sources by the editors of ADAP. See ADAP, VI, p.68-69. Fabry, Op.Cit., p.16, mistakingly places Ribbentrop's proposals in July, 1938.

72 ADAP, VI, No.306, 326, 400, 457, 538, 732.

The Japanese reluctance to be drawn into the German venture had a significant influence on the German-Soviet negotiations in Spring 1939. Hitler, now forced to count with the undispersed British forces had to arrange for a concentration of his own forces facing the Western Powers. Moscow, on the other hand, counting with the possibility of a Japanese attack in the Far East could face it only if her hands in Europe were free. These conditions explain why the Soviets asked the Germans during the early stages of their negotiations to assist them in restoring normal relations with Japan. It explains even more Stalin's indifference toward the normalization of his relations with Japan at the very moment when the German Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed.

That after Stalin's overture, Hitler, too, began to consider Russia's place in the scheme to achieve his 'New Order' became soon more apparent. On March 21 Ribbentrop had a conversation with the Polish Ambassador Lipski which made it definitely clear that Poland would reject any German suggestions of a common cause in East European affairs.<sup>73</sup> By the end of March Hitler disclosed his line of thinking when he asked General Brauchitsch what he thought about a state visit of the German

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<sup>73</sup> For a clever analysis of German-Polish negotiations, see W. Hofer, Die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkrieges, Stuttgart, 1954, Fischer.

Chancellor in Moscow.<sup>74</sup> Here then can be found the definite moment in which Hitler began to consider seriously a revision of German-Soviet relations.

Furthermore, the British guarantee, given to Poland on March 31, had a decisive effect on the relations between Berlin and Moscow. Both Hitler and Stalin knew that war might be inevitable. Hitler's own aim was now to isolate Poland and to crush her before Britain and France could assist her. He came to the conclusion that a settlement of the German-Polish question would have to take Soviet interests into account. At all costs he had to separate Poland and her allies from Russia. Since the beginning of April 1939 a new plan began to mature in Hitler's mind, namely, 'to buy out' Russia's interest in the fate of Poland by making her 'buy herself in' as an accomplice.

A further indication of a new course followed immediately. On April 1, 1939, Hitler spoke in Wilhelms-haven at the launching of the battleship "Tirpitz". There were no diatribes against the Soviets, but he said that Germany would not remain passive toward the British policy of encirclement.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Fabry, Op.Cit., p.18-19.

<sup>75</sup> ADAP. VI, No.156.

Moscow also contributed to the changing political climate. On April 4 "Pravda" the voice of Stalin, accused the Democracies of encouraging Germany to attack the Ukraine. On the same day "Tass" announced that the Soviet Union had no intentions to supply Poland with war material if the latter should become involved in a conflict.<sup>76</sup> The German Counsellor in Moscow commented : "The distrust of the Kremlin toward the policy of England and France shows itself in the aim not to become a trump in the game of the others".<sup>77</sup>

The first formal step toward a Soviet - German rapprochement came in the form of an interview of the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin, Alexei Merekalov, with the German State-Secretary, von Weizsäcker, on April 17, 1939.<sup>78</sup> If there was any doubt on the German side from what direction the wind was blowing in Moscow, such doubts were dispelled through this almost famous conversation. It was for the first time since Merekalov had presented his credentials to Hitler on July 13, 1938, that he felt the need to ask

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76 ADAP, VI, No.161.

77 ADAP, VI, No.163.

78 ADAP, VI, No.215,217.

for an interview with Weizsäcker. He dwelt at length on a subject which was of particular interest to him : namely, the fulfillment of certain contracts of war material by the Czech Skoda Works which were now under German control.<sup>79</sup> Weizsäcker's written notes on this conversation are quite elucidative:

Although the items concerned are obviously rather insignificant, the Ambassador regarded the fulfillment of the contracts as a test, to determine whether, in accordance with a recent statement by Director Wiehl to him, we were really willing to cultivate and expand our economic relations with Russia.<sup>80</sup>

Merekalov then led the conversation to political matters, and after some beating about the bush, bluntly asked Weizsäcker what he thought of German-Russian relations. Weizsäcker cautiously observed that the Russian press was not fully participating in the anti-German tone of the American and some of the English papers, and hinted at a

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<sup>79</sup> For the economic negotiations between Moscow and Berlin, see the memoirs of the former German Economic expert at the Moscow Embassy, G. Hilger. G. Hilger and A.G. Meyer, The Incompatible Allies, New York, Macmillan, 1953. For criticism of this book see K.D. Erdmann "Zur Geschichte der Deutsch - Sowjetischen Beziehungen vom Ersten zum Zweiten Weltkrieg", Zeitschrift für Ostforschung, 1960, 9 (1), p.107-114.

<sup>80</sup> ADAP VI, No.215; see also R.J. Sontag and J.S. Beddie, eds., Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941, New York, Didier, 1948, p.1.

similar restraint in the German press in regard to Russia.

Thus encouraged, Merekalov made the following statement:

Russian policy had always moved in a straight line. Ideological differences of opinion had hardly influenced the Russo-Italian relationship, and they did not have to prove a stumbling block with regard to Germany either. Soviet Russia had not exploited the present friction between Germany and the Western democracies against Germany, nor did she desire to do so. There exists for Russia no reason why she should not live with Germany on a normal footing. And from normal, the relations might become better and better.<sup>81</sup>

The moment was obviously a crucial one. Merekalov's confidential approach was followed by Hitler's and Stalin's public gestures. In a Reichstag speech of April 28, 1939, Hitler attacked President Roosevelt personally and ridiculed his appeal of April 15 through which he had invited Hitler and Mussolini to observe a ten-year truce and asked them to pledge themselves not to attack thirty-one nations of which he gave a list. He repudiated the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935, saying it had lost its foundation because of the British policy of encirclement against Germany. The German-Polish Agreement of 1934, which still had five years to run, he declared to be null and void because of Poland's rejection

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81 ADAP, VI, No.215.

of his proposals and her menacing attitude toward Germany.<sup>82</sup> Thus Hitler clearly laid down the lines of the coming conflict. Again his speech contained no word of abuse of Bolshevism or Soviet Russia.

Apparently the German receptive attitude was not enough for Stalin and he decided to take a step which would not be overlooked by the German government. On May 3, 1939, Litvinov resigned the office of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and was succeeded by Molotov.<sup>83</sup> Litvinov's retirement was a very important step in the German-Soviet rapprochement, if only because he was a Jew, was married to an English wife, and had come to symbolize the collective security against German aggression. Foreign opinion was almost unanimous in regarding the resignation as a severe

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<sup>82</sup> R. de Roussy de Sales, Adolf Hitler, My New Order, New York, Regnal and Hitchcock, 1941, p.629-679.

<sup>83</sup> ADAP, VI, No.325. - Litvinov's feelings about his dismissal are recorded in his Journal. "Molotov believes that Hitler can be played up as easily as ... How naive ... Klim Voroshilov said the appointment of Molotov was possible ... It would be a catastrophe ... He is completely lacking in suppleness, has little intelligence, and is conceited ... It's all over ... I have been sacked like a maid caught stealing ... without as much as a day's notice ... I have been instructed to go quietly ... without taking leave from my collaborators and the staff ... Like a thief in the night ... (....) Some day history will pass its judgment." M. Litvinov, Op.Cit., p.261-263.

blow to the chances of an agreement between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers.

Hitler and his associates were greatly impressed by Litvinov's dismissal. On May 6 Hitler asked to be briefed on the political, military, and economic position of the Soviet Union.<sup>84</sup> On the same day Ribbentrop talked to the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, about the need and possibilities for a détente in German-Soviet relations.<sup>85</sup> General Karl Heinz Bodenschatz, Göring's liaison officer to Hitler, at Göring's orders leaked the possibility of a German-Soviet rapprochement to the French Embassy in Berlin on May 7, and to the Polish Embassy on May 27.<sup>86</sup> All sorts of rumours about German-Soviet negotiations grew out of this and probably this inspired leak was an attempt to blackmail Poland into yielding to German demands.

Two days after Litvinov's dismissal Hitler summoned A. Hilger, German Councillor of Embassy, from Moscow to the Obersalzberg and received him there on May 10 in the presence

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<sup>84</sup> E. Kordt, Wahn und Wirklichkeit, p.158. - B.P. Kleist, Zwischen Hitler und Stalin, 1939-1945, Bonn, Athenäum, 1950, p.37-38.

<sup>85</sup> G. Ciano, Ciano's Diplomatic Papers, ed. M. Muggeridge, London, Odhams Press, 1948, p.286.

<sup>86</sup> Coulondre, Op.Cit., p.396-99; L.B. Namier, Europe in Decay, A Study in Disintegration, 1936-1940, London, Macmillan, 1950, p.263.

Ribbentrop, Keitel and Schnurre. Hitler asked for the reasons for Litvinov's dismissal and wanted to know whether Stalin was prepared to come to an agreement with Germany. Hilger also had to report on the strength of the Soviet Union, and Hitler was apparently deeply impressed. Finally, Hitler, gave orders to Hilger to inform the Russians that Germany was ready to send Schnurre to Moscow for a re-opening of economic negotiations.<sup>87</sup>

In the resignation of Litvinov one may see a friendly gesture toward Germany, although Molotov cannot be considered as an advocate of a pro-German course. The choice of Molotov indicated a swing away from the West toward a neutral bargaining position, rather than a pro-German one. Decisive for the following attitude of the Soviets was the German reaction to Litvinov's dismissal. The documents available show that Berlin understood the significance of Stalin's move. Admiral E. Raeder told the Nuremberg International Court that "Litvinov's resignation as foreign minister struck Hitler like a cannon-ball".<sup>88</sup> And Hitler

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<sup>87</sup> Hilger-Meyer, Op.Cit., p.281.

<sup>88</sup> A.Rossi, Op.Cit., p.15-16.

himself told his generals just before the Polish campaign that "the replacing of Litvinov was decisive". In a letter written to Mussolini on August 25 Hitler declared that the departure of Litvinov demonstrated to him the Kremlin's readiness to arrive at a reorientation of its relations with Germany.<sup>89</sup>

Although Hitler had by now decided upon war against Poland he was reluctant to launch an armed conflict as long as Soviet Russia's attitude had not been entirely clarified in favour of Germany. Thus the Polish problem created the conditions for a German approach to the Soviet Union.

The French Ambassador to Berlin, Coulondre, summarized Hitler's thoughts quite accurately in his report of May 7 to Paris.

The Fuehrer is determined to secure the return of Danzig to Germany, as well as the reunion of East Prussia to the Reich.

The Fuehrer is patient and cautious, and will not tackle the question in a direct way, for he knows that in the future France and Britain would not give way, and that the coalition which he would

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89 R.J. Sontag and J.S. Beddie, Op.Cit., p.81.

have to confront would be too strong. He will go on manoeuvring until his time comes.

The Fuehrer will come to an understanding to this effect with Russia. The day will come when he attains his aims by these means, without the Allies having any reason, or even any intention to intervene. It may be that we shall witness a fourth partition of Poland. He may hope to draw advantage from a rapprochement with the U.S.S.R. by arriving at a more or less tacit agreement with Russia which would assure him of the benevolent neutrality of that country in the event of conflict, perhaps even of her complicity in a partition of Poland. 90

After Litvinov's dismissal and the very favourable reaction in Berlin Stalin continued his soundings. In an interview between Schnurre and Soviet Counsellor in Berlin, Astakhov, held on May 5, Germany granted the Soviet request for the fulfillment of certain armament contracts at the Czech Skoda Works.<sup>91</sup> Astakhov expressed his gratification at this German concession and stressed the fact that for the Soviet Government the material side of the question was not of as great importance as the question of principle. He also expressed the Soviet's desire to resume trade negotiations which had been broken off in February.

Stalin's efforts continued. Again on May 9 Astakhov visited the German Foreign Office, this time accom-

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90 Ministère des Affaires étrangères, The French Yellow Book, London, Hutchinson, p.132-134.

91 ADAP, VI, No.332.

panied by the Tass representative Filipoff.<sup>92</sup> He expressed the Soviet's satisfaction as to the attitude of the German press and hinted that there was room left for further improvement of German-Soviet relations. And again on May 17 Astakhov called on Schnurre to talk about the legal status of the Soviet Trade Mission in Prague.<sup>93</sup> In his answer Schnurre indicated the German willingness to concessions. But then the real anxiety of the Soviet diplomat became apparent. He wanted to know whether the restraint of the German press was only a tactical manoeuvre. And in conclusion, Astakhov came to the core of his visit. Schnurre's notes about this crucial point read as follows :

that there were no conflicts in foreign policy between Germany and the Soviet Union, and that therefore there was no reason for any enmity between the two countries. It was true that in the Soviet Union there was a distinct feeling of being menaced by Germany. It would undoubtedly be possible to eliminate this feeling of being menaced and the distrust in Moscow. During this conversation he also mentioned the Treaty of Rapallo. In reply to my incidental question he commented on the Anglo-Soviet negotiations to the effect that, as they stood at the moment, the result desired by Britain would hardly materialize.<sup>94</sup>

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92 ADAP, VI, No.351.

93 ADAP, VI, No.406.

94 Ibid.

An analysis of the Astakhov-Schnurre conversations reveals their importance. Stalin was sounding out the German intentions. Discussions on this diplomatic level were not binding, a diplomatic defeat was excluded and future decisive action remained unimpaired. But for Germany the time had now arrived to follow up the Soviet suggestions. The time now came to secure certainty from the highest Soviet sources. On May 20, 1939, Ambassador von der Schulenburg visited the new Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Molotov, in the Kremlin. He had received instructions from Ribbentrop himself and was to raise only the question of resuming economic negotiations while remaining reticent about all else. Schulenburg began the conversation by asking that Dr. Schnurre might be sent to Moscow to discuss with Trade Commissar Mikoyan the removal of all obstacles that so far had prevented the conclusion of a trade agreement. Molotov replied that the Soviet Government had the impression that the Germans had only played at negotiations for political reasons. He explained that the Soviet Government could only agree to a resumption of the trade negotiations if the necessary "political basis" for them had been constructed. His determined efforts to

bring Molotov to a more precise description of those political basis were in vain. All Molotov had to say on this point was that both governments would have to think about them.<sup>95</sup> The first reaction in Germany was one of wait and see. Weizsäcker told Schulenburg "we must now sit tight (ganz stillhalten) and see if the Russians will speak more openly".<sup>96</sup> Both Ribbentrop and Schulenburg doubted the sincerity of the Soviets and feared an attempt at extortion, which was also directed against the Western Democracies.

The Soviets, however, had other means to force the Germans to make a new move in this waiting game. Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that an understanding with Russia had been reached on most important points and that an agreement would probably be signed soon.<sup>97</sup> This move brought the desired result. About May 25, Ribbentrop sent a telegram of instructions to Ambassador Schulenburg in Moscow.

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95 Sontag-Beddie, Op.Cit., p.5-7.

96 ADAP, VI, No.424.

97 V.M. Toynbee and A. Toynbee, eds., The Eve of War 1939, London, Oxford, University Press, 1958, p.448. - For the Polish attitude toward Soviet guarantees, see V.A. Yakhontoff, USSR Foreign Policy, New York, McGann, 1945, p.201. For the difficulties in the negotiations between the democracies and the Soviets, see Degras, III, Op.Cit., p.332-341, and M. Beloff, Op.Cit., p.249.

In this document Ribbentrop advised :

Since the latest reports indicate that the Anglo-Russian negotiations may shortly lead to a positive result, it seems appropriate that in further conversations with the Russians we should emerge from our reserve more markedly than has been contemplated hitherto.

I therefore request you to call on Molotov as soon as possible ... Molotov made the intensifying of economic relations dependent on a clarification of political relations between Germany and Soviet Russia. The German Government have no hesitation whatever in submitting their views on Russo-German relations quite frankly to the Soviet Government.

Our differences with Poland are well known. We take the view that the problem of Danzig and the Corridor will have to be solved sometime; for our part we are not considering forcing a solution by means of war. If, however, against our wishes, it should come to hostilities with Poland, we are firmly convinced that even this need not in any way lead to a clash of interest with Soviet Russia. We can, even today, go so far as to say that when settling the German-Polish question - in whatever way this is done - we would take Russian interests into account as far as possible ...

When the real balance of forces and interests are soberly weighed up, we are unable to see what could really induce Soviet Russia to play an active part in the game of the British policy of encirclement. From the reports available it seems to us that Moscow also realizes that this would mean Soviet Russia undertaking a one-sided liability without any really valuable British quid pro quo. We also take the view that Britain is by no means in a position to offer Soviet Russia a really valuable quid pro quo, no matter how the treaties may be formulated.

All in all, for Russia to join Britain against Germany would only be understandable if the Soviet Government were afraid of aggressive intentions on the part of Germany against Russia. Negotiations on economic questions etc., and finally also the official avowal of a return to normal in political relations, would furnish the opportunity for a practical test.<sup>98</sup>

This document reveals that Germans hoped to prevent an Anglo-Soviet agreement and to lessen Soviet-German tensions. The reference to consider Soviet interests in the Polish question seems to contain the germ of a far bigger idea - the fourth partition of Poland.

The Soviets also seem to have been re-examining the possible alternatives in the last week of May. Perhaps the Soviet Government wanted to stretch out the negotiations with the Western Powers and to know what the German side could offer them. On May 31, 1939, Molotov made a remarkable speech to the Supreme Soviet from which several important conclusions could be drawn : Molotov accused the democratic countries of having turned their back on the policy of collective security.<sup>99</sup> He acknowledged a certain change of mind in London and Paris, but he questioned its sincerity. He

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<sup>98</sup> ADAP, VI, No.441. See also Weizsäcker's memorandum to Ribbentrop of May 25 in ADAP, VI, No.437.

<sup>99</sup> J. Degras, Op.Cit., III, p.332-340.

reminded his listeners of the principle enunciated by Stalin on March 10 that "we must be cautious and not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them". While conducting negotiations with England and France he said "we do not by any means think it necessary to renounce business dealings with countries like Germany and Italy". Judging by certain signs, it is not impossible that trade negotiations which broke down in January will be resumed. The period of soundings and feelers ended at this time. At the end of May, both Germany and Soviet Russia were ready to enter concrete negotiations.

The progress in these negotiations was typically slow. As yet neither the Germans nor the Soviets were willing to commit themselves with haste. The economic negotiations which began in June represented a first and exploratory stage in which Germany and the Soviet Union attempted to discover, whether the other country was really seriously inclined toward a rapprochement. During June and July most of the initiative was on the German side. The Russians took every advantage of the fact that they were being wooed by both the Western Powers and the Reich and showed a careful

sometimes even frigid reserve. To both sides, to be sure, they gave occasional encouragement. On June 14, Astakhov called on Draganov, the Bulgarian Minister in Berlin and outlined to him, presumably for transmission to the German Government, the three possible courses which the Soviet Government had under consideration :

... the conclusion of the pact with England and France; a further dilatory treatment of the pact negotiations, and a rapprochement with Germany. In so far as the choice lay with Russia this last possibility, with which ideological considerations would not have to become involved, was closest to her desires.

Referring to "Mein Kampf" Astakhov added, that, if Germany would declare that she would not attack the Soviet Union, or better still, conclude a non-aggression pact with her, the Soviet Union will probably refrain from concluding a treaty with England. In addition there were other points, for instance, that the Soviet Union did not recognize the Rumanian possession of Bessarabia.<sup>100</sup>

The Bulgarian Minister gave an account of this conversation to Woermann, the head of the Political Section of the German Foreign Minister, on the following day.<sup>101</sup> This was the first time that a pact of non-aggression had been

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100 A. Rossi, Op.Cit., p.18.

101 Sontag - Beddie, Op.Cit., p.20-21.

mentioned and it was the Russians who mentioned it. Meanwhile Hilger met Mikoyan in Moscow to discuss a trade agreement on the basis of the Soviet proposals of February 1939. No real progress was made because of Russian vacillations. Mikoyan again raised the issue of political basis and asked for the immediate dispatch of Schnurre to Moscow.<sup>102</sup> Thereupon Weizsäcker declared by a telegram of June 12 that the German Government were prepared to send Dr. Schnurre to Moscow with full power to negotiate on expanding and strengthening economic relations between the Reich and the Soviet Union.<sup>103</sup>

On June 16, Ribbentrop told M. Shiratori, the Japanese Ambassador in Rome, that Germany intended to sign a pact of non-aggression with the U.S.S.R. A few days later Count Ciano revealed to the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Rome Germany's first concrete proposals based on three main points:

1) Germany would exercise influence on Japan for the purpose of an improvement of her relations with the Soviet Union and the elimination of the boundary disputes.

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102 ADAP, VI, No.491-543.

103 ADAP, VI, No.514.

2) Further, the possibility was envisaged of concluding a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and making a joint guarantee of the Baltic States.

3) Germany was prepared to make an economic treaty with the Soviet Union on a broad basis.<sup>104</sup>

These proposals reached Stalin.<sup>105</sup>

According to point 1 Germany desired to play the role of a 'honest broker' in order to remove one of the main obstacles which rendered a rapprochement difficult. This intention was fulfilled much later in a manner which was not advantageous for Hitler; for on April 13, 1941, Soviet Russia and Japan concluded a pact of neutrality which enabled Stalin to employ almost all his force in the west. Point 2 served to dispel the mistrust of the Soviets. The mention of a guarantee of the Baltic States showed that Berlin still had a status quo in north-east Europe in mind, without considering the rapidly growing dynamics of Soviet foreign policy. Point 3 contained the nucleus of all the proposals. It meant : in order to reach a favourable economic agreement Germany would satisfy the Soviet need for security in the Far East and north-eastern Europe.

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<sup>104</sup> Sontag-Beddie, Op.Cit., p.54.

<sup>105</sup> This is revealed from a conversation between Molotov and Schulenburg which took place much later on August 15; ADAP, VII, No.79.

Despite the fact that both sides were very anxious to come to a political agreement and that after several months of mutual soundings, finally both sides mentioned the key word "non-aggression" pact, the negotiations hit another snag. By the end of June the Germans pressed by the worsening of the Polish situation, were getting distinctly impatient because of the Russian reserve. On June 29 Hitler very nearly called off the entire negotiations and Ribbentrop instructed von Schulenburg to abstain from pressing the matter any further.<sup>106</sup> It took again the pretext of economic negotiations to bring the political matter back to the stage, where it stood two months before.

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<sup>106</sup> Sontag - Beddie, Op.Cit., p.25-28.

## CHAPTER IV

### FROM JULY 1939 TO THE CONCLUSION OF THE GERMAN-SOVIET NON AGGRESSION PACT

New progress after the stalemate in the negotiations was again made in the domain of economic talks. Hitler by now began to feel that time was running against him and it is thus not surprising that he made the first move. Around July 8 the German Embassy in Moscow received new instructions providing for further economic concessions, but not allowing for any further steps in the political sphere.<sup>107</sup> The Soviet Government, as so often before, showed no hurry. After a delay of more than a week, on July 16, 1939, Schulenburg was informed by the Soviet Government that Babarin, the Head of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin, would call on Schnurre on the next day to announce that he was authorized to negotiate an economic treaty.<sup>108</sup> A few days later the Soviet press published a short statement which was to demonstrate that the Kremlin was willing to make a further step.<sup>109</sup> It was announced that Germany and Soviet Russia were conducting economic negotiations in Berlin. Babarin and Schnurre

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107 ADAP, VI, No.628.

108 ADAP, VI, No.677.

109 ADAP, VI, No.699; DBFP, 3rd series, VI, No.399.

were mentioned as the leaders of the respective delegations.

The Germans were quick to follow up Moscow's suggestions. On July 25, Ribbentrop, at Hitler's orders, personally drew up instructions to Schnurre for an informal talk with Astakhov covering a large number of topics. In accordance with these instructions Schnurre invited Astakhov and Babarin to a dinner at Ewest's Restaurant in Berlin, on the evening of July 26, 1939. Schnurre and the Russians went over the whole field of the German-Soviet relations :

Schnurre explained that close collaboration between Germany and Russia could be achieved in three stages :

1) re-establishment of collaboration in the economic field through the credit and commercial treaty which we are to conclude.

2) The normalization and improvement of political relations.

3) Establishment of good political relations securing the vital political interests of both parties. There are no controversial problems which would exclude an arrangement between the two countries anywhere along the line from the Baltic to the Black Sea and to the Far East.

With the warm approval of Babarin, Astakhov designated the way of rapprochement with Germany as the one that correspond to the vital interests of the two countries. The possibilities would be barred the moment the Soviet Union, by signing a treaty, aligned itself with Britain against Germany.

What could Britain offer Russia? At best participation in a European war and the hostility of

Germany. What could Germany offer as against this? Neutrality and keeping out of a possible European conflict, and, if Moscow wished, a German-Russian understanding on mutual interests which, as in former times, would work out to the advantage of both countries. 110

Weizsäcker sent a copy of Schnurre's memorandum on this conversation to Schulenburg and instructed the latter to seek an interview with Molotov to find out whether Molotov held similar views to those expressed by Astakhov.

Sound Molotov on the same lines ... If he abandons his reserve, go a step further and put into more concrete form what is expressed in general terms in the memorandum. This applies in particular to the Polish question. We would be prepared, however the Polish question may develop, whether peacefully as we desire, or in some other way that is forced upon us, to safeguard all Soviet interests and to come to an understanding with the Government in Moscow. In the Baltic question too, the idea could be advanced of so adjusting our attitude to the Baltic States as to respect vital Soviet interests in the Baltic Sea. 111

Point one of Schnurre's proposals for an improvement of German-Soviet relations contains nothing that goes beyond the desire of a great power, poor in natural resources, to secure the capacity of its industry in the case of war.

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110 ADAP, VI, No.729.

111 ADAP, VI, No.736.

Normalization of the political relations mentioned in Point Two, is a logical consequence of Point One, if one wants to co-operate for a long time to come. Point three, however, is of greatest significance, for it is here that for the first time during the lengthy negotiations an official representative of the Reich talked about 'interests', a fatal word which was to be so frequently used among German-Soviet negotiations until June 21, 1941, when Schulenburg informed Molotov about the German invasion. The 'vital interests' were to legalize all steps taken by the two partners. Now Germany opened new perspectives for a revision of her own eastern border and for the western border of Soviet Russia. For the first time Germany touched the 'cordon sanitaire' which had been established by the victors of the First World War and was devised to serve as a protective wall against the Bolshevik movement. The possibility of a new partition of Poland was hereby clearly indicated. The Weizsäcker memorandum to Schulenburg re-affirmed Germany's willingness to consider Soviet interests and revealed Hitler's determination to solve the Polish problem on his own terms.

The Russians by then certainly realized that Hitler was trying to accelerate the negotiations and to arrive at a speedy agreement. The Germans were forced to reveal

their haste because of some very serious considerations. To start with, if the stubborn Poles persisted in refusing the German terms and thus an invasion of Poland became necessary, the campaign would have to begin by early fall at the latest.<sup>112</sup> The Soviet consent for an attack upon Poland was a prerequisite since the western powers guaranteed the existence of the Polish state, but these reasons alone were perhaps not sufficient to justify their haste.

On July 25, the British and the French Governments accepted Molotov's suggestion that military and naval representatives should be sent to Moscow for discussion.<sup>113</sup> In a telegram of July 28 the German Ambassador in Paris, Count Welczeck, reported to Berlin :

Concerning the Moscow negotiations I learn the following from usually well informed sources :

Three considerations moved Britain and France to agree to enter military discussions before reaching agreement in a political treaty :

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<sup>112</sup> At least this was Hitler's reasoning as given to Count Ciano on August 12, 1939; ADAP, VII, No.43.

<sup>113</sup> DBFP, 3rd series, VI, No.376, 435, 453, 465, 466, 473, 486, 489, 490, App. V, p.762-789.

- 1) Britain and France wish at all costs to avoid the negotiations being adjourned or broken off, because they believe that as long as the negotiations are being carried on, Germany will not take any action in Danzig.
- 2) By sending two representative military missions to Moscow it is believed to create a favourable atmosphere for the conclusion of a political treaty also.
- 3) Should the military authorities agree amongst themselves, the politicians hope to be able to exert pressure to overcome the remaining difficulties, though it is not overlooked that in the military discussions Russia will raise not only the problem of the border states, but also the difficult problem of Poland and Rumania tolerating military aid.<sup>114</sup>

It became clear to Ribbentrop that the Kremlin agreeing to such a conference had entered the decisive round. Greatest speed was required if Germany desired to gain results before the arrival of British-French representatives at Moscow. And here the western powers assisted Germany's cause by choosing the sea route as if time were not a matter of importance.<sup>115</sup> The threatening possibility of a British-French-Soviet alliance not only increased the German willing-

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<sup>114</sup> ADAP, VI, No.731. - A good analysis of the last stage of German-Soviet negotiations can be found in A. Dallin, "The Month of Decision, the German Soviet Diplomacy, July 22 -August 22", Journal of Central European Affairs, 1949 (9), p. 1 ff.

<sup>115</sup> M.Beloff, Op.Cit., II, p.264.

ness to make concessions, but also forced them to act fast.

Another reason for German haste had to be observed in the Far East. By the beginning of July there were signs of a détente in the strained relations between Great Britain and Japan. Not only was a partial agreement in Chinese affairs effected, but symptoms of grave consequences for Europe became discernible also.<sup>116</sup> The "Times" reported on July 24, that Japan had decided to remain neutral in case of a European war.<sup>117</sup> The excited reaction of the Wilhelmstrasse during the following days was understandable because such a Japanese attitude would make the British interference in the German-Polish conflict much more probable. Consequently Hitler had to find some kind of diplomatic counterpoise that might prevent Britain from going to war. A rapprochement with Stalin seemed to be the answer and this circumstance perhaps more than any other explained the activity of the Germans in Moscow during the early days of August.

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<sup>116</sup> Japan proposed to Britain to work together for a new order in the Far East. In the Craigie-Arita Agreement of July 24, 1939, Britain made concessions to the requirements of the Japanese army operating in China. See ADAP, VI, No.719, and also M. Shigemitsu, Die Schicksalsjahre Japans, Frankfurt, 1959, p.161 f.

<sup>117</sup> ADAP, VI, No.713.

On August 2, Ribbentrop, on Hitler's orders, saw Astakhov himself.<sup>118</sup> Both diplomats went over the ground covered in the Schnurre-Astakhov conversation of July 27. Ribbentrop alluded to the trade agreement discussions which were designated as a good step toward the normalization of German-Russian relations. He confirmed Schnurre's statement that there was no problem from the Baltic to the Black Sea that could not be solved. In case of a provocation on the part of Poland, Germany would settle matters with Poland within a week. He dropped a hint at coming to an agreement with Moscow on the fate of Poland. If Moscow were interested in the German ideas, Molotov could pick up the thread again with Count Schulenburg. Thus it is not difficult to pinpoint the date when Hitler decided to conclude a pact with the Soviet Union.

On the evening of August 3, 1939, Schulenburg was received by Molotov.<sup>119</sup> For the first time highly placed diplomats discussed respective interests of their countries in a direct manner. The ambassador reported in a long dispatch that in a talk lasting well over one hour

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<sup>118</sup> ADAP, VI, No.758, Sontag - Beddie, Opé Cit., p.37-39.

<sup>119</sup> ADAP, VI, No.766.

Molotov had abandoned his habitual reserve and appeared unusually open. This was not surprising since Germany indicated her wish to recognize Soviet interests in the Baltic countries and Poland. Molotov betrayed himself by asking whether Lithuania was included in the Baltic area. Schulenburg passed over this question since Hitler was as yet not willing to make any concessions on Lithuania.<sup>120</sup>

The unbending Soviet Minister then enumerated some of the hostile acts that the Reich had committed against the Soviet Union : The anti-Comintern Pact, support of Japan against Russia and the exclusion of the Soviets from Munich. Schulenburg seemed to have been somewhat discouraged when he reported to Berlin :

My general impression is that the Soviet Government are at present determined to conclude an agreement with Britain and France, if they fulfill all Soviet wishes. Negotiations, to be safe, might still last a long time, especially since mistrust of England is also great. I believe that my statements made an impression on Molotov, it will nevertheless take considerable effort on our part to cause the Soviet Government to swing about. <sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> The role of Lithuania in these negotiations is extensively analysed by A. Rossi, Op.Cit., p. 40.

<sup>121</sup> Sontag-Beddie, Op. Cit., p.37-46.

The essence of this conversation was that the Soviets still did not trust the Germans, and for the latter it became necessary to re-examine Molotov's complaints and to make redress. Furthermore, Hitler had to make a difficult decision, as Molotov had used the catch-word 'Lithuania'. One thing became clear, the price for Soviet neutrality was to include a threat to the north east borders of Germany and thus a heavy mortgage for the future. On the other hand, this concession appeared to be worthwhile if it resulted in the isolation of Poland and if it made the interference of the western powers improbable. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was to participate in the liquidation of Poland and this again could lead to a declaration of war of the western powers against Soviet Russia. If this should ever happen then Stalin and Hitler would be bound together for better or for worse and the elimination of the buffer states was advantageous. Should Great Britain and France refuse to apply their guarantee of the Polish state also against Soviet Russia then they would be in a very precarious position. World opinion would show little understanding for a policy which was meant to call one robber to account while the other went free.

Hitler's concession towards Moscow, however extensive could in the last analysis secure to him whatever he wanted from Poland and all that without a war, or should the Western Powers remain firm the aroused conflict could easily draw the Soviet Union into it on Hitler's side. And perhaps Hitler toyed already with the idea of using force against the Soviets at a more favourable time in the future to re-take everything he had to give away now.

The Kremlin, on the other hand, wanted to remain neutral under any circumstances. If this would be possible was doubtful as long as the Soviets wished to gain only the advantages that a co-operation with Germany offered without paying any penalty. As it turned out later both sides miscalculated. The German-Soviet agreement did not deter the Western powers from declaring war against Germany, whereby Soviet Russia remained outside of this conflict. Moscow on the other hand, obtaining a long common frontier with Germany, was exposed to German attack.

At the end of July Hitler was advised by his chief of the general staff that the military campaign against Poland could not be postponed beyond September.<sup>122</sup> He thus

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<sup>122</sup> Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg, Vol. III, p.267, 281.

placed himself in a precarious position in negotiations with Stalin. Since he had decided to go to war, if necessary, and the date for the Polish campaign was set, he needed Stalin's co-operation, and he had to get it by a definite date, otherwise the whole plan would be jeopardized. Hitler now would have to pay the top price for Soviet aid. Furthermore, Stalin by inviting the British and French military missions to Moscow could exert stronger pressure on the Germans.

Worried by rumours that a German attack on Poland was imminent, the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, arrived at Salzburg on August 11 to confer with Ribbentrop and Hitler. The German Foreign Minister informed his guest that Germany would fight Poland, that she wanted not only Danzig and the Corridor, but a complete settlement of accounts with all powers opposing her. Ciano stated afterwards, "They were possessed by the demon of destruction".<sup>123</sup> Hitler also told Ciano that the settlement with Poland would have to be made "one way or the other" by the end of August because autumn rains would render useless his motorized divisions in a country with few paved roads. He expressed

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<sup>123</sup> G. Ciano, The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943, ed. H. Gibson, Garden City, N.Y. Garden City Publishing Co., 1947, p.118-121.

his convictions that the western democracies would not fight. But even if the conflict should spread, victory was certain since Germany could now count on Soviet Russia's neutrality.

As if to bolster Ciano's morale a telegram from Berlin 'happened' to arrive, the contents of which were given to Ciano : The Russians agreed to receive a German political negotiator in Moscow. They were ready to discuss 'step by step' economic agreements, policies of the press, cultural co-operation, the Polish problem and a German-Soviet pact.<sup>124</sup> Ribbentrop stated that the Russians had been kept fully informed of German intentions in the Polish question and Hitler added that Germany would not object to Russia's aim of enlarging her access to the Baltic Sea. Count Ciano, baffled by these grandiose plans did not utter any opinion. It is interesting to note that the Balkan area was not mentioned. Perhaps Hitler did not want to cause any anxiety on the part of the Italians who always considered the Balkan area as their own sphere of interest.

In the meantime Stalin busied himself with keeping his second iron quite hot. He did not break off the negot-

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<sup>124</sup> ADAP, VII, No.50, See also E. Kordt, Wahn und Wirklichkeit, p.163.

iations with western powers, but rather stated his maximum demands in order to find out how far they would go. The British negotiator in Moscow, William Strang, had flown to London on August 8 to explain to his Government the Russian position and to receive new instructions in order to break the almost hopeless deadlock.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, on August 12, Soviet Commissar of Defence, Marshall Voroshilov, opened the negotiations between the Anglo-French and Soviet military staffs in Moscow's Spiridonovka Palace. The Soviet marshall began with an impressive statement : "All cards on the table please gentlemen".<sup>126</sup> When the western representatives put down their cards the Russians were struck by the smallness of the British and French forces available to face Hitler's war machinery; they became very sceptical about the

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<sup>125</sup> ADAP, VII, No.21. For Strang's personal account of these negotiations see his Home and Abroad, London, Deutsch, 1956, p.189. - Vol. VI, of the 3rd Series of DBFP contains the essential documentation for the Strang mission to Moscow.

<sup>126</sup> John Scott, Duel for Europe, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1942, p.24; W.L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1960, p.496; L.B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-1939, London, Macmillan, 1948, p.206; DBFP, VI, No.638, 647.

plans for the protection of Poland, who now as before refused to permit any Soviet troops on her soil and they were outraged by the obvious hesitation of the democracies to give them a blank cheque in Eastern Europe.<sup>127</sup> It is not surprising then that Stalin in the face of such unpromising prospects was now ready to listen quite seriously to German proposals.<sup>128</sup>

Berlin, after receiving Schulenburg's dispatch about his conversation with Molotov at the beginning of August,

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127 See W.L. Shirer, Op.Cit., p.533 f. - M. Beloff, Op.Cit., II, p.267 f. For the background to the Polish-Soviet relations see R. Umiastowski, Russia and the Polish Republic, 1918-1941, London, Simpkin, 1945. A good analysis of the complex problem of the Baltic States in the British-Soviet negotiations is offered by G. Vigrabs, "Stellungnahme der Westmächte und Deutschlands zu den Baltischen Staaten im Frühling und Sommer 1939", Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, July 1959, p.261-279. Official Soviet historians put the blame for failure of the British-Soviet negotiations entirely on the western inflexibility. See W.P. Potjomkin, Op.Cit., III, 2, p.343 f. - For details about the military conversations in Moscow, see DBFP, VII, Chapter I.

128 A penetrating light on British motives during the Moscow negotiations is thrown by A. T.P. Taylor in his book The Origin of the Second World War, p.227 f. According to Taylor's analysis the only British interest was to preserve peace. The accusations that the British instigated a conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union are here clearly refuted. For a criticism of Taylor, based on alleged factual inaccuracies, see P.A. Reynolds "Hitler's War", History, XLVI, Oct 1961, p.212-217. - David L. Hoggan, Der Erzwungene Krieg, die Ursachen und Urheber des 2 Weltkrieges, Tübingen, Verlag, der Deutschen Hochschullehrer Zeitung, 1961, p.893, came

tried desperately to find a short-cut which would lead to a speedy agreement with the Soviets. Schulenburg informed his Foreign Office that the Russians had felt slighted by the British for sending a subaltern official instead of the Foreign Secretary as originally suggested by Molotov himself.<sup>129</sup> To exploit this British diplomatic faux-pas Hitler decided to send his Foreign Minister to Moscow. This bold move had to be paralleled with a great bid, a combination which could hardly fail.

On August 14, Schulenburg received a 'most urgent' telegram from Berlin requesting him to call upon Molotov and

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128 forward with a novel thesis diametrically opposed to that of Taylor and others : The British Foreign Office steered its course consciously towards war, whereas Hitler's intentions were essentially peaceful. G.L. Weinberg refutes this thesis as a futile attempt to perverse basic facts, in The American Historical Review, LXVIII, Oct, 1962, p.104-105; the ensuing exchange of views between Hoggan and Weinberg, ibidem, April 1963, p.914-918, and October 1963, p.303-7.

129 It is certain that Halifax did not agree with Chamberlain's handling of the negotiations with the Soviets; Halifax, Op.Cit., p.207 - despite his criticism, even Churchill has to agree that it was much too late to change the course of events. W.S. Churchill The Gathering Storm, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1948, p.389. - Litvinov noted in his diaries about Strang's reception in Moscow : "William Strang is mentioned off handedly"; Litvinov, Op.Cit., p.264.

to read him this communication.<sup>130</sup>

1 Ideological contradictions between National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union that had separated the countries in hostile camps should not prohibit the restoration of co-operation of a new and friendly type.

2 There exist no real conflicts of interest between Germany and the U.S.S.R. Germany has no aggressive intentions against the U.S.S.R. The Reich Government is of the opinion that there is no question between the Baltic and the Black Sea which cannot be settled to the complete satisfaction of both countries. Among these are such questions as : The Baltic Sea, the Baltic area, Poland, Southeastern questions, etc.

3 There is some doubt that German-Soviet policy of to-day has come to an historic turning point. The decisions with respect to policy to be made in the immediate future in Berlin and Moscow will be of decisive importance for the aspect of relationships between the German people and the peoples of the U.S.S.R. for generations.

4 It is true that Germany and the U.S.S.R. as a result of years of hostility in their respective world outlooks, today look at each other in distrustful fashion. A great deal of rubbish which has accumulated will have to be cleared away.

5 The Reich Government and the Soviet Government must, judging from all experience, count it as certain that the capitalistic Western democracies are the unforgiving enemies of both National Socialist Germany and of the U.S.S.R. They are today trying to drive the U.S.S.R. into war against Germany. In 1914 this policy had disastrous results for Russia. It is the compelling interest of both countries to avoid for all future time the destruction of Germany and of the U.S.S.R., which would profit only the Western democracies.

6 The crisis which has been produced in German-Polish relations by English policy, as well as English agitation for war and the attempts at an

alliance which are bound up with that policy, make a speedy clarification of German-Russian relations desirable. Otherwise these matters, without any German initiative, might take a turn which would deprive both Governments of the possibility of restoring German-Soviet friendship and possibly of clearing up jointly the territorial questions of Eastern Europe. The leadership in both countries should, therefore, not allow the situation to drift, but should take action at the proper time. It would be fatal if, through mutual lack of knowledge of views and intentions, our peoples should be finally driven asunder.

7 As we have been informed, the Soviet Government also has the desire for a clarification of German-Russian relations. Since, however, according to previous experience this clarification can be achieved only slowly through the usual diplomatic channels, Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop is prepared to make a short visit to Moscow in order, in the name of the Fuehrer, to set forth the Fuehrer's views to Herr Stalin. Only through such a direct discussion, in the view of Herr von Ribbentrop, can a change be brought about, and it should not be impossible thereby to lay the foundations for a definite improvement in German-Russian relations. 131

Apart from the almost clumsy intrusion contained in points 1, 3, and 4, there remained enough for a first rate political sensation and a positive reaction of the Soviet Government. Point 2 promised a settlement of the mutual spheres of interest; Point 5 soothed the almost pathological Soviet quest for security and Point 6 finally indicated the

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131 Sontag - Beddie, Op.Cit., p.50-52.

German determination to fight Poland, and if necessary, the Western Powers. Simultaneously it indicated the great importance of the negotiations for Germany and the German desire for a speedy conclusion. Great Britain and France could and would not match the German offer.

On the evening of August 15 Schulenburg saw Molotov and delivered Ribbentrop's urgent suggestion that he himself should go to Moscow to complete the work which had started well.<sup>132</sup> Molotov showed far greater friendliness than before and received the message conveyed with greatest interest. He promised to report it at once to his government. He stated that the Soviet Government warmly welcomed German intentions of improving relations with the Soviet Union and that he now believed in the sincerity of these intentions. But shrewdly he gave no sign of being in a hurry. He agreed to Ribbentrop's visit, but the preparatory work for it would have to be very detailed:

In this connection, he was interested in the question of how the German Government were disposed towards the idea of concluding a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, and further, whether

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132 ADAP, VII, No.70.

the German Government were prepared to influence Japan for the purpose of improving Soviet-Japanese relations and eliminating border conflicts, and whether a possible joint guarantee of the Baltic States was contemplated by Germany.

With regard to the sought for expansion of economic relations, Molotov admitted that negotiations were progressing successfully in Berlin and approaching a favourable conclusion.

It should be noted that Molotov spoke about a German-Soviet non-aggression pact at the very moment while negotiating with France and Britain an alliance to oppose further German aggression.

On August 16 Ribbentrop sent Schulenburg instructions<sup>133</sup> to see Molotov again and inform him :

that Germany is prepared to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, and if the Soviet Government so desire, one which would be unenforceable for a term of twenty-five years. Further, Germany is ready to guarantee the Baltic States jointly with the Soviet Union. Finally, Germany is prepared to exercise influence for an improvement and consolidation of Russian-Japanese relations.

The Fuehrer is of the opinion that in view of the present situation and of the possibility of the occurrence, any day, of serious events, a basic and rapid clarification of German-Russian relations, and of each country's attitude to the questions of the

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133 ADAP, VII, No.75.

moment, is desirable. For these reasons I am prepared to come by aeroplane to Moscow at any time after August 18, to deal, on the basis of full powers from the Fuehrer, with the entire complex of German-Russian questions, and if the occasion arises, to sign the appropriate treaties. Ask for the views of the Russian Government and of M. Stalin immediately.

The negotiations reached a stage where the Germans dropped all pretenses. When Schulenburg called at the Kremlin on August 17 to read Ribbentrop's reply to Molotov the latter was able to hand him a note from his Government summarizing its position. Beginning acidly with a reminder of the Nazi Government's previous hostility to Soviet Russia, it explained that "up till very recently the Soviet Government have proceeded on the assumption that the German Government are seeking an occasion for a clash with the Soviet Union... Not to mention the fact that the German Government by using the so-called anti-Comintern Pact was endeavouring to and did establish a united front of a number of states against the Soviet Union". It was for this reason, the note explained, that Russia was participating in the organization of a defensive front of a number of states against such aggression. If, however, the German Government now undertook a change from the old policy, the Soviet Government could only welcome such a change, and were for their part, prepared to revise their policy in the sense of

of a serious improvement in respect of Germany. Moscow declared that the principle of the peaceful "co-existence" of various political systems represented a long established principle of the foreign policy of the U.S.S.R. The first step was to be the conclusion of a trade and credit agreement. The second step, to be taken shortly thereafter, could be the conclusion of a non-aggression pact, or the re-affirmation of the neutrality pact of 1926 (Berlin Treaty) with the simultaneous conclusion of a special protocol defining the interests of the contracting parties in this or that question of foreign policy, and forming an integral part of the pact.<sup>134</sup>

The last part contains the phrase which was to bring disaster to eastern Europe; the portentous secret protocol attached to the non-aggression Pact of August 23 was indicated.

Molotov made no mention of Ribbentrop's urgent specific proposal that he come to Moscow over the weekend. Schulenburg was therefore instructed to see Molotov again.<sup>135</sup> He was to urge utmost speed in view of the acute deterioration of German-Polish relations. Hitler wanted a complete

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<sup>134</sup> ADAP, VII, No.105; J. Degras, Op.Cit., III, p.356-357.

<sup>135</sup> ADAP, VII, No.111, 113.

clarification of the Soviet position before the outbreak of an open conflict. To achieve this Ribbentrop proposed his immediate departure for Moscow, to which he would come with full powers of Hitler, authorizing him to settle fully and conclusively the total complex of problems. Schulenburg was to press emphatically for a rapid realization of Ribbentrop's journey since "German foreign policy has today reached an historic turning point".<sup>136</sup> The Ambassador was to read to Molotov the following two articles :

Article 1 - The German Reich and the U.S.S.R. will in no event resort to war, or to any other use of force, with respect to each other.

Article 2 - This treaty shall enter into force immediately upon signature, and shall be valid and not liable to denunciation thereafter for a term of twenty five years.

August 19, 1939, was a crucial day in these negotiations. On this day a full agreement was reached on the text of the Credit and Economic Agreement between Germany and Soviet Russia negotiated and signed by Schnurre and Babarin.<sup>137</sup> The eight Articles of the Agreement indicated the course that Russo-German economic relations were to

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136 ADAP, VII, No.113.

137 ADAP, VII, No.123, 131.

follow. Germany granted the U.S.S.R. a credit of 200 million R.M. for seven years at 5 per cent for the purchase of German goods over two years from the day of signature of the agreement. The agreement also provided for the delivery of goods from the U.S.S.R. to Germany over two years, to the value of 180 million R.M. The goods Germany was to send were mainly machine tools, equipment for factories and for the chemical and electro-technical industry, instruments and laboratory equipment. The Russians obligated themselves to send Germany various raw materials, especially lumber, cotton, feed grain, petroleum and platinum. This agreement was signed in great hurry and not all the details in it were fully settled. Its main importance was in the political field.

On this same day Schulenburg read to Molotov Ribbentrop's memorandum quoted above. Molotov was unimpressed.<sup>138</sup> He stubbornly insisted that thorough preparations for Ribbentrop's visit would be requested. Specifically, he asked for advance clarification of the proposed protocol which was supposed to become the 'crowning' point of the treaty. Schulenburg's insistence was to no avail. Only half an hour

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138 ADAP, VII, No.125, 132.

later, however, Molotov summoned Schulenburg to the Kremlin. He explained that he had reported to his 'government' and was instructed to hand over a draft of the non-aggression pact.

The entire Soviet proposal reads as follows:<sup>139</sup>

The Governments of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Germany, desirous of strengthening the cause of peace among the nations and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Treaty which was concluded in April 1926 between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Germany, have reached the following agreement :

Article 1 : The two contracting parties undertake to desist reciprocally from any act of violence and any aggressive action whatsoever against each other, or from an attack on each other either separately or jointly with other powers.

Article 2 : Should one of the contracting parties become the object of an act of violence or attack by a third power, the other contracting party shall in no manner whatever lend its support to such acts by that power.

Article 3 : Should disputes or conflicts arise between the contracting parties over questions of one kind or another, both parties undertake to settle their disputes and conflicts exclusively by peaceful means through mutual consultation, or if necessary, through the creation of suitable arbitration commissions.

Article 4 : The present Treaty shall be concluded for a period of five years with the proviso that, unless one of the contracting parties denounces

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139 ADAP, VII, No.133. English translation from the Documents on German Foreign Policy.

it one year before the expiry of that period, the validity of the Treaty shall be deemed to be automatically prolonged for another five years.

Article 5 : - The present Treaty shall be ratified in as short a time as possible, whereupon the Treaty shall enter into force.

Postscript: The present Pact shall be valid only if a special Protocol is signed simultaneously, covering the points in which the contracting parties are interested in the field of foreign policy. The Protocol shall be an integral part of the Pact.<sup>140</sup>

"As far as the Reich Foreign Minister's journey was concerned" reported Schulenburg, "the Soviet Government agreed to Herr von Ribbentrop's coming to Moscow about a week after the public announcement of the signing of the economic agreement; should the announcement be made tomorrow, Herr von Ribbentrop could arrive at Moscow on August 26 or 27". Another attempt on the part of the German Ambassador to make Moletov accept an earlier date for Ribbentrop's visit remained unsuccessful.

The fact that Moletov was able to present a complete proposal of the agreement within half an hour is almost more interesting than the content of the agreement in itself. Obviously the proposal must have been ready beforehand, which indicates that the Soviets were quite decided on arriving at

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<sup>140</sup> ADAP, VII, No.133. Translation from the Documents on German Foreign Policy.

a concord with the Germans, while procrastinating in the actual talks in order to increase the already quite noticeable German eagerness. The proposal in itself is nothing more than a replica of any one of the numerous non-aggression pacts concluded between many European states during the inter-war period. As a matter of fact, this text was fully accepted during the final negotiations and supplemented only by two new articles. The essential part, the secret protocol, was not spelled out by Molotov; its desirability, however, was prominently mentioned.

It appears that on August 19 Stalin made his decision to accept Hitler's offer. Two days before, on August 17, the Soviet discussions with the British and French military delegations were adjourned until August 21.<sup>141</sup> An impasse due to Polish resistance to accept Soviet troops on Polish soil was reached. The Polish Foreign Minister Beck repeatedly expressed his absolute unwillingness to accommodate Soviet troops, for the last time on August 19 in Warsaw

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<sup>141</sup> DBFP, 3rd Series, VII, No.40.

towards the French Ambassador.<sup>142</sup> It is quite likely that Stalin knew about this final refusal and decided to move closer to Hitler.

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<sup>142</sup> See the account of the Polish refusal by M. Lukasiewicz in L.B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p.206-208; G. Bonnet, Fin d'une Europe, Genève, Bourquin, 1948, p.275-294; W. Hofer, Op.Cit., p.120 f; DBFP, 3rd Series, VII, No.70, 87.

## CHAPTER V

### AN ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN - SOVIET NON-AGGRESSION PACT

August 26 was the day for which Hitler had scheduled the attack on Poland. Obviously then, Ribbentrop had to travel to Moscow before this date. Schulenburg's and Ribbentrop's insistence for an early date were to no avail. As a last resort Hitler himself entered dramatically the scene. Swallowing his pride, he decided to communicate directly with Stalin. In the evening of August 20, Hitler's personal message to his Soviet counterpart was sent to Schulenburg.<sup>143</sup>

The German Ambassador shortly after midnight tried frantically to contact the Soviet Foreign Ministry, but without success.<sup>144</sup> In the meantime he received a terse order from Ribbentrop "Please make every effort to secure the journey. Date as per telegram".<sup>145</sup> Finally, on August 21 he was able to inform Berlin "I will see Molotov today at 3 p.m.". <sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> ADAP, VII, No. 142.

<sup>144</sup> ADAP, VII, No. 148.

<sup>145</sup> ADAP, VII, No. 149.

<sup>146</sup> ADAP, VII, No. 152.

Hitler's message is one of the most interesting documents of these fateful days as it reflected on the tense political situation and betrayed Hitler's inclination to the dramatical :

Herr Stalin, Moscow,

1)I sincerely welcome the signing of the new German-Soviet Commercial Agreement as the first step in the re-ordering of the German-Soviet relations.

2)The conclusion of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union means to me the establishment of a long-range German policy. Germany thereby resumes a political course that was beneficial to both states during by-gone centuries. The Government of the Reich is therefore resolved in such case to act entirely consistently with such a far reaching change.

3)I accept the draft of the non-aggression pact that your Foreign Minister, Herr Molotov, delivered, but consider it urgently necessary to clarify the questions connected with it as soon as possible.

4)The supplementary protocol desired by the Government of the Soviet Union can, I am convinced, be substantially clarified in the shortest possible time if a responsible German statesman can come to Moscow himself to negotiate. Otherwise the Government is not clear as to how the supplementary protocol could be cleared up and settled in a short time.

5)The tension between Germany and Poland has become intolerable. Polish demeanor toward a great power is such that a crisis may arise any day. Germany is determined, at any rate, in the face of this presumption from now on to look after the interests of the Reich with all the means at its disposal.

6) In my opinion, it is desirable, in view of the intentions of the two states to enter into a new relation to each other, not to lose any time. I therefore again propose that you receive my Foreign Minister on Tuesday, August 22, but at the latest on Wednesday, August 23. The Reich Foreign Minister has full powers to draw up and sign the non-aggression pact as well as the protocol. A longer stay by the Reich Foreign Minister in Moscow than one or two days at most is impossible in view of the international situation. I shall be glad to receive your early answer. Adolf Hitler.<sup>147</sup>

Hitler could hardly be more explicit. In Soviet eyes there could have been only one reason for Hitler's dramatic gesture : to conclude the agreement as many days as possible before August 26, the date originally suggested by Molotov. Hitler proposed August 22 or 23, the difference being only a matter of three days. Moreover, Hitler was emphatic about the length of the negotiations, one or two days at the most. The Soviets could not but conclude that Hitler's attack on Poland was to take place on August 26 or shortly thereafter.

Hitler consented to the text of the agreement as proposed by Molotov. And he showed his willingness to sign

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<sup>147</sup> ADAP, VII, No. 142.

practically a blank cheque as far as the secret protocol was concerned, since he expressed his conviction that the matter of the protocol could "be clarified in the shortest possible time", and "cleared up and settled in a short time".

Molotov received Schulenburg at 3 p.m. on August 21. "Molotov read the message", reported the excited Schulenburg to impatient Berlin, "and was obviously deeply impressed".<sup>148</sup> Needless to say the German Ambassador pressed again for the acceptance of Ribbentrop's early arrival according to Hitler's message. After their interview Molotov consulted his 'government' and two hours later called Schulenburg to his office. He handed him Stalin's reply. At 9.35 p.m. the same day Stalin's message arrived in Berlin :

To the Chancellor of the German Reich, Herr A. Hitler.

I thank you for the letter. I hope that the German-Soviet non-aggression pact will bring about a decided turn for the better in the political relations between our countries.

The peoples of our countries need peaceful relations with each other. The assent of the German Government to the conclusion of a non-aggression pact provided the foundation for eliminating the political tension and for the establishment of peace and collaboration between our countries.

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<sup>148</sup> ADAP, VII, No.157.

The Soviet Government have instructed me to inform you that they agree to Herr von Ribbentrop's arriving in Moscow on August 23. J. Stalin.<sup>149</sup>

According to Goering's evidence at Nuremburg, Hitler was in a state bordering on collapse before Stalin's answer arrived. He was worried because the answer to his message was slow in coming. But when the good news of the Russian's acceptance reached Berlin he gave way to an hysterical outburst of joy. One of his intimates who was present at the scene related that Hitler began to hammer on the wall with his fists, uttering inarticulate cries, and finally shouting exultantly : "I have the world in my pocket".<sup>150</sup>

On the morning of August 22 the forthcoming visit of the German Foreign Minister to Moscow for the purpose of negotiating a non-aggression pact was announced in the Russian press. On the same day, Hitler convoked his top military commanders to the Obersalzberg lectured them on his own greatness and on the need for them to wage war brutally and without pity and informed them that he probably

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<sup>149</sup> ADAP, VII, No.159.

<sup>150</sup> ADAP, VII, No.192, 193.

would order the attack on Poland to begin four days hence, on Saturday, August 26. Stalin, the Fuehrer's mortal enemy had made this possible.<sup>151</sup> On the same day also Hitler made out Ribbentrop's full powers :

I hereby grant to the Reich Foreign Minister Herr Joachim von Ribbentrop full power to negotiate, in the name of the German Reich, with authorized representations of the Government of the U.S.S.R., regarding a non-aggression treaty, as well as all related questions, and if occasion arises, to sign both the non-aggression treaty and other agreements resulting from the negotiations, with the proviso that this treaty and these agreements shall enter into force as soon as they are signed.<sup>152</sup>

In the evening of August 22 Ribbentrop and his delegation left by plane for Moscow, spending the night in Koenigsberg.<sup>153</sup> At 11 a.m. on August 23, 1939, the German delegation arrived in Moscow. They were greeted by Deputy Commissar Potemkin, who had been an advocate of collective security in the heydays of Maxim Litvinov. After a hasty meal at the embassy Ribbentrop hurried off to the Kremlin to confront the Soviet dictator and his Foreign Commissar.

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<sup>151</sup> W.L. Shirer, Op.Cit., p.529-532.

<sup>152</sup> ADAP, VII, No.191.

<sup>153</sup> For a colourful description of the journey see Paul Schmidt, Statist auf Diplomatischer Bühne, 1923-45, Bonn, Athenäum, 1953, p.449-455.

The talks between Stalin, Molotov, Ribbentrop, Schulenburg and Hilger began at 5 p.m., and lasted for three hours.<sup>154</sup> According to a most urgent telegram sent by Ribbentrop to Hitler, the discussions proceeded in a favourable direction. Stalin, however, made further successful discussions dependent upon an all important question : Germany must recognize the ports of Libau and Windau on the Baltic (Liepaja and Ventspils in Latvia) as being within the Russian sphere of interest. Since all of Latvia was to be placed on the Soviet side of the line dividing the two powers, Hitler after a brief glance at the map of the Baltic agreed. "Answer : Yes, agreed".<sup>155</sup> In the same telegram Ribbentrop also informed Hitler that "the signing of a secret protocol on the delimitation of mutual spheres of interest in Eastern Europe is contemplated". In order to make it clearly understood that no further interference of a third power in the affairs of Eastern Europe would be tolerated Hitler sent his Foreign Minister a special wire :

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<sup>154</sup> ADAP, VII, No.205.

<sup>155</sup> ADAP, VII, No.210.

The Fuehrer would be very glad if within the framework of the present agreement it were put on record that, when agreement has been reached between Germany and Russia on problems in Eastern Europe, these are to be regarded as belonging exclusively to the spheres of interest of Germany and Russia.<sup>156</sup>

As a result of the second meeting at the Kremlin during the night from August 23 to August 24, the German-Soviet non-aggression pact was signed. The full text was published in Moscow by "Izvestia" on August 24 and dated August 23, 1939:

Guided by the desire to strengthen the cause of peace between the U.S.S.R. and Germany and proceeding from the fundamental stipulations of the neutrality treaty concluded in April 1926, the Government of the U.S.S.R. and the Government of Germany have come to the following agreement :

Article 1 - The two contracting parties undertake to refrain from any act of force, any aggressive act, or any attack against each other, either individually or in conjunction with other powers.

Article 2 - If one of the contracting parties should become the object of hostilities on the part of a Third Power, the other contracting party will give no support of any kind to that Third Power.

Article 3 - The Governments of the two contracting parties will in future maintain contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information about questions which touch their common interests.

Article 4 - Neither of the contracting parties will join any group of Powers which directly or indirectly is directed against the other party.

Article 5 - Should differences or conflicts arise between the two contracting parties on questions of one kind or another, the two parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively by peaceful means, by the friendly exchange of views, or if necessary by setting up conciliation commissions.

Article 6 - The present treaty shall remain in force for ten years; unless one of the contracting parties gives notice to terminate it one year before its expiration, it will be regarded as automatically prolonged for a further five years.

Article 7 - The present treaty shall be ratified in the shortest possible time. The instruments of ratification shall be exchanged in Berlin. The treaty comes into force immediately after its signature.

Done in two copies in Moscow, in the German and Russian languages.<sup>157</sup>

As stated before, the text of the Agreement consisted basically of routine diplomatic exercises. But in the concrete situation of August 1939 the text had specific connotations. Article 4 provided that neither party "will join any group of Powers which directly or indirectly is directed against the other party". Thereby any possibility

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157 J. Degras, Op.Cit., p.359-360; ADAP, VII, No.228.

of an agreement between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers was eliminated, but on the other hand, German passivity in a possible conflict between the Soviet Union and Japan was also secured. Of course, this stipulation negated the purpose of the anti-Comintern Pact. This article was reinforced by Article 2, which forbade any assistance to any third power, should one of the partners become involved in hostilities with this third power. The rather strange stipulation of Article 7 that "the treaty comes into force as soon as it was signed" eliminating the usual ratification procedure, revealed Hitler's haste and the willingness of Moscow to accommodate him as far as his plans for an attack on Poland were concerned.

Whereas Hitler's main interest aimed at securing Moscow's neutrality in the event of a German-Polish conflict and the Agreement in itself gave him full satisfaction in this respect, the Soviets pressed for a secret protocol which should give them a reward for this neutrality.<sup>158</sup> The protocol attached to the Agreement and treated as secret, gave Stalin probably more than he ever hoped for. This then

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<sup>158</sup> See Molotov's and Stalin's insistence on this point, quoted above.

was basically the price Hitler had to pay for his stubborn determination to stage the invasion of Poland in the next few days. The secret protocol attached to the Non-Aggression Pact runs as follows :

On the occasion of the signature of the Non-Aggression Treaty between the German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the undersigned plenipotentiaries of the two parties discussed in strictly confidential conversations the question of the delimitation of their respective spheres of interest in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following result :

1) In the event of a territorial and political transformation in the territories belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) the northern frontier of Lithuania shall represent the frontier of the spheres of interest both of Germany and the U.S.S.R., In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna territory is recognized by both parties.

2) In the event of a territorial political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish State, the spheres of interest of both Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San.

The question whether the interests of both parties make the maintenance of an independent Polish state appear desirable and how the frontiers of this state should be drawn can be definitely determined only in the course of further political developments.

In any case both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly understanding.

3) With regard to South-Eastern Europe, the Soviet side emphasizes its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares complete political desinteressement in these territories.

4) This Protocol will be treated by both parties as strictly secret.<sup>159</sup>

As far as the three Baltic States and Finland were concerned Stalin took for himself a lion's share, everything except Lithuania.<sup>160</sup> Poland was split in two parts along the Curzon line, the eastern part being given to the Soviet Union and for the western part Hitler had to fight. And in addition, Hitler declared his desinteressement on the whole Balkan region. Obviously this kind of gain could not be secured by Moscow from the Western Powers.

This apparent Soviet tour de force did not give a completely new turn to the Soviet policy as it is often maintained. It did not matter to Stalin if he obtained the Baltic States from the Western Powers or from Germany. It must have appeared to the Soviets that Hitler was in a much better position than the Western Powers to fulfill the

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159 ADAP, VII, No.229.

160 The 'final' agreement between Moscow and Berlin after the conclusion of the Polish campaign gave Stalin even the greater part of Lithuania in exchange for small pieces of Polish territory behind the Curzon line. For the consequences of the Agreement on the Baltic States, see Boris Meissner "Die Beziehungen Zwischen der Sowjet Union und den Baltischen Staaten von der Deutsch - Sowjetischen Interessengrenzung bis zum Sowjetischen Ultimatum", Zeitschrift für Ostforschung, 1954, 3 (2), p.161-179.

Soviet aims in this region. Hitler, on the other hand, miscalculated on every account. Later he was shocked by the Soviet attack against Finland and the ruthless occupation of the Baltic countries; he very much regretted the careless wording of the paragraph concerned with the Balkans; and in giving the Soviets parts of Poland he did not succeed in pulling the Soviet Union into the armed conflict. And most important, the dreaded two front war was prevented only temporarily.<sup>161</sup>

After the signing of the pact Stalin played host to his German guests at a banquet which did not only save the purpose of expressing satisfaction over the conclusion of the pact, but also of classifying important political questions which because of the great haste had not been dealt

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<sup>161</sup> At the end of August 1939, the Havas news agency published the text of an alleged speech of Stalin of 19 August 1939. According to this speech Stalin was inclined to conclude a pact with Hitler in order to instigate a war between Germany and the Western Powers. However plausible this may appear, this text of the speech is most probably spurious, different versions exist contradicting each other, and an appended document is counterfeit. See Eberhard Jäckel, "Über eine angebliche Rede Stalins vom 19 August 1939", Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 1958, 6(4), p.380-389.

with in detail.<sup>162</sup> Ribbentrop tried to sound out Stalin's attitude toward Germany's allies, Japan and Italy. He stated that the German-Japanese friendship was in no way directed against the Soviet Union. Stalin gratefully accepted Ribbentrop's offer of playing the 'honest broker' and to assist in bringing about an improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations.

Stalin himself questioned Ribbentrop about the ambitions of Italy on the Balkans, which were the historical aim of Russian expansionism. He wanted to know if Italy desired more than just Albania, perhaps Greek territory. Ribbentrop evaded an answer and merely assured Stalin that Mussolini welcomed warmly the restoration of friendly relations between Germany and the Soviet Union. With respect to Turkey both Stalin and Ribbentrop expressed disdain at the vacillating policy of the Turks.

As to Great Britain the Soviet dictator and the German Foreign Minister found themselves at once in accord.

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<sup>162</sup> For a detailed protocol of the various topics discussed at this occasion between Ribbentrop and Stalin see ADAP, VII, No.213.

Both Stalin and Molotov commented adversely on the British Military Mission in Moscow, which "had never told the Soviet Government what they really wanted". Ribbentrop stated in this connection that England had always been trying to disrupt the development of good relations between Germany and Russia : "England was weak and wanted to let others fight for her presumptuous claim to world domination". Stalin, not wanting to be outdone in disparaging Britain concurred : "If England dominated the world it was due to the stupidity of the other countries that always let themselves be bluffed". He also pointed out that Britain was weak, her fleet of lesser importance, but that the British would fight with unwavering perseverance if challenged. Against Stalin's rather high evaluation of the French Army and the Maginot Line Ribbentrop objected that Germany's manpower was twice as large and the West Wall five times as strong as the Maginot Line.

By this time the Soviet and Nazi Foreign Minister were getting along so well that the anti-Comintern Pact no longer embarrassed them. Stalin remarked that this Pact had frightened only the City of London and the English shopkeeper. Thereupon Ribbentrop tried to crack a joke : "What the German people thought of this matter was evident from a

joke originating with the Berliners, well known for their wit and humour that "Stalin will yet join the anti-Comintern Pact himself". Finally Ribbentrop gave assurance of the German people's desire for an understanding with Soviet Russia. In the course of the conversation Stalin spontaneously proposed a toast to the Fuehrer "I know how much the German nation loves its Fuehrer, I should therefore like to drink to his health". And Molotov raised his glass to Stalin, remarking that it had been Stalin who by his speech of March 10, 1939, had introduced the reversal in political relations. Perhaps Stalin had some mental reservations about Hitler keeping the pact. Shortly before Ribbentrop left the banquet, Stalin took him aside and said "The Soviet Government take the new pact very seriously. I can guarantee on my word of honour that the Soviet Union will not betray its partner".

The Moscow missions of the Western Powers were bewildered. At first, they did not seize the full meaning of the Agreement and tried to continue in the military and political talks with the Soviets. Only the explicit statement of Molotov to the effect that further discussions would serve no purpose, clarified the situation. The military mission left Moscow immediately thereafter.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> DBFP, 3rd series, VII, No.164, 165, 189, 218, 223, 225, 274, 277, 291. - The failure of this mission is analysed in detail by Ernst Deuerlein, Op.Cit., p.634-650; and by Werner Basler, Op.Cit., p.18-59.

Ribbentrop returned to Berlin on the following day, August 24, and reported to Hitler. The Fuehrer expressed his complete satisfaction in his speech in the Reichstag, on September 1, 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, and emphasized the importance of the Pact:

I am happy particularly to be able to tell you of one event. You know that Russia and Germany are governed by two different doctrines. Germany and Russia have no intention of exporting their doctrine. I no longer see any reason why we should still oppose one another. We have, therefore, resolved to conclude a pact which rules out forever any use of violence between us. It imposes the obligation on us to consult together in certain European questions. It makes possible for us economic co-operation and above all it assures that the powers of both these powerful States are not wasted against one another. Every attempt of the West to bring about any change in this will fail.<sup>164</sup>

During the five day period between August 26 and September 1, the extra days of peace resulting from Hitler's postponement of the attack on Poland, Germany attempted to isolate Poland in two ways. On the one hand, Germany by a number of proposals and negotiation schemes tried to lull the Western Powers into another Munich. On the other hand, she tried to exert pressure on Poland and the Western Powers

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<sup>164</sup> R. de Roussy de Sales, Op.Cit., p.687-688.

by emphasizing that with the non-aggression pact Soviet Russia was now in effect on the side of Germany. In any case, the way was now clear for a German attack on Poland. The Western powers might or might not come in. Soviet Russia would be neutral and Poland thus strategically isolated.

On August 25 a special session of the Supreme Soviet opened in Moscow. On the 31st Molotov made a lengthy speech in which he reviewed the international situation, gave a detailed analysis of the developments leading up to the pact and proposed the ratification of the Soviet-German Agreement.

In view of the international situation the conclusion of a pact of non-aggression between the U.S.S.R. and Germany is of tremendous positive value, eliminating the danger of war between Germany and the Soviet Union.

The proposals of the British Government were entirely unacceptable - they ignored the principle of reciprocity and of equal obligations ... On the one hand, the British and French Governments fear aggression, and for that reason would like to have a pact of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union, in so far as it would strengthen them - Great Britain and France.

The decision to conclude a non-aggression pact between the U.S.S.R. and Germany was adopted after military negotiations with France and Great Britain had reached an impasse owing to insuperable difficulties. Only when it became clear to us that the German Government desired to change its foreign policy so as to secure an improvement of relations with the U.S.S.R. was a basis found for the conclusion of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. On March 10, in his speech at the Eighteenth Party Congress Comrade Stalin declared that the Soviet Union stands for strengthening

business relations with "all" countries.

Only the enemies of Germany and the U.S.S.R. can strive to create and foment enmity between the peoples of these countries. We have always stood for unity between the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and Germany.

It is proposed that the Soviet-German non-aggression Pact be ratified.<sup>165</sup>

The Pact was ratified by the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union on the evening of August 31. A few hours later, on September 1, 1939, the German Wehrmacht launched its attack on Poland. Peace was no longer indivisible, the Second World War had begun.

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<sup>165</sup> J. Degras, Op.Cit., p.363 - 371.

## CONCLUSION

The German-Soviet Pact of August 1939, similarly to the Rapallo Pact, was a non-aggression agreement. But in contrast to Rapallo it had immediate and most serious repercussions on world politics. It ended a period of uncertainties and diplomatic shifting; it divided Europe into two distinct groups of powers and resulted in the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Pact of 1939 represents perhaps the most fateful single event within the years preceding World War II. Thus it is not surprising that many writers, both historians and journalists, were attracted by this topic immediately after the final round of the conflict which left one of the partners of the 1939 Pact in utter defeat and the other in splendid triumph. The state of international affairs soon after 1945, known today as the Cold War, became a powerful catalyst in keeping the interest in this fateful event alive and, incidentally, helped in bringing to light an unprecedented abundance of source material pertaining to the conclusion of the German-Soviet Pact.

For all practical purposes, the Pact of August 1939 was an agreement between two men : Hitler and Stalin. The German foreign policy during and before 1939 was theoretically formulated and carried out by the German Foreign

Office, but in fact the only policy maker was Hitler himself. Public opinion, the Reichstag, the German diplomats, including the Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, and the armed forces were in complete servitude to Hitler. In Moscow the situation was not much different. Stalin made all the decisions himself although he had to respect somewhat, or at least had to listen to the Politburo and the Comintern. Such a concentration of power in foreign affairs, of course, made any major diplomatic decision, however radical, relatively easy to execute, quite in contrast to the cumbersome machinery of Western European Powers. This was of an extreme importance in the days of feverish diplomatic activities in the summer of 1939, when old positions were to be abandoned quickly and new positions taken up.

Shortly after Hitler came to power, the Soviets tried very actively to play a role in international diplomacy. They became active in the League of Nations, concluded treaties with France and Czechoslovakia and all that in an effort to break their isolation and to prevent the "aggression of the Fascist Powers". The passivity of the Western European Powers in 1937 during the Anschluss of Austria and their active participation in September 1938

in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia left the Soviet Union aside, and more serious, arose certain Soviet suspicions as to the intentions of Great Britain and France.

Soon after the Munich Agreement of September 1938, first signs of a German-Soviet rapprochement became apparent. To be sure, these signs were very subtle and touched upon peripheral areas of German-Soviet relations. Economic talks between Berlin and Moscow were conducted in a more relaxed atmosphere and made promising progress. The mutual animosities as expressed in press polemics and public speeches of statesmen since 1933 were becoming milder and gradually disappeared.

The sudden appearance of the Polish Question in the Winter 1938-39 made a decisive impact on German-Soviet relations. Hitler explored first the possibility of an anti-Soviet alliance with Poland, an alliance of course, which would satisfy Hitler's immediate claims in Eastern Europe at the expense of Poland. The Poles refused to become involved. The alternative of turning towards Moscow, an alternative which seemed to be feasible judging from the recently friendly Soviet attitude towards Berlin, became a real possibility to be explored fully. Hitler's exploration of this path was supported by Stalin himself.

In his important address to the Eighteenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party on March 10, 1939, he directed more friendly words toward Germany than to the Western European Powers and came very close to offer Hitler direct negotiations. A few days later Hitler occupied Prague. This further German expansion gave Stalin some material to ponder. For the last time he offered to Great Britain an overall conference of anti-Fascist Powers. London refused, but at the same time gave Poland a territorial guarantee against Germany.

These developments in Europe were paralleled by significant events in the Far East. The German efforts since 1938 to foster a triangle Berlin-Rome-Tokyo were frustrated by the reluctance of Japan to commit herself against Great Britain. Thus Hitler would have to count with undispersed British forces in Europe, whereas Stalin would have to divert his forces to the Far East. Obviously it was of a definite advantage for both Germany and the Soviet Union to free their hands as much as possible in Eastern Europe.

Hitler's intentions in the spring of 1939 were to crush Poland before the Western Powers could assist her in time. This plan had to take Soviet interests into account

and Hitler decided to buy them as cheaply as possible. A series of conversations between subaltern German and Soviet officials took place and an awkward and longwinded procedure of getting into closer contact without too much apparent eagerness on either side was initiated. Indirect friendly gestures, such as the dismissal of the Jewish and pro-Western Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, and the German expression of appreciation of this gesture were used again in this manoeuvring. Hitler set the date for an attack against Poland for the end of August and he hoped to have the Soviets in his corner by that time. The Soviets, fully aware of Hitler's schedule, played a perfect chess game.

This precarious manoeuvring was further complicated by distrust between the Soviets and the Germans nourished by the British and the French. The Western Powers tried vigorously at the last minute to secure Soviet co-operation - but they had very little to offer. On the other hand, the possibility of an Anglo-French-German alignment, so real only a year ago in Munich, could not be lightly dismissed. Nevertheless, the efforts to come to a rapprochement hit a snag at the beginning of the summer.

Hitler, by July 1939 seriously pressed for time, had to make a new move. His diplomats, apparently still talking about economic relations, were instructed to use the decisive word "Soviet interests". By the beginning of August Molotov had taken over the negotiations on the Soviet side. He enumerated in the most direct fashion the Soviet reservations and, most important, the Soviet demands. At the same time, the Soviets sounded out the British and the French. The comparison of reactions was clearly in favour of an agreement with Germany. The Western Powers did not go beyond that which they had offered in the spring of 1939 - a precious little. The Germans on the other hand, kept on promising more and more as the end of August was approaching. Eventually, Stalin continued the negotiations with the Western Powers as a mere leverage against the Germans. His mind was set.

The dramatic last days of the German-Soviet negotiations culminated in Hitler giving the Soviets a blank cheque. Stalin obtained everything he wanted and more - in the form of an obscure reference to the Soviet influence in the Balkans. The signing of the Non-Aggression Pact on August 23, 1939, cleared the way for Hitler's military campaign against Poland and for the Second World War.

The German attack against Poland was the immediate result of the Pact. The price Hitler payed for Soviet neutrality was another and perhaps more significant feature of the Pact. Stalin secured for himself neutrality in a conflict between capitalist countries, a classic situation in terms of Leninist predictions. On the other hand, Hitler's hope that the conflict could be limited to Poland did not materialize, just as his hope that the Soviets might be dragged into the conflict in the case of its extension to the Western Powers. In addition the Soviets obtained a sizeable portion of Poland which had to be defeated by German arms only. Moreover, the Baltic States, the Near East, and the Balkans were largely brought under the exclusive control of Soviet interests.

From this it can be concluded that Hitler was more of a tactician seeking boldly immediate advantages by whatever means he had at his disposal, neglecting long range consequences. Stalin was a diplomatic strategist adhering to the principles of long range Soviet policy. Taking into consideration the consequences of the Pact, it has to be concluded that the Pact was a Soviet victory, although to the contemporaries it might have not appeared as such.

The German motives, way of thinking, and actions during this fateful period was not subject of any considerable controversy. Hitler's basic policies were straight forward and are clearly documented. The role of Great Britain and France is more difficult to assess. To start with the available documentation is not as comprehensive as that of defeated Germany. And then, statesmen and diplomats of democratic countries usually do not put on paper all their thoughts in the same way as dictators do. Of course, one can also reasonably assume that their way of thinking and their schemes, if any, are less objectionable than those of their dictatorial counterparts.

Thus there is room for some controversy as to the behaviour of the Western Powers during this period. The Western rejections of Soviet offers, made almost continuously since Spring 1938, are thought by some interpreters as being the distrust of the Soviet regime with its subversive tendencies in democratic countries and even a secret desire to involve Hitler's Germany in a war against Soviet Russia with the Western Democracies at the side lines. However, one cannot dismiss lightly the British rejection of all Soviet demands aimed at the countries to which the British were not obliged but morally. And this despite the fact that the alternatives must have appeared

to Western diplomats as a long and costly war against Hitler. Any responsibility on the part of Great Britain and France seems to lie in the period before 1939, in their inactivity during Hitler's rise and in their inadvertent assistance to Hitler during the Munich crisis. During 1939 the Western European Powers refused to repeat the same mistakes in dealing with the Soviet Union which they made in 1938 when dealing with Hitler.

The attitude of the Soviet Union during the negotiations of 1939 appears to be clearly in line with their professed doctrine of world revolution. It is true, documentary evidence in the classical sense is largely lacking. However, this doctrine was never refuted and even more, it was repeatedly confirmed by Soviet official spokesmen. There is no reason to believe that an unrestricted access to Soviet contemporary documents would contradict this basic Soviet design, although it would certainly complement and correct our knowledge of one or the other detail. And finally, the fact alone that the Soviets have allied themselves with Hitler, at a most critical moment of events, and thus facilitated the outbreak of a new world war weighs most heavily in any serious analysis.

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## APPENDIX 1

### ABSTRACT OF

#### German - Soviet Relations in 1939<sup>167</sup>

The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 is set into the framework of German-Soviet relations since 1917. A detailed analysis of diplomatic activities among European Powers, especially Germany and the Soviet Union with ramifications in the Far East, is undertaken for the period between the conclusion of the Munich Agreement in September 1938 and the signing of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939.

After the acquisition of the Sudeten region and the ensuing liquidation of the Czechoslovak question in March 1939, Hitler concentrated his attention on Eastern Europe. The rather unexpected Polish resistance to Hitler's demands, coupled with the stubbornness of the British and the French, made it necessary for him to turn towards the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1939 the attitude of the Soviet Union was decisive. Its alignment

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<sup>167</sup> Carl B. van Husen, Master of Arts thesis presented to the Department of History, University of Ottawa, Canada, April 1964, 139 p.

with the Western Democracies would guarantee the European status quo, whereas its alignment with Germany would upset it. The diplomatic activities in spring and summer 1939 were a long struggle between the Western Powers and Hitler to gain the favour of the Soviet Union.

Stalin as a decisive policy maker in the Soviet Union pondered the two possibilities. The exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich Agreement by the Western Powers, together with the rejections by the British of several Soviet proposals for a front against "Fascist aggression", had to be his first consideration. However, the respective offers by the two prospective allies were decisive. The Western Powers had very little to offer, in fact they asked for the preservation of the status quo even in Eastern Europe. Hitler, on the other hand, having in mind his immediate objectives in Poland, proposed a complete elimination of the cordon sanitaire and a partition of Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Germany. Pressed by time and by the parallel Soviet negotiations with the Western Powers, he even accepted the Soviet specifications as to this partition. The destruction of the status quo was the prime objective of the Communist doctrine and the war resulting from such a Soviet alignment with Hitler seemed to fulfill the Communist dream of self-destruction of the "capitalist Powers".