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Author(s): Albert Resis

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The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German–Soviet Non-aggression Pact

ALBERT RESIS

HISTORIANS HAVE LONG SPECULATED on the reasons for Stalin's dismissal of Maxim Litvinov as Commissar for Foreign Affairs on 3 May 1939, and the connection it had, if any, with Stalin's subsequent rapprochement with Hitler. The consensus holds that the removal of Litvinov, the paladin of collective security, and his replacement by Molotov, were prompted by a policy difference, the rejection by Stalin and Molotov of Litvinov's orientation to the West. Thus 3 May steered the Soviet Union toward the Pact with Nazi Germany and away from alliance with Britain and France.¹ The revisionist or dissentient view contends that the dismissal was instead prompted by Kremlin politics, a murderous struggle for greater centralisation of foreign policy decision making and execution. It pitted Molotov against Litvinov in contention for Stalin's favour, but the outcome did not entail a fundamental shift in foreign policy.² The problem remains unresolved. Recent work by historians of the Russian Federation has made little advance on the question.³

The difficulty arises of course from the gap in the primary sources. Pending access by the world of scholarship to the Stalin and Molotov files, the Politburo protocols, and Narkomindel internal papers,⁴ any reconstruction of Soviet foreign policy decision making in 1939 must remain provisional. Nevertheless, a new, more nuanced, more firmly grounded explanation of the meaning of Litvinov's ouster is now possible. It shows that neither the consensus nor the revisionist view has it quite right. Moscow's recent declassification and publication of pertinent diplomatic papers relating to 1939 offer previously undisclosed documentation that now enables us to establish with greater certainty the proximate causes and consequences of Litvinov's removal.⁵

At first glance, the wonder is that Litvinov was not sacked or repressed before May 1939. In the wake of the grievous defeat inflicted on Litvinov by the Munich Agreement, his imminent dismissal became a topic of conjecture among foreign diplomats in Moscow⁶ as the NKVD devastated Litvinov's commissariat. Of senior diplomats, whether old Bolshevik, former Menshevik or one-time Tsarist, few had survived the Great Terror. Most notable were Litvinov himself, ambassadors Ivan Maisky in London, Jakob Surits in Paris, Boris Shtein in Rome and Aleksandra Kollontai in Stockholm. Writing to Stalin on 3 January 1939,⁷ Litvinov reported that Soviet missions in nine capitals lacked an ambassador: Washington, Tokyo, Warsaw, Bucharest, Barcelona, Kovno, Copenhagen, Budapest and Sofia. Teheran might be the

10th. Moscow could hardly know what was going on in these capitals, a situation that threatened, for example, to abort the incipient rapprochement with Poland.

Matters stood no better at lower levels. Embassy counsellors and secretaries and consuls and vice-consuls were being recalled and swept into the NKVD maw. There were vacancies abroad for nine counsellors, 22 secretaries, 30 consuls and vice-consuls and 46 other official posts. Even clerical positions in embassies remained vacant. Moscow had received no information from the London embassy of late, because it lacked typists. In Narkomindel's central apparatus, seven out of eight departments were headed by temporary appointees. Pending scrutiny of the cases of 12 diplomatic couriers, the commissariat was compelled to suspend courier service. Indeed, a majority of Narkomindel personnel could not obtain permission to go abroad, the plight of many new appointees slated to fill vacancies. Many of Litvinov's closest associates, even if not repressed, remained useless to the commissariat because they were denied access to secret documents. All this, Litvinov remarked, stoked the politically damaging charge in the West that the USSR had adopted a posture of self-isolation.

Keenly aware that none of this could happen without Stalin's direction or knowledge, Litvinov carefully avoided any hint of criticism. He simply described the damage the purge dealt the operation of the commissariat and proposed the appointment of a commission to study means of solving the personnel problem. The commission ought to include Georgii Malenkov and Litvinov, as well as one Politburo member. Litvinov's letter to Stalin did not halt NKVD havoc in Narkomindel. The following month Litvinov wrote again to Stalin to inform him that the commissariat had no information about what was going on in the Mongolian People's Republic (or in the Tana-Tuva Republic or in Szechuan), because three Soviet ambassadors in succession at Ulan-Bator were NKVD men who reported directly to their superiors rather than to Narkomindel.⁸

As the USSR embarked on the crucial negotiations of 1939, Litvinov found himself under close NKVD surveillance and Narkomindel in a state of semi-paralysis. Burdened by these pressures and the failure to win Western support for collective security, he drafted a letter of resignation but did not submit it, believing that duty required him to stay at his post in time of great danger to the country.⁹

On 3 May 1939 the axe finally fell. Although Stalin did not have Litvinov pilloried at a show trial, imprisoned or executed, he shelved the former commissar for possible use in the future. We now have Stalin's official explanation of what amounted to Litvinov's forced resignation. By telegram, Stalin informed Soviet emissaries accredited to the major world capitals that

in view of the serious conflict between Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Cde. [Comrade] Molotov and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Cde. Litvinov that arose owing to the disloyal attitude of Cde. Litvinov towards the USSR Council of Peoples Commissars, Cde. Litvinov has requested that he be released from his duties as People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs. The Central Committee of the Party has acceded to Cde. Litvinov's request ... Cde. Molotov has been appointed as People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs to serve concurrently as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.¹⁰

This telegram did not, however, spell out the nature of Litvinov's alleged 'disloyalty'.

In fact the Stalin message, referring to 'Comrade' Litvinov, indicated that the latter had not yet entirely lost Stalin's confidence. The bitter antagonism between Litvinov and Molotov and their rivalry to win Stalin's favour undoubtedly hastened Litvinov's departure from office. But firm evidence on differences they had over the short and long-term priorities of Soviet policy is scant. Molotov, for his part, in a meeting at the commissariat on 1 July 1939, explained the removal of Litvinov as follows:

Comrade Litvinov failed to ensure the pursuance of the party line, the line of the CPSU Central Committee in the People's Commissariat. It is wrong to say that before the People's Commissariat for Foreign affairs was non-Bolshevik ... but as regards the choice and training of the personnel, the commissariat was not quite Bolshevik, because Comrade Litvinov was clinging to a number of people alien and hostile to the party and to the Soviet state, and displayed a non-party attitude to the new people who had come to serve at the commissariat.¹¹

Yet it is not clear whether the purge victims were so labelled because they disagreed with official policy or because of the stock allegations of the Great Terror—fabricated charges of espionage, sabotage or 'lack of vigilance'. True, Litvinov scorned the new men brought into the commissariat. He regarded most of them as ignorant, provincial, incompetent party and NKVD hacks, innocent of Western languages and culture, who lacked the capacity or will to form independent judgments on questions of foreign policy.

There is, however, another element of domestic politics in the dismissal of Litvinov and many of his colleagues. Decades later, Molotov recounted that when he had taken over the foreign affairs commissariat, Stalin had said to him: 'Purge the ministry of Jews'. Recalling Stalin's order, Molotov commented: 'Thank God for these words! Jews formed an absolute majority in the leadership and among the ambassadors. It wasn't good. Latvians and Jews And each one drew a whole crowd of his people along with him. Moreover, they regarded my arrival in office with condescension and jeered at the measures I began to implement ...'. Absurdly denying any anti-semitism on the part of Stalin, Molotov held that this purge was designed to bring more ethnic Russians into top positions.¹²

All of these domestic political conflicts would have been more than enough to foreshorten Litvinov's career. But they are insufficient to explain why he was dropped on 3 May. The principal reason was in fact a fundamental disagreement over foreign policy direction that came to a head precisely at that juncture. A clue is found in Andrei Gromyko's memoirs. He recalled an argument he had overheard between Ambassador Litvinov and Molotov in Washington back in 1942:

We were talking about the French and the British, and Molotov sharply criticised their pre-war policy, which was aimed at pushing Hitler into war against the USSR. In other words he voiced the official party line. Litvinov disagreed. This had been the prime reason for his removal from the post of Foreign Commissar in 1939, yet here he was, still stubbornly defending Britain and France's refusal to join the Soviet Union and give Hitler a firm rebuff before he could make his fateful attack upon the USSR. Despite having been relieved of his post for such views, Litvinov continued to defend them in front of Molotov, and consequently in front of Stalin.¹³

But Gromyko's contention that Litvinov had contravened the party line's view of the

supposed perfidy of London and Paris is seemingly belied by everything Commissar Litvinov had said and done, especially in his communications with his subordinates and with Stalin. No one in the Soviet leadership outdid Litvinov in the wariness, distrust, suspicion and Stalinist 'vigilance' he manifested in his assessments of Western words, deeds and intentions. Otherwise Litvinov would have been unable to retain Stalin's confidence as long as he did. But something snapped in Litvinov around mid-April; he seemed to be losing his grip. Politically beleaguered at home, hounded by the NKVD, his initiatives and counterproposals spurned by his British and French negotiating partners, a drowning Litvinov began to clutch at straws: he turned receptive to British and French proposals Moscow had ordinarily dismissed out of hand.

In sum, Litvinov's policy of collective security, based on the premise of the 'indivisibility of peace', had since 1936 suffered almost continuous failure, culminating with Munich and the continued isolation of the USSR. In the end, Litvinov's most important gain remained the tremendous sympathy world-wide that his policies had won for the USSR. But public opinion victories without political substance would not satisfy Stalin. The growing danger posed by Germany and Japan to a USSR in isolation called, at the very least, for a new approach to the policy of collective security.

Consequently, in his speech to the XVIII Congress of the Party on 10 March 1939 Stalin reserved his sharpest barbs for the appeaser governments' failure to join with the USSR in collective security measures. Their policy of channeling the aggressors towards the USSR, he warned, might well boomerang. Propagandists in the democracies strove to provoke the USSR into a conflict with Germany over the Ukraine, but 'visible grounds' for such a conflict were absent. Besides, the USSR had straitjackets enough to constrain any 'lunatics' in Germany who would have a German-dominated Carpatho-Ukraine annex the Soviet Ukraine. At the same time, the Soviet Union stood 'for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries' (read: Germany). While the USSR would not be anybody's cat's paw, it supported nations which were the victims of aggression and were fighting to defend their independence. In any event, the USSR was strong enough in all respects to take care of its own defence.¹⁴ In short, Stalin implied that the non-aggressor states in their own security interests needed the USSR more than the USSR needed them. And Moscow still remained open to a trade agreement with Berlin.¹⁵

To translate the line Stalin had set at the congress into policy, Litvinov recommended that Moscow serve notice to London and Paris that it would no longer take the initiative in proposing collective security measures. Hereafter, the USSR would await such initiatives on the part of those who had yet to demonstrate that they had finally broken with appeasement. The USSR was prepared to examine and discuss any concrete proposal along those lines.¹⁶

Stalin evidently endorsed this position. Between 18 March and Litvinov's dismissal on 3 May the USSR initiated no new collective security proposals. Moscow instead responded to Anglo-French initiatives with three major counterproposals: the first on 20 March; the second on 22 March and the third on 17 April, which proposed a radically new approach to the problem.

The first counterproposal sprang from the alarm over a reported German ultimatum

to Romania. On 18 March Lord Halifax asked the Soviet Government whether it would, if requested by Romania, help the latter resist German invasion. London wanted to ascertain the position of other states before taking a decision of its own.¹⁷ Litvinov turned the question around; he asked Ambassador William Seeds what London proposed to do about the threat to Romania. Did London desire that the USSR engage itself militarily while Britain retained a free hand? And why did this request for support not issue directly from the Romanian Government?¹⁸ He urgently requested speedy instructions from Stalin on how to reply to British soundings.¹⁹

Stalin undoubtedly initiated or endorsed the response Litvinov gave Ambassador Seeds that very same evening. Litvinov's first counterproposal suggested the immediate convocation, preferably in Bucharest, of an international conference of representatives of the USSR, Britain, France, Poland and Romania (subsequently he added Turkey) for joint rather than one-to-one consultation on how to deal with the Romanian crisis.²⁰

The British Government deemed the Soviet proposal premature, Halifax told Maisky on 19 March. Circumstances required speedy action while such a conference would be time-consuming and, without certainty of success, dangerous. London then suggested instead as a first step that Britain, the USSR, France and Poland issue a joint declaration stating their interest in safeguarding the integrity and independence of states in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Halifax promised that the draft declaration would be ready the next day. Once signed by the four powers, the following states should be invited to clamber aboard the bandwagon: Turkey, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and other peace-loving states. At that point a conference, such as the USSR had suggested, could be held comprising the four initial signatory states and other states joining in the declaration.²¹

As Halifax had promised, on 20 March the British Government offered its projected Four-Power Declaration. The German occupation of Prague, London's *démarche* declared, directly or ultimately threatened every European state. London accordingly proposed that the UK, France, Poland and the USSR sign a joint declaration, holding that 'since European peace and security may be affected by any action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European state, our respective governments hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action'.²² Proposing a multilateral, unequivocal guarantee of the independence of *all* European states, it represented Chamberlain's first, and most portentous, initiative in collective security.

True, the declaration proposed neither the guarantee of the territorial integrity of European states Halifax mentioned on 19 March nor means of enforcement beyond 'consultations'. Nevertheless, the unprecedented omnibus guarantee of the political independence of any and all European states, presumably including all the states bordering the USSR from the Baltic to the Black Sea, raised high hopes in Moscow. Litvinov lost little time in replying positively with a second counterproposal to London. On 22 March Moscow agreed to sign the declaration if France and Poland promised their signatures. In addition, Litvinov suggested that the invitation to sign ought to be extended to the USSR's neighbours: Finland, the Baltic states and the Scandinavian countries.²³ Thus, Litvinov added the states of Northeastern Europe

omitted from Halifax's 19 March list of guarantor states in order to double-lock the gate to the Baltic invasion route.

From that time forward, Moscow demanded that any collective guarantee of the independence of European states must cover Estonia, Latvia and Finland—whether they desired such a guarantee or not. Lithuania, which had no common border with the USSR, was given up as more or less lost from 22–23 March, when Germany seized Memel (Klaipeda) and forced Kaunas to sign an unconditional non-aggression treaty. Meanwhile, Litvinov on 28 March sent analogous notes to Estonia and Latvia forewarning them of serious consequences should they permit Germany to impair their independence and neutrality.²⁴

Although Halifax had urged speedy action, a week passed without an official British response to Moscow's qualified approval of the projected Four-Power Declaration. On 29 March Maisky queried Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-secretary, Foreign Office, on the reason for the delayed response. Cadogan explained that the Poles quite categorically and the Romanians somewhat less so had declared that they would join no peace bloc with the USSR.

To get around the Polish and Romanian blackball of the USSR, Cadogan said, London now contemplated a two-stage approach to the Four-Power Declaration. At the first stage, Britain and France would initiate a four-power peace bloc to include Poland and Romania and assume a firm obligation to aid them by force of arms if they were attacked by Germany and resisted. Maisky, astonished by this statement, replied that he could not imagine Chamberlain giving a firm guarantee to Poland and Romania. Assured by Cadogan that the government would most probably adopt this position, Maisky, incredulous, said that if adopted that would be tantamount to a revolution in British foreign policy. Cadogan agreed; nevertheless, the cabinet now did favour such guarantees. For the present, Britain and France would sideline the USSR. But at the second stage, after this quadripartite defence bloc had been formed, the USSR could be brought in, at which time the British Government would take up with the Soviet Union the forms that Soviet cooperation might assume.²⁵

Most astonishing, Maisky raised no objection to this scheme, which, even if only temporarily, excluded the USSR.²⁶ Meanwhile, Halifax had not replied to the Soviet counterproposal and had not seen Maisky since 19 March. But in view of the contemplated Anglo-French guarantees to Poland and Romania, which if granted would enormously increase Soviet security gratis, Maisky refrained from any criticism.

On 31 March, at 1 p.m., Halifax finally saw Maisky. Halifax emphasised that the talks on creating a united front against aggression begun two weeks earlier remained in force, and London intended to continue them vigorously. He doubted, however, whether the 20 March draft declaration Britain proposed had any chance. Now other forms of collective action should be sought. Meanwhile, the imminence of a German attack on Poland required that Britain adopt extraordinary measures. Chamberlain would announce in the Commons at 3 p.m. that any action that clearly threatened the independence of Poland, and was resisted by Polish national forces, would impel Britain, supported by France, to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. Although the suggested Four-Power Declaration was bound to encounter difficulties, Britain hoped to achieve its ends by the two-stage approach that London was now taking.²⁷

Maisky noted that the Prime Minister's statement that the British Government would 'lend the Polish Government all support in their power' was susceptible to diverse interpretations of British intentions. Moreover, Moscow had not been consulted beforehand on the matter. Nevertheless, if, as stated, the British Government did not intend to drop the idea of creating a united front of peace-loving powers, he generally would regard the statement as a step forward compared with previous declarations made by the British Government on resisting aggression. In conclusion Halifax stated that he would take up the matter of Polish-Soviet relations with Beck when the latter visited London the following week.²⁸

Litvinov, however, took sharp issue with Maisky's positive assessment of the Prime Minister's statement. Litvinov vented his exasperation on ambassador William Seeds, who had expected that Litvinov, too, would give qualified approval of Chamberlain's action. Instead, Litvinov bitterly complained that he had yet to receive an official reply to the USSR's acceptance of the proposed Four-Power Declaration. He could not know whether the Declaration had fallen through or whether Chamberlain's statement on Poland was to be understood as a precondition for Poland's acceptance of the Declaration. Seeds said he thought the question of the Declaration dead. A chagrined Litvinov doubted whether England had really taken the path of fighting aggression wherever it occurred. Embittered, he asked, was it not instead a matter of an agreement between England, France and Poland, or even Romania, prompted by 'special considerations and interests' (read: anti-Soviet gang-up). The USSR had replied positively to England's proposed Four-Power Declaration, yet nothing had come of it. The USSR had had enough; it now considered itself free of any commitments. In cases of aggression, the USSR would act in accordance with its own interests.²⁹

If what the British have said about the position taken by Poland is true, Litvinov wrote to Maisky, Chamberlain must be indescribably glad to have the opportunity to blame Poland and Romania for the failure of the Declaration and similar undertakings. The Chamberlain-Halifax policy strengthened Poland's position in negotiations with Hitler. Thus Beck might induce Hitler to accept a compromise: Danzig and the 'Corridor' to Germany in exchange for Lithuania. Then having secured Poland's neutrality, Hitler could direct his energies elsewhere. Chamberlain's unexpected readiness to pledge aid to Poland and Romania might prompt Hitler to direct his aggression to the Baltic region, leading to the Soviet-German clash Chamberlain devoutly wished.³⁰

Still, Litvinov regarded it as inconceivable that Britain would allow Poland's Foreign Minister Józef Beck to dictate the membership of the proposed anti-aggression bloc. It was up to Chamberlain and Daladier to speak the last word on that matter. They should not harbour the delusion that the USSR might accept relegation to the subordinate position assigned it under the so-called two-stage design to constitute a peace bloc. The USSR would accept no role allotted it by a combination of states without Soviet participation. Maisky must make London understand that Moscow would not accept such 'consultations' and 'close cooperation'.³¹

Halifax apprised Maisky of the agreement reached in the Anglo-Polish talks in London on 4-6 April. Maisky in turn grilled Halifax with 'inquisitorial persistence' on the precise obligations entailed in the Anglo-Polish agreement that 'would assure

Great Britain and Poland of mutual assistance in the event of any threat, direct or indirect, to the independence of either'.³² Halifax assured Maisky that no secret agreements had been concluded at the talks. Beck had told Halifax that Poland could participate in no bloc or agreement that included the USSR, because (a) such action would violate Poland's policy of balancing between Germany and the USSR and (b) under no circumstance would the Poles allow the Red Army on their territory. Britain, Halifax informed Maisky, had nevertheless successfully included a clause in the Anglo-Polish agreement stipulating that the accord did not preclude either government from reaching agreements with other countries in the interests of general peace. London had insisted on this clause in order to ensure Britain the freedom to enlist the USSR in the projected security system. The British Government counted on a favourable attitude by the USSR toward the Anglo-Polish treaty, which London regarded not as an end in itself but as a first step to the establishment of a broad coalition of peace-loving states against aggression. He, Halifax, would exert every effort to bring about the USSR's indispensable participation as soon as possible.³³

Maisky in his report to Moscow now derided Britain's alleged break with appeasement. In guaranteeing Poland, Chamberlain had neither advanced to collective security nor returned to Britain's time-tested policy of fighting any power bent on domination of the continent. He was talking about extending guarantees to states which, while calling for British assistance, were incapable of helping Britain or themselves. If he were serious in opposing German aggression in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, he would first of all come to terms with the USSR, the key to any system of European security. Instead, he was merely temporising until circumstances allowed an open return to appeasement.³⁴ Furthermore, Chamberlain's dilatory action in respect of a guarantee to Romania showed that he still wanted to leave Hitler a 'corridor' through Hungary and Romania to the borders of the Soviet Ukraine.³⁵ Litvinov and his subordinates appeared to outdo each other in ascribing the most sinister ulterior motives to the Chamberlain government.

Nor did Moscow place much hope or trust in France. True, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, convinced by his military of imminent German aggression, had told Surits on 7 April that it was urgent that the USSR and France immediately concert measures to counter a German attack on Romania or Poland, surely the preliminary to a German showdown with the USSR or France. Bonnet seemed to have in mind an update of the Franco-Soviet Pact that would provide Soviet assistance to France in meeting its allied commitments to Poland and Romania.³⁶

Litvinov regarded Bonnet as an even more incorrigible appeaser than Chamberlain. Bonnet's line, Litvinov wrote to Stalin, boiled down to France's renunciation of any intervention whatsoever in the affairs of Europe, except in cases of a direct attack on France itself or on its immediate neighbours, Belgium and Switzerland. Litvinov suggested a reply that rehashed Soviet complaints but closed, nevertheless, with the assurance that the USSR was prepared to consider any concrete proposal made by the French Government. The next day Litvinov instructed Surits to convey this message to Bonnet.³⁷

On 10 April Bonnet again broached with Surits the question of the aid the Soviet

Government might render Poland or Romania in the event of the approaching general conflict. The Soviet Government, Surits replied, had no assistance pact with Poland and had only a commitment to France. He did not see why his government should itself propose aid unsolicited by the interested states. Bonnet replied that it was imperative that the USSR secure agreement either with Poland or with Romania in order for the Franco-Soviet Pact to take full effect. Poland or Romania might at the very least accept indirect aid from the USSR if offered through the French Government. Should Romania or Poland refuse this offer, Paris and Moscow could consult on the next step. The question would not brook delay.³⁸

Although Bonnet had urged the USSR to commit itself unilaterally to supply Poland or Romania in the event of a German attack, he did not indicate the assistance France would render either state. On the same day, in a panic, he raised his offer. Bonnet exhorted the Soviet Government to join France in an examination of practical measures to be taken in response to German aggression.³⁹

Overwrought, Bonnet also proposed that the USSR consider conclusion of separate bilateral pacts of mutual assistance with Poland and Romania. In the heat of the moment, he also suggested a measure that moved France much closer to the Soviet position than any measure Britain was then proposing to Moscow. Apparently off the cuff, he said he was ready immediately to sign a tripartite declaration with the USSR and Britain (without Poland), but he did not mention the terms of such a declaration. Surits attributed this policy shift in Paris to Daladier's ascendancy over Bonnet and advised against its outright rejection. But Litvinov deemed this proposal devoid of significance, for Bonnet knew that it was unacceptable to Britain and to the USSR as well.⁴⁰

On the next day, 11 April, Premier and Minister of War Daladier instructed the French military attaché in Moscow to inform the Soviet General Staff that France was prepared jointly to study the aid that might be rendered Poland and Romania. The immediate practical question, Daladier wrote, was to spell out forthwith the nature of the war materiel the USSR might supply to these two countries! The Soviet staff replied that it would prefer the matter to be submitted to the Soviet Government through the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs.⁴¹ After four years of failed efforts exerted by the Soviet General Staff to engage its French counterpart in talks to coordinate their military plans,⁴² Daladier's risible proposal could only affront Moscow. Litvinov informed the French military attaché that matters affecting the organisation of security in the face of the German threat could be settled only by a conference of powers directly interested. Undeterred, Daladier noted that such a conference was unnecessary and asked Bonnet to pursue this 'very simple matter' directly with the Soviet Foreign Ministry.⁴³

Litvinov summarily rejected Surits's positive assessment of France's new offers. No evidence of a change in Anglo-French policy toward the USSR existed, he wrote. They simply wanted to fob off domestic parliamentary opposition by claiming that they were in consultation with the USSR. In fact, since negotiations for the initial four-power declaration had fallen through, London and Paris had offered no concrete proposal linking them to the USSR. Instead, they wanted Moscow to assume unilateral commitments to be fulfilled at the discretion of Warsaw and Bucharest. The USSR would not commit itself in advance without obtaining anything in exchange.

Bonnet's suggestion that the USSR sign a tripartite declaration with France and Britain but without Poland was an empty gesture.⁴⁴

In short, negotiations with Britain and France on a projected declaration, whether Halifax's or Bonnet's version, had ground to a halt. Poland would not join any peace front that included the USSR; the USSR would not sign a proposed declaration without Poland's adhesion. The obduracy of Warsaw and Moscow on this issue played into the hands of Chamberlain and Halifax who, when forced to choose, gave priority to alliance with Poland over partnership with the USSR.⁴⁵ Hence, the Anglo-Polish mutual assistance agreement of 6 April.

Litvinov now conjured up the spectre of an Anglo-French-Polish-Romanian coalition taking shape against the USSR. The Anglo-French guarantees to Poland, Litvinov wrote, only strengthened the hand of Poland's Foreign Minister, Colonel Józef Beck, to strike a bargain with Hitler in which Poland would restore the Corridor and Danzig to Germany, and Germany would compensate Poland at the expense of the Baltic states. In an *outré* assessment, Litvinov held that Britain, having pledged assistance to Poland without the precondition that Poland accept Soviet participation, had in fact concluded a treaty with Poland *against* the USSR. True, Moscow did not intend to attack Poland; nevertheless, the British guarantee, by strengthening Poland's position *vis-à-vis* the USSR, could not fail to be an 'inimical act'.⁴⁶

Litvinov instructed Maisky to probe Halifax tactfully on the possible anti-Soviet character entailed in Britain's projected pledges of aid to Poland and to Romania. Did Britain designedly enter into anti-Soviet agreements, or was it drawn in by others? Particularly inadmissible would be Britain's association with the Polish-Romanian Treaty of Alliance of 1921, which was concluded openly against the USSR and affected the Bessarabian issue. Despite Halifax's claim that he was in close contact with us, he did not deem it necessary to notify you of the British statement to the Romanian Government. Of course the USSR had no intention of attacking Poland; nevertheless, the USSR was entitled to expect that Britain clearly specify that the aid it pledged Poland operated exclusively against German aggression.⁴⁷

Italy's occupation of Albania on 7 April heightened concern over Axis intentions toward Southeastern Europe. On 11 April Halifax informed Maisky that on 13 April London would issue a guarantee of the frontiers and independence of Greece and some form of guarantee to Turkey. So far Beck had balked at a joint British-Polish guarantee of Romania. But Maisky's immediate concern was the Baltic area. As instructed, he asked Halifax whether Beck had mentioned the question of German aggression northeastward toward the Baltic area. Had Beck spoken to him about the possible seizure by Poland of a Latvian port? No, said Halifax.⁴⁸

Despite Halifax's claim that Britain had adopted a new policy, Maisky saw nothing new in it. He did not see why Britain and France did not make the offer of assistance to Poland and Romania conditional on their adopting a reasonable attitude towards acceptance of Soviet military aid. Only genuine collective security, Maisky said, could check aggression and consolidate the peace, not separate agreements between individual powers. Halifax agreed in principle. The British Government, he averred, was moving towards the goal of collective security but from the other end: from separate agreements to a general agreement without bandying about the compromised phrase 'collective security'.⁴⁹ On 13 April Chamberlain stated in the House of

Commons that British and French separate statements guaranteeing the independence of Greece and Romania were being communicated to Athens and Bucharest.⁵⁰

A significant shift in Soviet posture ensued. Maisky had repeated to Halifax the stock Soviet objections to any British action that fell short of collective security. Litvinov now, undoubtedly at Stalin's direction, reproved Maisky for having indulged in unauthorised criticism of British policy. The ambassador's remarks, Litvinov charged, might mislead Halifax to believe that the USSR opposed any security arrangement short of a single, overarching, multilateral system of collective security. To avoid any Foreign Office misunderstanding on this score, Litvinov instructed Maisky to inform Halifax that the USSR was not indifferent to the fate of Romania and was prepared to cooperate in giving such assistance. But Moscow first wanted to know how Britain envisaged its aid and the aid to be rendered by other interested powers to Romania.⁵¹

In other words, Stalin at that point apparently ordered Narkomindel not to call into question the gift of the Anglo-French unilateral guarantees of independence issued to Romania, Greece and Poland respectively. Falling far short of Moscow's ideal, multilateral, collective security agreement, these guarantees nevertheless enhanced Soviet security—gratis. Soviet security all along the European frontier was greatly strengthened, except in the Baltic region. That gap would continue to be a major stumbling block in subsequent negotiations with Britain and France.

On 14 April a shift also occurred in British policy toward the USSR. Halifax expressed appreciation for the Soviet willingness to come to the aid of Romania. As concerns the best method of rendering such assistance, he now instructed Ambassador William Seeds to ask Litvinov whether the Soviet Government would consider it possible to offer unilateral guarantees to Poland and Romania and perhaps also to certain other states analogous to those Britain and France had just given Greece and Romania. This would avoid the difficulties that had wrecked the Four-Power Declaration. Maisky replied that he had no instructions regarding these questions but thought collective security was still the best method. Dismissing this view, Halifax replied that, under the old idea of collective security, 'we sometimes deluded ourselves into thinking that words were the same as action'. In view of the very serious danger, Halifax hoped to have the Soviet reply to the British proposal no later than 17 April.⁵²

In short, by mid-April the Chamberlain Government had backed away from its first collective security initiative made to the USSR, the projected Four-Power Declaration. Halifax defensively asserted that Britain's guarantees to Poland and Romania and its request that Moscow issue similar declarations were quite in accord with Stalin's statement of 10 March holding that the USSR would assist victims of aggression fighting to save their independence. Accordingly, Seeds, on Halifax's instructions, asked Litvinov:

Would the Soviet Government agree to make a public declaration ... that in the event of any act of aggression against any European neighbour of the Soviet Union which resisted such an action, the assistance of the Soviet Government would be available, if desired, and would be afforded in such a manner as would be found most convenient?⁵³

Although this British proposal marked a full retreat from London's previous proposals, Litvinov gave it a polite hearing and promised he would transmit it to his

government. He objected, however, that such a unilateral declaration would bind the Soviet Government without committing anyone else. Seeds replied that Britain was committed to the hilt; moreover, a Soviet unilateral declaration would befit the position of the Soviet Government as a Great Power. But Litvinov would not be fobbed off. According to the Soviet record, Litvinov reminded Seeds that London had not yet answered Moscow's query: how did the British Government envisage its own aid and the USSR's to guaranteed states? Evidently, London favoured abstract declarations of principle over precise commitments to previously coordinated forms of assistance.⁵⁴

On the same day, 14 April, Bonnet suggested to Surits that France and Russia supplement their mutual assistance treaty of 1935. In an exchange of secret letters, they should undertake to assist each other in the event either found itself at war with Germany as a consequence of coming to the aid of Poland or Romania. Both governments would also without delay concert on the forms of such aid and adopt every measure to guarantee its full effectiveness. Surits in his report to Litvinov mischaracterised Bonnet's proposal as a somewhat comical attempt to pass off a unilateral proposal as one possessing a bilateral character. After all, Bonnet knew it was not a serious proposal and that there was no chance of the USSR accepting it.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, it did contain more than a modicum of Great Power reciprocity. The next day, however, before Moscow could act on it, Bonnet, under British suasion, more or less backed away from his offer. He told British Ambassador Phipps that he preferred the British proposal that the USSR issue a unilateral guarantee to Poland and Romania; he would accordingly instruct the French ambassador in Moscow at once.⁵⁶ He then told Surits on 15 April that he was not retracting the previous day's offer but believed the British proposal sufficiently capacious to encompass it.⁵⁷

By 15 April this flurry of proposals had thrown tripartite negotiations into deadlock. Three proposals were on the negotiating table: one, since 22 March, Moscow had insisted on acceptance of its counterproposal that projected a four-power declaration (the USSR, Britain, France and Poland) to guarantee the independence of all the states of Eastern Europe, including the Baltic countries; two, on 14 April, Britain proposed that the USSR issue unilateral guarantees of the independence of Poland and Romania, and perhaps other states, parallel to those Britain and France had issued; and three, on the same day, France proposed a secret Franco-Soviet agreement on joint defence of Poland and Romania against German aggression but on the next day expressed preference for the British proposal.⁵⁸

In Moscow's view, the British and French proposals bore little resemblance to the Soviet concept of collective security, which required at the very least tripartite, not separate, guarantees of the independence of the Baltic states as well as of Poland and Romania—whether these states wanted such guarantees or not. Nevertheless, Litvinov by mid-April in fact warmed to parts of the latest British and French proposals, if understood as steps toward the goal of collective security, not as substitutes. Litvinov, rebuffed abroad and politically beleaguered at home, was clutching at straws to attain some kind of agreement with London and Paris by blending the three proposals.

Consequently, the USSR's third and most important counterproposal underwent a difficult birth. Moscow had first to sort out its own position. Litvinov suggested to

Stalin that he publish in the Soviet press an 'interview' in which Litvinov would expound the Soviet position regarding the latest proposals from London and Paris. First, he would deny that the USSR had chosen a course of self-isolation as charged by the Western press. The USSR remained as interested as ever in collective security. But inasmuch as Soviet collective security initiatives had been spurned by London and Paris, Moscow had every right to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, leaving it to other states to take the initiative. Second, he would point out that Britain, France and Poland were all interconnected by a network of bilateral agreements on mutual assistance. But, as regards the USSR, Britain and France proposed that Moscow, in its own self-interest, should take upon itself non-reciprocal obligations to Poland and Romania. The Soviet Government could not undertake unilateral obligations to extend military assistance to other states while these states remained free of obligation to the USSR.⁵⁹ In short, faced by the mounting threat of Nazi Germany, the USSR, alone of the powers, had no mutual security alliances (except the dormant alliance with France). Moscow would welcome new ones.

Litvinov was now prepared to accept the Halifax and Bonnet proposals as the starting point of negotiations. Although the USSR could take care of its own security and had its own preferences on modes of mutual security, the 'interview' continued, Moscow did not exclude other forms of joint action. Such security measures could take the form of bilateral, trilateral and other agreements if these clearly and precisely spelled out reciprocal obligations.⁶⁰

This draft 'interview' was not published. Stalin evidently vetoed Litvinov's idea that the USSR should accept the latest Anglo-French proposals as a basis for negotiation. Brought up short by Stalin, Litvinov hastily drafted a fresh counterproposal.

Still, Litvinov did not entirely back away from the premise underlying his 'interview' *manqué*. However unacceptable the British and French proposals were, he wrote to Stalin, they still left room for bargaining. The other side could not be expected at the outset to offer the USSR exactly what it wanted; a lengthy process of diplomatic give-and-take lay ahead. He spelled out his view of Soviet desiderata in the following negotiating terms:

1. Mutual obligation on assistance between Britain, France and the Soviet Union in the event of aggression against one of them as a consequence of assistance rendered to any European neighbour of the USSR. (Litvinov noted that this point differed from the British suggestion by substituting a 'bilateral pact'⁶¹ for a unilateral declaration and from the French proposal by extending the guarantees to the Baltic states and Finland.)
2. Britain, France and the USSR bind themselves each to the other to render assistance to the European neighbours of the USSR.
3. Representatives of the three states immediately commence to discuss and establish the scope and forms of assistance.
4. The USSR, Britain and France pledge not to conclude agreements with other governments on questions concerning Eastern Europe without concurrence of the three states. Likewise, they undertake not to conclude a separate peace with aggressors.

On the same day, Litvinov sent copies of this memorandum to Stalin, Molotov, Commissar for Defence Kliment Voroshilov and Deputy Chairman of Sovnarkom Lazar Kaganovich,⁶² who constituted a Politburo foreign affairs committee.⁶³

Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich regarded Litvinov's memorandum of 15 April as grossly inadequate. They significantly revised and expanded it into a comprehensive counter-proposal, dated 17 April, which Litvinov then polished for Stalin's approval.⁶⁴ Litvinov presented this third counterproposal to Seeds on the same day; Surits presented it to Bonnet on 18 April.⁶⁵

The Soviet counterproposal plainly represented Stalin's debut in the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Regarded since as Commissar Litvinov's handiwork and last throw of the diplomatic dice, the main lines of the third counterproposal were in fact directly laid down by Stalin aided by Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich. The Politburo foreign policy *chetverka* began in fact to take over the day-to-day direction of Soviet foreign policy and return it to the Soviet collective security fundamentalism from which Litvinov had begun to stray. Stalin, seconded by Molotov, henceforth proposed as well as disposed in Soviet foreign relations.

Unlike Litvinov, who still countenanced the idea of negotiating bilateral mutual assistance treaties with Britain and France to defend third states, the *chetverka* paid only lip service to the French proposal for a such an alliance. They proposed instead an overarching triple alliance having a period of five to ten years. First, Britain, France and the USSR would conclude an agreement to oblige themselves mutually to render forthwith all manner of assistance, including military, in case of aggression against any one of them. Second, they would undertake to render all manner of assistance, including military, to the Eastern European states situated between the Baltic and the Black Sea and bordering on the USSR, in case of aggression against these states. Third, the three powers would conclude within the shortest possible time a convention that would specify the extent and forms of military assistance each signatory state would render in fulfilment of its pact obligations. Fourth, the political agreement must be signed simultaneously with the military convention. Fifth, the signatories would pledge not to enter into separate negotiations or a separate peace with the aggressors in the event of hostilities.

Ancillary points required that (a) the British Government declare that the assistance it promised Poland would be applied exclusively to aggression on the part of Germany; (b) the Polish–Romanian alliance be declared as exclusively applying to a case of aggression against Poland and Romania or else be revoked altogether as targeting the USSR. Finally, it called for joint negotiations with Turkey to conclude a special agreement on mutual assistance.⁶⁶

In this hard-and-fast triple pact of mutual assistance, Moscow bluntly laid out three radical demands that differentiated it from all previous British and French proposals. First, it called for a triple defence alliance: a direct attack on one would be considered an attack on all. Second, the triple alliance would, by armed assistance if necessary, jointly guarantee the independence of *all* Eastern European states bordering the USSR—whether these states desired such a guarantee or not. Third, the counterproposal presupposed that only guarantees backed by multilateral military commitments could deter Hitler; hence the demand for a military convention.

Underpinning the counterproposal lay an unstated purpose rooted in Soviet threat

perceptions: the perceived need to close off any anti-Soviet military coalition from the Polish, Romanian and, most immediately, the Baltic invasion routes.⁶⁷ The counterproposal thus represented Moscow's irreducible terms for a grand alliance and for Soviet maximum security. Moscow doggedly held to these terms—and more—in its alliance negotiations with London and Paris, and quite successfully right up to 23 August 1939.

The *chetverka* counterproposal differed also from Litvinov's memorandum in two ways. Litvinov had limited mutual assistance to cases where an ally was subjected to attack as a consequence of its lending military assistance to an Eastern European state subjected to aggression. In contrast, the *chetverka* extended mutual assistance to cover cases in which one of the partners was subjected to direct attack. Second, they dropped Litvinov's point four. This clause would have bound the USSR, as well as Britain and France, to refrain from negotiating separately with Germany on questions of Eastern European security. Plainly, Litvinov in frustration was losing his grip. Judging by his proposed 'interview' and memorandum, he was yielding to British and French negotiating pressure. No less alarming to Stalin, Litvinov was even prepared to preclude separate Soviet negotiations with Hitler. That Stalin was not prepared to accept. Litvinov's diplomacy at this juncture would have diminished rather than enlarged Stalin's room to manoeuvre in the international arena. Litvinov's days in office were numbered.

The Kremlin had evidently decided that it must dispel British and French illusions regarding Soviet pliability, personified by Litvinov. Halifax had stated on 14 April that he hoped to receive Moscow's response to his suggestion that the USSR extend unilateral guarantees of Polish and Romanian independence no later than 17 April. But the Kremlin would not be hustled into unilateral commitments, and answered instead with its 17 April triple-alliance counterproposal. The next move was again up to London and Paris, now confronted by a Soviet hard line that had little or no give.

The time had come for Moscow to take stock. What were the prospects for British and French acceptance of the Soviet counterproposal? A full dress review of Soviet foreign policy was now held in Stalin's office on 19 and 21 April.⁶⁸ On 19 April Litvinov, accompanied by Potemkin, saw Stalin for an hour and 10 minutes in the presence of Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikoyan and Kaganovich. They were joined for 20 minutes by Boris Shtein, who had been negotiating in Helsinki to acquire Finnish territory for Soviet bases. Beria joined the Politburo members for the last 40 minutes of their meeting. Maisky,⁶⁹ summoned from London, and Ambassador Aleksei Merekalov, called from Berlin, joined the meeting of 21 April. Absent was Surits, probably because Bonnet was still wavering between support of the British proposal and his own off-the-cuff suggestions. Moreover, in the absence of Emile Naggiar between February and late May owing to illness, France had no ambassador in the USSR. Paris, by default, served during the interim as the venue of Franco-Soviet negotiations.

As viewed from Moscow, London had backed away from its own collective security proposals and then stalled its reply to the Soviet counterproposal of 22 March, evidently in the belief that Moscow would be impelled by lack of an alternative to issue the unilateral guarantees suggested by Britain. London was now slow to reply to the Soviet counterproposal of 17 April.

In contrast, when Bonnet received the third counterproposal on 18 April he responded positively to every one of its points except the guarantee of the Baltic states. In his formal response of 25 April he told Surits that only the clause pertaining to the Baltic states was unacceptable to France. But the complexity of the Soviet counterproposal, he added, precluded speedy adoption while the current situation required quick decisions. Accordingly, he renewed his offer to Moscow of a three-power agreement to guarantee the independence of Poland and Romania. It would require the USSR to come to the defence of Britain and France should they find themselves at war with Germany as a consequence of aid provided to Poland or Romania. Britain and France, however, would be bound to come to the defence of the USSR only if it found itself at war with Germany as a consequence of aid provided to Britain and France, a flagrant imbalance Bonnet corrected four days later.⁷⁰ But he adamantly refused to extend the proposed tripartite guarantees to cover the Baltic states. In sum, the prospects for acceptance of the counterproposal by Britain and France seemed dim.

And Germany? Hitler at his New Year's reception for the diplomatic corps had engaged Ambassador Merekalov in a friendly conversation that had set diplomatic tongues wagging. At a dinner given by Hitler in March, Merekalov and his wife were not seated below the salt but were placed near Hitler and Goering. The conviviality of Goering's after-dinner chat with Merekalov prompted the ambassador to recommend that Moscow when opportune invite Goering to pay Moscow an official visit.⁷¹ On liquidating Czechoslovakia, Hitler had awarded the Carpatho-Ukraine to Hungary, thus relinquishing a potential vassal 'Ukrainian Piedmont'. The armistice in the Soviet-German propaganda war was holding. Although Berlin had in March rescinded an offer to negotiate a new trade treaty in Moscow, it now appeared, judging by Merekalov's 17 April meeting with State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, that Germany was ready to develop trade relations with the USSR, opposing ideologies notwithstanding.⁷² Soviet intelligence may have learned that the phrase 'it may become necessary to occupy the Baltic states up to the border of the former Courland and incorporate them in the Reich' was deleted from the plan to invade Poland two days after Hitler had signed it.⁷³

Against this background, Stalin at the meeting on 21 April asked Merekalov point-blank: 'Will the Germans start a war against us or not?' Merekalov, according to his reminiscences, replied that Hitler would seize Poland by the autumn of 1939, bringing the Germans to the Soviet border. They would seek to attain the subsequent neutralisation of the USSR while they dealt with France. After they had solved that task, they would in two to three years time launch the inevitable war against the USSR. Stalin reacted positively to this report. No discussion took place, and Stalin told Merekalov he was free to leave.⁷⁴

In short, for the conferees in Moscow, short-term prospects began to look up in Berlin while London distanced itself from the Soviet conception of collective security and Paris vacillated. Despite the failure hitherto of Litvinov's approach toward the goal of collective security, he was now entrusted, probably on probation,⁷⁵ with the task of implementing collective security policy, Stalinist-style. This new approach placed the Soviet counterproposal for a grand alliance at the starting point of negotiations to the total exclusion of Anglo-French proposals. Litvinov's fate now

hinged on the nature of the British and French responses to the triple alliance proposed by the Soviet Union.

Maisky returned to London on 28 April and was received the next day by Halifax. The latter said that he still had no definitive reply to the Soviet counterproposal and hardly expected to have one before the coming week. The British Government, he explained, had been preoccupied by other matters such as adoption of conscription. While he found the Soviet counterproposal logical and well-formulated, he doubted its feasibility owing to Polish and Romanian opposition. In defence of the British proposal, he strove to disabuse the Soviet Government of its fear of being made Britain's cat's paw. London, he asserted, envisaged the USSR lending military assistance to victims of aggression only after Britain itself went into military action. Maisky alluded to suspicions raised by the early return of Ambassador Neville Henderson to Berlin following his recall to London in the wake of the German occupation of Prague. Henderson's return, Halifax claimed, did not signal a resumption of general negotiations with Hitler. The ambassador's instructions only required that he apprise Hitler of Britain's imminent adoption of conscription. Maisky was not impressed by Halifax's brief. Patchwork attempts at strengthening international security were, Maisky said, inefficacious. The only one way to deal with Hitler was to strengthen the anti-aggression front and extend it to cover all possible points of danger⁷⁶ that is, accept the Soviet offer of a triple alliance.

In contrast to Halifax's footdragging, on 29 April Bonnet offered the USSR what appeared to be a further French advance toward collective security:

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

If the USSR found itself in a state of war with Germany as a result of the action which it had taken with a view to preventing all changes by force of the existing status quo in Central and Eastern Europe, France and Great Britain would immediately lend it aid and assistance. The three governments would concert without delay on the nature, in both cases contemplated, of this assistance and will take all steps to ensure its full efficacy.⁷⁷

It is difficult to find anything in this proposal objectionable to the USSR. True, it was not a straight pact of mutual assistance; it did not explicitly cover the three states against a direct attack on any one of them by Germany. But the French proposal finally put the USSR on an equal footing with Britain and France as regards the consequences of lending assistance to fourth parties. By guaranteeing the states of Central and Eastern Europe against changes in the status quo by force, the proposal covered cases both of direct and indirect aggression. Unlike the British proposal, it did not make assistance to a victim of aggression contingent on whether that country offered armed resistance to the aggressor. Thus it left the decision on *casus foederis* in the hands of each of the three guarantors, not in the hands of the guaranteed states. Indeed, the French proposal had much in common with the Soviet counterproposal and marked a tremendous advance over previous French and British offers. It is therefore puzzling that Moscow did not promptly grasp this proposal at least in principle.

But there is no puzzle. On the same day, Bonnet informed Surits that by the states of 'Central and Eastern Europe' he meant Poland, Romania and Turkey,⁷⁸ thus excluding any Anglo-French guarantees of the Baltic states and Finland. For Moscow that was the fatal flaw. Before responding negatively to Bonnet's *démarche*, however, Litvinov waited for London's overdue response.

Finally on 3 May, Ambassador Seeds called on Litvinov to say that he had been instructed by Halifax several days earlier to assure Moscow out of courtesy that the British Government was studying the Soviet counterproposal. London had delayed its reply owing to the government's absorption in the question of conscription and other matters. Litvinov pressed him to explain how Britain would react to aggression against a guaranteed country. Would the British Government declare war? Declarations of war, Seeds replied, were rather out of fashion these days, but under promises made to Poland and other countries an aggressor on such a country that resisted a clear threat to its national independence would find itself in a state of war with Britain. Seeds admitted to Halifax that on this point he might have exceeded his instructions but pleaded that London would gain nothing in Moscow simply by reiterating that the British Government would lend all support 'in their power' to a guaranteed state.⁷⁹

On the same day Litvinov informed Stalin by memorandum that Britain had again balked. London, Litvinov wrote, would delay its reply pending Moscow's response to Bonnet's latest proposal of a triple pact of mutual assistance and would then simply repeat its proposal that the USSR issue unilateral guarantees. The positive aspects of this French proposal notwithstanding, Litvinov recommended its outright rejection. The sticking point was Bonnet's refusal to extend guarantees to Finland, Estonia and Latvia. On this issue the USSR was intransigent. Bonnet must be told that Moscow required acceptance of its counterproposal *en bloc*. Litvinov also suggested, however, that the USSR might agree to guarantee Holland, Belgium and Switzerland in exchange for Anglo-French guarantees of the Baltic states.⁸⁰

This memorandum proved to be the last report on Soviet relations with Britain and France addressed to Stalin by Litvinov as Commissar. For Stalin it proved to be the last straw as regards Litvinov. Britain had allowed more than two weeks, marked by feeble excuses for the delay, to pass without giving Moscow a direct answer to the Soviet counterproposal. (In fact the British Cabinet had decided almost immediately, on 19 April, that the Soviet counterproposal was unacceptable but did not so inform Moscow until 8 May.)⁸¹ On 3 May, for the first time since 21 April, Litvinov was called to Stalin's office. There, from 5:15 to 5:50 p.m., in the presence of most of the Politburo members (only Zhdanov and Khrushchev were absent),⁸² he was undoubtedly forced to resign his post.

Litvinov had performed his usual duties that day until about 4 p.m., after which Litvinov's signature on messages was crossed out and replaced by the initials V.M. (Vyacheslav Molotov). At 11 p.m. Stalin's message announcing the replacement of Litvinov by Molotov was dispatched to Soviet ambassadors.⁸³ Next day, the front page of Soviet newspapers published a decree announcing that Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Molotov had been appointed to serve concurrently as Commissar for Foreign Affairs. An inconspicuous four-line notice on the back page of newspapers stated that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR had

released Litvinov at his own request from his duties as Commissar for Foreign Affairs.⁸⁴

The sources available at this time show that the immediate cause of the dismissal of Litvinov was the disagreement between him and the *chetverka* over how to deal with Britain and France. The security systems proposed by London and Paris generally relegated the USSR to a subordinate, unequal status and absolutely refused to include a guarantee of Estonia, Latvia and Finland. Compounded by Britain's dilatory response to the Soviet counterproposal of 17 April, all this indicated that London felt free to treat negotiations with Moscow in cavalier fashion. So long as Litvinov, the personification of collective security, represented Moscow, London acted as if it could take the USSR for granted; Soviet diplomacy seemingly had only two options: either association with Britain and France on their terms or isolation. To Chamberlain, it was inconceivable that Soviet Russia, the ideological antipode of Nazi Germany, could ever negotiate rapprochement with Berlin, a possibility all the more remote so long as Litvinov, of Jewish origin, and the epitome of collective security, headed Narkomindel. As for Stalin, he could not credibly use Litvinov to play, or even threaten to play, the German card.

Moreover, Litvinov had irreparably discredited himself with his masters. He had recommended to Stalin that the USSR meet Halifax and Bonnet halfway by accepting highly unsatisfactory Anglo-French proposals as a basis for negotiation. But most important, he had committed an unforgivable offence against Stalinist *Realpolitik*: on 15 April he had recommended to Stalin that the USSR conclude an agreement with Britain and France to bar separate negotiations with Germany on matters affecting Eastern European states. Litvinov probably intended this measure to finish off Anglo-French appeasement of Hitler. But, if adopted, it would also have precluded any Soviet-German deal. At that point, Stalin, Molotov and their Politburo confidants brought Litvinov to a halt. From 17 April they demanded that the West accept the Soviet counterproposal as the basis for negotiation, fundamentally on a take-it or leave-it basis. Litvinov fruitlessly tried to persuade them that that was not the way things were done in diplomatic relations. Over Litvinov's objections, the Stalinists had in fact adopted a Stalinist approach to collective security.⁸⁵ Thereupon, for some two weeks Litvinov tried to implement it. Failure led to his forced resignation. He was dismissed just when his conduct of Soviet foreign policy was again proving sterile and signs were accumulating that Germany might be willing to moderate its anti-Sovietism.⁸⁶

By replacing Litvinov with Molotov, Stalin significantly increased his freedom of manoeuvre in foreign policy. Litvinov's dismissal served as a warning to London and Paris that Moscow had a third option—rapprochement with Germany. After Litvinov's dismissal, the pace of Soviet-German contacts quickened. But that did not mean that Moscow had abandoned the search for collective security, now exemplified by the Soviet draft triple alliance. Meanwhile, Molotov's appointment served as an additional signal to Berlin that Moscow was open to offers. The signal worked;⁸⁷ the warning did not. The denouement came in the Kremlin on the night of 23–24 August 1939, when Ribbentrop and Molotov signed the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact and the Secret Additional Protocol.

¹ For example, Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Nazi Germany. Starting World War II, 1937–1939* (Chicago and London, 1980), pp. 570–573; Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came. The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938–1939* (New York, 1989), pp. 232–235; Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York and London, 1990), pp. 593–595; Jonathan Haslam, 'Litvinov, Stalin, and the Road Not Taken'; Gabriel Gorodetsky (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1991. A Retrospective* (London, 1994), p. 58; or 'The dismissal of Litvinov marked the end of an epoch. It registered the abandonment by the Kremlin of all faith in a security pact with the Western Powers and in the possibility of organising an Eastern Front against Germany' (Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (New York, 1961), p. 328).

² Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Fall of Litvinov: A Revisionist View', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 1992, p. 645: 'Litvinov was the victim of an internal political purge whose objective was to extend the power and control of Stalin's inner circle in the field of foreign policy'; Teddy J. Uldricks, 'Soviet Security Policy in the 1930s', in Gorodetsky (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1991 ...*, p. 73: 'Throughout the decade, suspicion of all imperialist powers and a desperate search for security remained constant. Stalin may be faulted for a great many mistakes in attempting to carry out the Collective Security line, but the line itself seems indisputably genuine'. In an agnostic view, Fleischhauer presents six hypotheses that had yet to be tested against Soviet diplomatic papers: (1) the removal of Litvinov was a signal designed to warn the Western powers that the policy of collective security was in danger; (2) it released from his post a man whose foreign policy conceptualisation had not proved true and in any case a man who, unlike Molotov, did not belong to Stalin's inner circle; (3) in Molotov Stalin appointed a foreign commissar who pursued no ideas of his own but was a competent executant of Stalin's will; (4) the change at the top of Narkomindel gave the Soviet Government full freedom of action at a time of acute international crisis; (5) with Litvinov and his appointees the pro-Western faction of Narkomindel was removed, if only temporarily (Litvinov was not subjected to the Purge but could in honour await a return to favour); (6) the elimination of the Jew Litvinov cleared the way for further rapprochement of the USSR with Germany (Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt, Hitler, Stalin, und die Initiative der deutschen Diplomatie 1938–1939* (Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp. 164–165).

³ Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Triumf i tragediya. Politicheskii portret I. V. Stalina*. V 2-kh knigakh (Moscow, 1989). Kniga II, chast' 1, pp. 15–18; Aleksandr Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922–1941*. Edited and translated by Gregory L. Freeze (New York, 1996), pp. 109–110; M. M. Narinsky, 'Kak eto bylo', in Yu. N. Afans'ev (ed.), *Drugaya voyna, 1939–1945* (Moscow 1996), pp. 39–40. See however N. A. Abramov & L. A. Bezymensky, 'Osobaya Missiya Davida Kandelaki', *Voprosy istorii*, 1991, 4–5, pp. 144–156 and L. A. Bezymensky, 'Sovetsko-Germanskii Dogovory 1939 g.: Novye Dokumenty i Starye Problemy', *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya*, 1998, 3, pp. 3–26. They show the cardinal political importance Stalin attached to economic agreements with Germany. He believed that agreement by Berlin to exchange its state-of-the art military equipment to the USSR for Soviet raw materials would give him surety against a German war on the USSR.

⁴ The Stalin and Molotov papers remain, more or less, under lock and key in the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. On this question see Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, 'Chapter 1, Why is Stalin's Archive Still Locked Away?', *Archives of Russia. Five Years After 'Purveyors of Sensation' or 'Shadows of the Past'?* (Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History, 1997), pp. 11–18 and *passim*; Jonathan Haslam, 'Russian Archival Revelations and Our Understanding of the Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, 21, 2, Spring 1997, pp. 218–219; also D. G. Nadzhafov, 'Sovetsko-Germanskii Pakt 1939 goda: pereosmyslenie podkhodov k ego otsenke', *Voprosy istorii*, 1999, 1, pp. 154–167.

⁵ The public acknowledgement by the Gorbachev leadership in December 1989 that copies of the Secret Additional Protocol to the Non-aggression Treaty were in fact genuine cleared the way for publication of the following diplomatic papers: Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, *God krizisa, 1938–1939. Dokumenty i Materialy v dvukh tomakh* (henceforth *Gk*) (Moscow, 1990). After a hiatus of some 15 years, vol. XXII in the Documents of Foreign Policy series was published under the El'tsin government: Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki 1939 god (DVP)*, XXII, v 2 kn. (Moscow, 1992). Although it contains important material omitted from the 1990 publication, it too suffers from serious gaps, mainly the absence of Stalin's replies to Litvinov's communications and of internal documents on Narkomindel decision making.

⁶ Letters, Tippleskirch to Schliep, Moscow, 3 and 10 October 1938, *Documents of German Foreign Policy, (DGFP)*, Series D, IV (Washington DC, 1951), nos 476 and 477. Telegrams, Chargé Kirk to Secretary of State, Moscow, 31 October 1938 and 22 February 1939, *Foreign Relations of The United States: The Soviet Union, 1933–1939* (Washington DC, 1952), p. 592 and p. 737.

⁷ Litvinov to Stalin, 3 January, DVP, XXI, kn. 1, no. 2.

⁸ Litvinov to Stalin, 23 February *ibid.*, no. 104. Stalin's written replies to Litvinov's letters, if any (Stalin was loath to leave a paper trail), are not included in this collection. The commission recommended by Litvinov to supervise continuation of the purge and to screen replacements was formed after his

dismissal. Its members included Malenkov, Beria, Molotov, Dekanazov—and, for several days, Litvinov. Elected a member of the Party Central Committee at the XVII Congress in February 1934, he remained a member until he was dropped in February 1941 (Vladimir Sokolov, 'People's Commissar Maxim Litvinov', *International Affairs* (Moscow), May 1991, p. 104). For further information on the purge of Narkomindel see Teddy J. Uldricks, 'The Impact of the Great Purges on the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs', *Slavic Review*, 36, 1977, pp. 200–201.

⁹ Z. Sheinis, *Maksim Maksimovich Litvinov. Revolyutsioner. Diplomat. Chelovek* (Moscow, 1989), pp. 360–361.

¹⁰ Stalin to Polpredy, 3 May, *DVP*, XXII, kn. 1, no. 269. In an implausible account, Arthur Upham Pope, who maintained a close friendship with Ambassador Litvinov during the war years, reported that Litvinov himself had recognised that he had to go, because appeasement had left the USSR no alternative but collaboration with Hitler. It was Litvinov himself who had offered his resignation and he had also 'suggested his friend, Prime Minister Molotov, as his successor' (Arthur Upham Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff* (New York, 1943), pp. 441–442).

¹¹ Quoted in A. Roschin, 'People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs Before World War II', *International Affairs* (Moscow), May 1988, pp. 113–114.

¹² Albert Resis (ed.), *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics* (Chicago, 1993), p. 192. On the anti-semitic aspect of the Narkomindel purge, see Arkady Vaksberg, *Stalin Against the Jews*, translated by Antonina W. Bouis (New York, 1994), pp. 82–88.

¹³ Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*, translated by Harold Shukman (New York, 1989), p. 313.

¹⁴ *XVIII S'ezd Vsesoyuznoi Kommunisticheskoi partii (b). Stenograficheskii Otchet* (Moscow, 1939), pp. 12–15. Of the more than 1500 delegates with full voting rights, only 21 held membership before 1917, including Stalin, Litvinov and M. I. Kalinin. Their membership purportedly dated from 1898.

¹⁵ Vyacheslav Dashichev contends in his analysis of the speech that Stalin had decided from January 1939 to sign with Germany rather than with Britain and France. See his 'Pakt: pagubnost' i neizbezhnost', *Znanie–Sila*, 1989, 8, pp. 79–82; 'Stalin in Early 1939', *Moscow News*, 3–10 September 1989; 'Planungen und Fehlschläge Stalins am Vorabend des Krieges—der XVIII Parteitag der KPD (B) und der sowjetisch-deutsche Nichtangriffspakt', in Klaus Hildebrand *et al.*, (eds), *1939. An der Schwelle zum Weltkrieg* (Berlin and New York, 1990), pp. 303–314. Written before declassification of key diplomatic papers (see note 5), Dashichev's analysis rests mainly on assertion and contains no fresh corroborative material.

¹⁶ Litvinov to Stalin, 20 March 1939, *DVP*, XXII, kn. 1, no. 157. Litvinov said nothing about a change in Soviet policy toward Germany. In fact the USSR took up a similar posture toward the Reich. Since Germany bore responsibility for the deterioration of Soviet–German relations, the Reich must take the initiative in patching up that relationship.

¹⁷ Maisky to NKID, 18 March, *Gk*, 1, no. 196; Halifax to Seeds, 17 March, *Documents on British Foreign Policy (DBFP)*, 3d Series, 1938–39. vol. IV (London, 1951), no. 389.

¹⁸ Seeds to Halifax, Moscow, 18 March, *ibid.*, no. 403; Litvinov to Maisky and Surits, 18 March, *Gk*, I, no. 197.

¹⁹ Litvinov to Stalin, 18 March (copy to Molotov), *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 150.

²⁰ Litvinov to Maisky (London) and Surits (France), 18 March, *Gk*, I, no. 198. Regarding Turkey, Litvinov to Surits and Maisky, 19 March, *ibid.*, no. 200; Seeds to Halifax, 19 March, *DBFP*, IV, no. 421.

²¹ Maisky to NKID, 19 March, *ibid.*, No. 201; Halifax to Seeds, 19 March, *DBFP*, 4, no. 433.

²² Halifax to Ambassadors, Paris, Moscow and Warsaw, 20 March, *DBFP*, IV, no. 446; Record of Litvinov–Seeds Conversation, 21 March, *Gk*, 1, no. 209.

²³ Litvinov told the Polpredy for their information that the USSR would not sign the declaration unless Poland signed. He had not informed Seeds of this, because Seeds had not asked what the USSR would do failing Polish adhesion to the declaration (Litvinov to Polpredy in Britain and France, 22 March, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 162). Daladier had assured Surits that the declaration covered not just Romania but any case of aggression (Surits to NKID, 22 March, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 165).

²⁴ Litvinov had cleared the texts of the notes of warnings first with Stalin (Litvinov to Stalin, 27 March, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 179). Texts: nos 180 (Estonia) and 181 (Latvia); Latvian and Estonian rejection of the Soviet notes, (7 April), *ibid.*, nos 204 (Latvia) and 205 (Estonia). Stalin saw Litvinov in Stalin's Kremlin office for 30 minutes on the evening of 26 March and five minutes on the afternoon of 27 March. Also present on 26 March were Molotov, Zhdanov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan and Litvinov's Deputy Potemkin (for 15 minutes). Also present on 27 March were Zhdanov, Molotov and Mikoyan ('Poseiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I. V. Stalina. Zhurnaly (tetradi) zapisi lits, prinyatykh pervym gensekom, 1924–1953 gg', *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1995, 5–6, p. 33).

²⁵ Maisky to NKID, 29 March 1939, *Gk*, I, no. 240; Halifax to Seeds, 28 March, *DBFP*, IV, no. 565.

²⁶ Record, Maisky-Cadogan conversation, 29 March, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 187; Maisky to NKID, 29 March 1939, *Gk*, I, no. 240.

²⁷ Halifax to Seeds, 31 March, *DBFP*, IV, no. 589; text of Chamberlain statement, no. 582.

²⁸ Maisky to NKID, 31 March, *Gk*, I, no. 246. Halifax, half-hearted, suggested to Beck that Poland might seek a closer relationship with the USSR, even if it were only Russian agreement to supply Poland in the event of war. Beck contended that any extension of Polish relations with the USSR would provoke a German attack, not deter it (Record, Halifax-Beck conversation, 4 April, London, *DBFP*, V, no. 1, pp. 6–7).

²⁹ Record, Litvinov-Seeds conversation, 1 April, *Gk*, I, no. 248; Seeds to Halifax, 1 April, *DBFP*, IV, no. 597.

³⁰ Litvinov to Maisky, 4 April, *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II. Documents and Records (SPE)*, Two Parts (Moscow, 1973), 1, no. 210.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² ‘Record of Conversation’, Chamberlain–Beck, 5 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 10, ‘Communiqué’, pp. 35–36; Halifax: Maisky’s ‘ingenuity in the formulation and examination of hypothetical problems is unrivaled’ (Halifax to Seeds, 6 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 19).

³³ Maisky to NKID, 6 April, *Gk*, I, no. 255; Halifax to Seeds, 6 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 19.

³⁴ Maisky to Litvinov, 9 April, *SPE*, 1, no. 218.

³⁵ Maisky to NKID, 9 April, *Gk*, I, no. 257.

³⁶ Surits to NKID, 7 April, *SPE*, 1, no. 215; Surits to NKID, 4 April, *ibid.*, no. 212; Bonnet to Payart, 5 April, *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, 1932–1939. 2e Série, (1936–1939) (*DDF*), vol. XV, no. 263.

³⁷ Litvinov to Stalin, 9 April, (copy to Molotov), *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 206; Litvinov to Surits, 10 April, *ibid.*, no. 208. Potemkin informed Payart of the same (Payart to Bonnet, 11 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 343).

³⁸ Bonnet to Payart, 10 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 318; Surits to NKID, 10 April, *Gk*, I, no. 260.

³⁹ Bonnet to Payart, 10 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 323.

⁴⁰ Surits to NKID, 10 April, *Gk*, I, no. 260; Bonnet’s account of this conversation says nothing about a willingness on his part to sign a tripartite declaration with Britain and the USSR but without Poland (Bonnet to Payart, 10 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 318). Litvinov to Surits, 11 April, *Gk*, I, no. 262.

⁴¹ Daladier to General Palasse (Moscow), Paris, 11 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 344; Payart to Bonnet, Moscow, 14 April, *ibid.*, no. 386; Gamelin to Daladier, Paris, 15 April, *ibid.*, no. 416.

⁴² On French rejection of Soviet proposals that the French and Soviet military hold staff talks in conjunction with their Mutual Assistance Treaty see Michael Carley, ‘End of the “Low, Dishonest Decade”’. Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 45, 2, 1993, pp. 306–309 and *passim*.

⁴³ Daladier to Bonnet, Paris, 22 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 476.

⁴⁴ Litvinov to Surits, 11 April, *Gk*, I, no. 262.

⁴⁵ Halifax to Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee: ‘if we had to make a choice between Poland and Soviet Russia, it seemed clear that Poland would give the greater value’ (Public Record Office, Cab 27/624, F.P. (36) 38th meeting 27 March, quoted in Robert Manne, ‘The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8, 1974, p. 12); Chamberlain to the full Cabinet: ‘it was of the utmost importance to obtain the support of Poland and it was impossible to secure this if Russia was brought into the declaration’ (Cab 23/98, CM 15/39, 29 March a.m., quoted in Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy: the British Experience, October 1938–June 1941* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 43–44). Chamberlain and Halifax did not concede the necessity of alliance with the USSR until late in May.

⁴⁶ Litvinov to Surits, 11 April, and copy to Maisky, *Gk*, I, no. 262; Litvinov to Maisky, 11 April, *ibid.*, no. 263. But the British guarantee to Poland also strengthened the Soviet hand *vis-à-vis* Germany and Britain. If this did not occur to Litvinov, it must certainly have crossed Stalin’s mind.

⁴⁷ Litvinov to Maisky, 11 April, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 210.

⁴⁸ Maisky to NKID, 11 April, *Gk*, I, no. 264. Halifax’s account states that Maisky had asked whether Poland had floated the idea of taking possession of Latvian ports in exchange for Danzig and the Corridor. Halifax replied that Beck had made no such suggestion as he did not contemplate abandoning the Corridor (Halifax to Seeds, 11 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 42).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Text, 13 April, *DBFP*, V, p. 197.

⁵¹ Litvinov to Stalin, 13 April, *DVP*, XX, 1, no. 216 and Litvinov to Maisky, 13 April, *ibid.*, no. 217.

⁵² Halifax to Seeds, 14 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 176. Halifax again stressed that his proposals were in complete harmony with Stalin’s statements of 10 March on Soviet aid to countries resisting aggression (Maisky to Litvinov, 14 April, *DVP*, XXII, no. 221).

⁵³ Halifax to Seeds, 14 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 170; 'Memorandum, Litvinov-Seeds conversation', 15 April, *SPE*, I, no. 233.

⁵⁴ Seeds to Halifax, 15 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 182; Memorandum, Litvinov-Seeds conversation, 15 April, *SPE*, I, no. 233.

⁵⁵ Surits to NKID, 14 April, *Gk*, I, no. 269. Bonnet pointed out to Emile Naggiar, French Ambassador to the USSR, who was still in Paris, that although this proposed arrangement lacked reciprocity with the guaranteed states, it was akin to the guarantee that France had extended to Belgium and Switzerland (Bonnet to Naggiar, Paris, 14 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 387).

⁵⁶ Halifax to Phipps, 14 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 172; Phipps to Halifax, 15 April, *ibid.*, no. 183, also no. 186.

⁵⁷ Surits to Litvinov, 15 April, *Gk*, I, no. 272; Bonnet to Payart, 16 April, *DDF*, XV, no. 417.

⁵⁸ Three days later Moscow accepted the French proposal 'in principle'. See the draft triple alliance, dated 17 April, Moscow proposed to Britain and France (Text, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 229 and *SPE*, I, no. 239). See pp. 46–47.

⁵⁹ Litvinov to Stalin, 15 April, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 223; copy to Molotov.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Evidently Litvinov still envisaged the possibility of separate bilateral mutual defence pacts with Britain and France respectively.

⁶² In conclusion, Litvinov vigorously urged that Maisky be kept in London in view of the pressing, complex negotiations that lay ahead (Litvinov to Stalin, 15 April, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 224), but Litvinov was compelled to summon Maisky to Moscow to participate in consultations on the prospects for the tripartite pact of mutual assistance that Litvinov proposed on 17 April. Maisky left London on 19 April and returned nine days later (Ivan Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler?*, translated from the Russian by Andrew Rothstein (London, 1964), p. 119). Litvinov told Seeds that he was summoning Maisky to Moscow in order to ask him why he had not pressed Halifax to specify the form of assistance Britain would render Romania and the nature of the assistance that Britain expected the USSR and other interested parties to render Romania (Seeds to Halifax, 17 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 196).

⁶³ The Politburo, on 14 April 1937, at Stalin's initiative, had adopted a decision to form under its aegis a standing committee intended 'to prepare for the Politburo, and in the case of special urgency, to take decisions on, questions of a secret character, including questions of foreign policy'. The committee members were Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, L. Kaganovich and Ezhov (O. V. Khlevnyuk, *Politbyuro. Mekhanizm Politicheskoi Vlasti v 1930-e gody* (Moscow, 1996), pp. 237–238; *Molotov Remembers*, p. 283). Ezhov was purged in December 1938, reducing the five-member committee to a *chetverka*. In 1939, however, Mikoyan, Commissar for Foreign Trade, frequently participated in sessions of this Politburo core. Other members elected in March 1939 to the Politburo were Kalinin, Andreev, Zhdanov and Khrushchev, and candidate members Beria and Shvernink.

⁶⁴ Stalin and Molotov saw Litvinov and his deputy Potemkin in Stalin's Kremlin office on the nights of 16 and 17 April, each night for more than one hour. Also present were Mikoyan and Kaganovich ('Posetiteli ...', p. 35).

⁶⁵ Litvinov to Stalin, 17 April, *DVP*, XXII, 1, no. 228; text of the proposal, dated 17 April, *ibid.*, no. 229 and *SPE*, I, no. 239.

⁶⁶ Turkey was a special case because it did not border the USSR in Europe and it involved the Straits question. Litvinov either had a blind spot where Turkey was concerned or early on it was reserved for Molotov to handle. Litvinov had neglected to include it in his initial 18 March list of states that would confer. Molotov was negotiating directly with the President of Turkey as early as 15 April (Molotov to Chargé d'Affaires O. I. Nikitnikova, *DVP*, XXII, kn. 1, no. 225; Record of a Conversation, Nikitnikova with President İsmet İnönü and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sükrü Saracoglu, 16 April, *ibid.*, no. 227). In the counterproposal of 17 April, Molotov had substituted his formulation respecting Turkey for Litvinov's softer one, which was intended to avoid the appearance of an ultimatum (*ibid.*, fn., p. 283).

⁶⁷ Soviet war plans, approved by Stalin in 1938 and carried over into 1939, assumed that the USSR had to be prepared for war on two fronts: in the West against Nazi Germany, Italy and Poland, and the states gravitating to this core—Romania, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—and in the East against Japan. The most immediate and greatest danger lay in the West. The moment a critical situation developed, Lithuania would be occupied by Germany and Poland. The armies of the three Baltic countries and Finland might be utilised by Germany for a concentrated strike on Leningrad to cut it off from the rest of the country (M. V. Zakharov, *General'nyi Shtab v predvoennye gody* (Moscow, 1989), pp. 126–128). Zakharov omitted any reference to the position Britain and France might take. Also see Cynthia Roberts, 'Planning for War. The Red Army and the Catastrophe of 1941', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 47, 8, 1995, pp. 1293–1295 and 1314–1315.

⁶⁸ 'Posetiteli ...', pp. 35–36.

⁶⁹ Maisky's spare account remains the major source on these consultations, but he offered few

details. Ivan Maisky, *Vospominaniya Sovetskogo Posla*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1964), 2, pp. 466–467; also his *Who Helped Hitler?* pp. 120–121.

⁷⁰ Surits to Litvinov, 18 April, *SPE*, I, no. 240; Surits to Litvinov, 25 April, *ibid.*, nos 252–253; Surits to Litvinov, 29 April, *ibid.*, I, no. 261 and Draft Agreement ... 29 April, *ibid.*, no. 262; Surits to Litvinov, 29 April, *ibid.*, 263.

⁷¹ Merekalov to Litvinov, 12 January, *Gk*, I, no. 110; Merekalov Diary, entry, 1 March, *DVP*, XXII, I, no. 116.

⁷² Merekalov reported Weizsäcker as having said: 'Germany has fundamental political differences with the USSR. Nevertheless, Germany wants to develop economic relations with [the USSR]' (Merekalov to Litvinov, 18 April, *Gk*, I, no. 279). Weizsäcker reported Merekalov as having stated that ideological differences should not affect Soviet–German relations. As far as Russia was concerned, 'there was no reason why she should not live on a normal footing with us [Germany], and out of normal relations could grow increasingly improved relations' (Memorandum by State Secretary Weizsäcker, 17 April, *DGFP*, VI, no. 215).

⁷³ 'Directive by the Führer', Berlin, 11 April 1939, *ibid.*, no. 185, pp. 224–225, fn. 3. Russian Federation intelligence historians claim that Soviet foreign intelligence had learned of Hitler's directive and speedily reported it to the Soviet leadership. In negotiating with the British and French military delegations in 1939, the Soviet side knew that 'Plan Weiss' had already been signed and the fate of Poland sealed (O. I. Nazhestkin, 'Groznye Vesti iz Varshavy', in E. M. Primakov (ed.), *Ocherki istorii Rossijskoi Vneshnei Razvedki*, six vols, vol. 3, 1933–1941 (Moscow, 1997), p. 290).

⁷⁴ Lev Bezymensky, 'Dvenadtsat' Minut iz zhizni Posla Merekalova', *Novoe vremya*, 1996, 7, p. 45. Bezymensky based this account on the notes left by Merekalov, who died in 1983, and the recollections of the ambassador's son, who died in 1992. This hazy account must be checked against the reports Merekalov had filed from Berlin. Despite the promising signs emanating from Berlin, Moscow did not return Merekalov to Berlin, although Berlin had asked Moscow when he might be expected back (Memorandum, Weizsäcker, 25 May, *DGFP*, VI, no. 437). Merekalov retained the title of Ambassador to Germany until 2 September. His absence left it to the far more capable Acting Chargé d'Affaires Georgii Astakhov in Berlin to test and foster Germany's readiness to improve relations with the USSR.

⁷⁵ According to Maisky, on 27 April (*sic*) he and Litvinov were summoned by Stalin and Molotov to explain why Maisky en route to Moscow had without specific authorisation paid a routine courtesy call on Finnish Foreign Minister Eljas Erkkö in Helsinki, news of which had leaked to the press. At this Kremlin hearing Molotov turned violent, accusing Litvinov of every kind of mortal sin. Stalin, barely containing his rancour, castigated Litvinov for supposedly letting his associates get out of hand (Sheinis, pp. 362–363).

⁷⁶ Maisky to Litvinov, 29 April, *Gk*, I, no. 303; Halifax to Seeds, 29 April, *DBFP*, V, no. 316.

⁷⁷ 'Communication du Département à l'Ambassade d'U.R.S.S. à Paris, April 29, 1939', *DDF*, XV no. 523; English translation, *SPE*, vol. 1, no. 262.

⁷⁸ Surits to Litvinov, 29 April, *SPE*, I, no. 263.

⁷⁹ Seeds to Halifax, 3 May, *DBFP*, V, no. 344.

⁸⁰ Litvinov to Stalin, 3 May, *DVP*, I, no. 267.

⁸¹ R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 224–226. The central issue, Chamberlain observed (19 April), was how the Soviet counteroffer might be most diplomatically rejected (Robert Manne, 'The British Decision', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8, 1974, p. 19).

⁸² 'Posetiteli ...', p. 36.

⁸³ Vladimir Sokolov, 'People's Commissar Maxim Litvinov', *International Affairs* (Moscow), May 1991, p. 103.

⁸⁴ Seeds to Halifax, 4 May, *DBFP*, V, no. 353.

⁸⁵ A propos, Litvinov in a small gathering of close party comrades once reportedly said about Stalin: 'He will twist Eastern rulers, all those Shahs, and other despots around his little finger. But the Western world, Western politics are beyond his ken. He can't cope with such politics' (Sheinis, p. 370).

⁸⁶ Hitler, in a major foreign policy speech to the Reichstag on 28 April, assailed the democracies and Poland but studiously refrained from his stock anti-Soviet invective (Norman H. Baynes (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, 2 vols (New York, 1942), vol. 2, pp. 1605–1663). He did however make a few digs at Soviet Russia in passing (*ibid.*, pp. 1612 and 1636).

⁸⁷ Hours before the Pact was signed, Hitler said that in his step-by-step rapprochement with Russia, 'Litvinov's replacement was decisive' ('Unsigned Memorandum, August 22, 1939. Speech by the Führer to the Commanders-in-Chief on August 22', *DGFP*, VII, no. 192, p. 204).