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Molotov's Apprenticeship in Foreign Policy: The Triple Alliance Negotiations in 1939

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THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE NEGOTIATIONS with Britain and France provided Molotov's formal introduction to the diplomatic world. They established his negotiating style, based less on the civilities of diplomacy than on his experience as chairman of Sovnarkom, as a member of the Politburo and other top party institutions, where he was prepared to hand out rude and rough treatment to others. The negotiations created a reputation for him in the international arena that was to remain, and perhaps dog him, for the rest of his political career. Much has been written about these talks from the Western point of view, less from the Soviet, and very little regarding Molotov's role. This article seeks to redress the balance and is the first attempt to review these negotiations using unpublished documents in the archive of the Russian Foreign Ministry formerly unavailable, although these mainly confirm the conclusions drawn from published Soviet documents and Western materials.¹

From the beginning, the two sides approached the negotiations differently. The Western powers believed that war could still be avoided and, if it came, the USSR, much weakened by the purges, could only function as a supply base in a long war of attrition, not as a main military participant. The USSR, which approached the negotiations with caution because of the traditional hostility of the Western powers and its fear of 'capitalist encirclement', had little faith either that war could be avoided or in the Polish army. It wanted a guaranteed commitment of military support in a war in which the USSR would play an aggressive role in a two-pronged attack on Germany: from France and the USSR.² These contrasting attitudes partly explain why the USSR has often been charged with playing a double game in 1939: carrying on open negotiations for a pact of mutual assistance with Britain and France whilst secretly engaging in parallel discussions with Germany for an agreement aimed against the Western democracies. Molotov has been accused both of artificially dragging out the talks with Britain and France by seizing on various inessential details to secure a successful outcome or better deal with Germany, and also of summarily breaking them off and concluding an alliance with Germany when on the verge of success with Britain and France. But the delays which Molotov caused were usually on issues essential to Soviet interests, and there appeared to be an impossible obstacle to the vital military convention with France and Britain when the agreement with Germany was signed. In contrast, the Western states, even taking into account that

they had to coordinate their policy in the capital of a distant country, were dilatory in their approaches to Moscow and slow in their responses during the negotiations.³ A.J. P Taylor commented:

If British diplomacy seriously aspired to alliance with Soviet Russia in 1939, then the negotiations towards this end were the most incompetent transactions since Lord North lost the American colonies ...

and compared the 67 days delay made by the British and French in their responses to Soviet proposals to the 16 days which the Soviet side took to respond.⁴ Similar comparisons were made by Zhdanov in *Pravda*, and by Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to Britain at the time of the negotiations.⁵

In spite of the clear failure of the Munich agreement, as demonstrated by Hitler's occupation of the Czech lands in March 1939, to Soviet politicians there was little evidence of any reappraisal of British or French policy.⁶ Nor were there major changes in the personnel responsible. In May 1939 the British cabinet was still divided on the question of an alliance with the Soviet Union, and Halifax, the foreign secretary, did not want a mutual assistance pact.⁷ The British government, as late as March 1939, was unduly pessimistic about the USSR's military capability following the purges,⁸ and a military agreement, as desired by the Soviet Union, was without precedent for Great Britain, which failed to understand the USSR's fear of being forced to fight a war alone against Germany. These factors made it more likely that the Western powers, rather than Molotov, would prolong negotiations. But it is true that in their later stages, once commercial negotiations with Germany had begun, it was important for Soviet politicians to keep the talks with Britain and France going to put pressure on Germany.

Sir William Seeds, the new British ambassador to the USSR, was Halifax's nominee to overcome Chamberlain's suspicions of an improvement in relations with the USSR. Although not sympathetic to the communist regime, he was pro-Russian,⁹ enthusiastic for an Anglo-Soviet agreement and showed genuine disappointment when the negotiations failed. William Strang, sent to Moscow to assist Seeds, was more cynical. He wrote later that the negotiations were possibly used by the USSR to stimulate the Germans into making an offer of a non-aggression treaty and to serve as a reserve if those negotiations were unsuccessful.¹⁰ Yet he also pointed out that, when the negotiations finally collapsed, the most comprehensive agreement with the Soviet Union ever negotiated had been achieved, even if agreement had only been reached after successive concessions to the Soviet point of view by the British, sometimes under pressure from the French.¹¹

The French, as a continental power needing military help on land, rather than at sea and in the air as desired by Britain, were always more anxious for an agreement with the USSR than the British and took the lead in re-establishing contact in the spring of 1939. In the negotiations they let the British make the running, but when discussions reached an impasse they often urged compromise on them. The French were more willing to make concessions, more anxious to conclude an agreement quickly, and more aware of the dangers of an agreement between the USSR and Germany.¹²

Taylor contends that the Soviet government genuinely wanted an alliance with

Britain and only turned to Germany when an alliance with the Western powers proved impossible.¹³ Stalin seemed to admit this when he told Dimitrov, the Comintern leader, in September 1939:

We would have preferred an agreement with the so-called democratic countries, hence we entered negotiations with them, but Britain and France wanted us to be their hired hand ... and without pay.¹⁴

Molotov's behaviour throughout the negotiations supports the argument that an alliance with Britain and France was the first choice, strengthening the case of those who consider that the decision to sign a pact with Germany was taken late, more a consequence than a cause of the failure of the Triple Alliance negotiations.¹⁵ From the time of his appointment as Commissar for Foreign Affairs on 3 May 1939 Molotov was immediately active in communicating with, and receiving information from, his ambassadors in Britain and France, indicating his intention to pursue the negotiations seriously. The earnestness of Narkomindel officials, as noted by Western diplomats, confirms this.¹⁶ In 1940 a Soviet diplomatic defector told the British Foreign Office that the need for an agreement with Britain and France had become a lower priority for the USSR by the time that Molotov took office, because the guarantees of the two Western powers to Poland and Romania had persuaded Stalin and Molotov that, if Hitler attacked Poland, these countries would go to war without the need for the USSR to give any undertakings.¹⁷ But if Molotov did not have to rush into an alliance and could hold out for his own terms, the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, the focus of difficulties, were of vital strategic importance to the USSR. If there was no ambition to re-establish the former tsarist frontiers, the Soviet Union was particularly sensitive to the question of their independence, especially when Hitler occupied Memel in March 1939, after which the USSR considered it necessary to issue an unsolicited guarantee of independence to Latvia and Estonia which was resented by those powers. Increasingly afraid of German economic and political influence in the Baltic states, the USSR feared that Hitler's ambitions had been diverted in that direction.¹⁸ The reluctance of the Western powers to offer guarantees to those countries made Molotov and Stalin suspicious that they were opening the door for an attack on the USSR by Germany through them. The signing of a non-aggression pact between Germany, Latvia and Estonia on 7 June 1939 may have been an important factor driving the USSR towards an understanding with Germany when it could not secure an alliance with France and Britain.¹⁹

Other factors which influenced Molotov were relations with Japan, and fear of a German-Italian-Japanese alliance. The first clash on the Soviet-Mongolian border in what became known as the 'war of the Khalkin-Gol river' took place on 11 May. Zhukov's final successful offensive was launched on 20 August,²⁰ at the time when it was becoming clear that Ribbentrop was to visit Moscow.²¹ The initial conflict was regarded as just one more border incident, but by the end of the month Moscow was seriously concerned,²² as Molotov made clear in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 May when he emphasised the USSR's determination to defend her frontiers.²³ The war cost the USSR nearly 10 000 dead, the crisis continuing until it was known that Zhukov's offensive would be successful. Even if, in 1939, the USSR believed it could hold one front whilst pursuing a more aggressive policy on the other, a modification

of the traditional strategy of avoiding war on two fronts,²⁴ Khalkin-Gol put pressure on the USSR to conclude a settlement either with Britain and France or with Germany. In addition, the Japanese attack was regarded as an attempt to prevent France and Britain signing an agreement on the grounds that the USSR was already preoccupied with war, Molotov writing to Surits, the Soviet ambassador in France, on 30 June:

The provocative activities of the Japanese and Manchurians in Mongolia were an attempt to demonstrate Japan's military might, carried out at the insistence of Germany and Italy. The aim of these actions by Japan was to hinder the conclusion of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement, by scaring away England and France from this agreement.²⁵

Early stages in the negotiations

Whether the reasons for Molotov's appointment as head of Narkomindel were internal rather than foreign policy factors is still subject to debate,²⁶ but foreign powers saw it as a clear signal that alternative foreign policy options were to be explored. Litvinov's attempt to negotiate a collective security agreement with the Western powers had failed even with the extreme pressure created by Hitler's occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. To protect the USSR, alternative policies had to be considered. The choice of Molotov reflected not only the appointment of a nationalist and one of Stalin's leading lieutenants, a Russian who was not a Jew and who could negotiate with Nazi Germany, but also someone unencumbered with the baggage of collective security who could obtain the best deal with Britain and France, if they could be forced into an agreement.

Formal negotiations with the Western powers had not really begun. After a flurry of suggestions and counter-plans from mid-March, the USSR was waiting for a response from Britain to the counter-proposals handed by Litvinov to Seeds late on 17 April, and to the French government by the Soviet ambassador in Paris on the following day. Made in response to the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland when that country refused to be associated with a four-power guarantee involving the USSR, these were for a mutual assistance pact between the three powers for five to 10 years, committing the signatories to assistance, including military support, if any of the powers were the subject of aggression. The draft included similar commitments to all East European states bordering the USSR, and envisaged a supplementary agreement with Turkey. The British government was to announce that its guarantee to Poland referred only to aggression by Germany, and the agreement between Poland and Romania was to be declared operative in the event of any aggression against either country, or else be revoked as directed against the USSR. There were to be early discussions on a simultaneous military convention to come into force at the same time as the political agreement, and if it came to war the three powers were not to conclude peace separately.²⁷ In fact, from the start Soviet diplomats may have been misled about the British attitude to a military agreement, because Robert Hudson, the British overseas trade secretary, during his visit to Moscow in March had commented to Narkomindel officials on the Soviet lack of interest in military cooperation.²⁸

The French rejected the Soviet proposals on 25 April as too broad and too complex.

In their place they suggested a rather unequal three-power agreement, whereby the USSR would aid the Western powers against Germany in the event of hostilities over Central or Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania and Turkey) and they would assist the USSR if it was at war with Germany as a result. This was later amended to the effect that the British and French would assist the USSR if it took action on its own initiative to defend the status quo.²⁹

Following speculation in the British cabinet on the significance of Molotov's appointment, Halifax saw Maisky, who told him that individual ministers in the USSR executed the policy of the government and that there would be no change in Soviet foreign policy.³⁰ Halifax then instructed Seeds that the comprehensive counter-proposal which the Soviet government had made was premature. He was to negotiate with Molotov on the basis of revisions to the British suggestions made prior to the Litvinov proposals of 17 April, involving a unilateral Soviet declaration to assist Romania and Poland only after Britain and France had become involved because of their obligations.³¹ This was the position when Molotov reassured Seeds, and Naggiar, the recently arrived French ambassador,³² on 8 and 11 May, that there would be no change in Soviet policy. To Seeds, he repeated the statement, adding the cryptic comment that 'it was liable to be altered if other states changed theirs'. He also pointed out that Moscow had replied to British proposals in three days, but London had taken three weeks.

Molotov pressed Seeds on the British government's willingness to start military conversations, referring to a statement made by Sir John Simon in the House of Commons. A military agreement was a top priority, because of the failure of France to conclude the promised military convention in the months and years following the USSR's signing of the Mutual Assistance Pact with her in May 1935.³³ It soon became clear that in such an agreement the USSR required that the military contribution of each party should be precisely defined in terms of numbers of troops, tanks, aircraft and other resources.³⁴ Seeds, clearly ignorant of Simon's statement,³⁵ told Molotov that military conversations were a 'later development' if 'events called for it'. Since Simon, British Chancellor of the Exchequer and former Foreign Secretary, with Halifax in the Lords, was making an official statement on foreign policy, Molotov's surprise at Seeds's ignorance was justified. He had clearly studied Simon's speech, which was to form an important basis for his actions. He tried to use an immediately preceding interview with Grzybowski, the Polish ambassador, in which he had reassured him about Soviet intentions and the ambassador had been non-committal,³⁶ to challenge Seeds on his statement that Poland was reluctant to be associated with the USSR in a collective security agreement. Finally Seeds was attacked for 10 minutes because the French and British had made independent and different answers to Litvinov's proposals.³⁷ In reporting the interview to Halifax, Seeds described Molotov as a 'true bureaucrat' but assessed him as seeking information, rather than hostile.³⁸ To Lancelot Oliphant, a permanent official at the Foreign Office whom he knew well, he wrote, after some reflection, that Molotov was still an 'enigma'. He was sceptical about Molotov's claims that the Polish government had changed its attitude, which he regarded as an attack on the 'Polish plank' in British policy, and surprised that Molotov had not raised the question of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. He concluded:

... Litvinov's disappearance means chiefly the loss of an admirable technician or perhaps shock-absorber, and that we are faced with a more truly Bolshevik as opposed to diplomatic or cosmopolitan *modus operandi*. Reaction to what we say or do will be more violent and the great men in the Kremlin will be more apt to plunge off into the deep if disappointed or indignant.³⁹

It is clear that Molotov was unfavourably impressed with the progress of the negotiations with Britain and France. He immediately fired off telegrams to Maisky in London and Surits in Paris that the British and French were demanding 'unilateral and gratuitous help with no intention of rendering us equivalent assistance'. He asked urgently for an assessment of the British proposals and for advice on the response the Soviet government should give.⁴⁰ In their replies, on 10 May, Maisky indicated that the 'appeasers' were back in the saddle again in Britain; Surits advised that it would mean that the USSR would be involved in a war against Germany, whenever Britain and France chose to go to war: it relegated the role of the USSR to that of 'blind satellite'. But both advised against outright rejection of the British proposal.⁴¹ These responses influenced or confirmed an article on 'The International Situation', in *Izvestiya*, 11 May, directed, if not written, by Molotov, which he used as a basis in the next round of discussions. The article deliberately ignored the existence of the Franco-Soviet Treaty of 1935. As Molotov was involved in foreign policy matters at the time of its negotiation, and it had been mentioned by Stalin in his famous speech to the XVIII Congress earlier in the year, it is clear that this was a tactic.⁴² When his attention was drawn to the error by a minor official at Narkomindel, that official was dismissed.⁴³ At his interview with the French ambassador Molotov used the omission to question the validity of the treaty,⁴⁴ thus putting more pressure on the French to sign a new treaty and military convention.

The article referred to the Soviet proposal to create a mutual assistance pact, including at a minimum the USSR, Great Britain and France and, optimistically, Poland as well. It stated that this proposal, based on full reciprocity, had been rejected by Britain and France. The British had offered a counter-proposal for Soviet assistance to Britain and France, if they had to fulfil the guarantees given to Poland and Romania. But this did not mention British and French help to the USSR if it became involved in hostilities in fulfilling obligations it had made to eastern European countries. The article, once more showing that Molotov was aware of parliamentary discussion of British foreign policy, concluded:

Once again the USSR is put in an unequal position. In his speech in the House of Commons the British Prime Minister spoke of cooperation and of alliance with the USSR. But cooperation presupposes reciprocity as its natural basis. Where there is no reciprocity there is no possibility of establishing real cooperation.⁴⁵

At his 11 May interview with the French ambassador Molotov stressed that it was important to the Soviet government that Estonia, Latvia and Finland should be given the same guarantee as Poland and Romania. These three Baltic states had a border with the Soviet Union whilst Lithuania did not. He also raised the issue of assisting states which had made a nominal agreement with Germany, making clear that the USSR was determined to prevent the use of the technique of internal subversion, employed so successfully by Hitler against Austria and Czechoslovakia. These

matters, to be prominent in the next conversations with Seeds, were particularly noted by the French ambassador, but do not figure in Molotov's record of the interview.⁴⁶

Molotov's response to the British counter-proposal, given to Seeds on 14 May, restated the arguments in the article. But he refused to say whether the absence of the principle of reciprocity, the chief reason given for the rejection of the British proposals, was more important than the question of a guarantee to Estonia, Latvia and Finland. He insisted that there must be a military convention. Seeds gave no ground, and afterwards speculated as to how serious the Soviet government was in seeking an agreement.⁴⁷ If Seeds's response was negative, Molotov may have gained some reassurance from Surits. His report indicated that the reactions of the French government, although concerned about the guarantee to the Baltic countries bordering on the USSR, were less unfavourable than that of its British counterpart.⁴⁸

The British government now took some time to rework the joint proposals, hoping for informal consultations at the forthcoming meeting of the Council of the League of Nations in Geneva, but since neither Molotov nor Potemkin, his deputy, attended, this proved impossible. Seeds twice hinted to Molotov that he might meet Halifax in Geneva but, presumably because the British still resisted a full alliance, Molotov told him that he was unlikely be able to go personally, although the meeting was delayed a week because of Molotov's request to allow time for the Soviet delegate to reach Geneva.⁴⁹ Here, on 21 May, Halifax probed Maisky about the possibility of extending the British and French guarantees to Estonia, Latvia and Finland without a formal pact. Maisky, primed by Molotov, emphasised that the USSR could make no concessions on a pact of mutual assistance between the three countries, or on a military agreement, and guarantees of security for all the small countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea. He found Bonnet, the French foreign minister, more anxious to conclude an alliance.⁵⁰ Maisky's telegraphed report to Molotov stated that the British government was avoiding a three-power pact because it did not wish to 'burn its bridges to Hitler and Mussolini'.⁵¹ That Molotov was still interested in an alliance with Britain and France as a first choice was indicated in the famous interview with Schulenburg, the German ambassador, on 20 May, where he ruled out the resumption of commercial negotiation with Germany until the necessary political basis had been constructed,⁵² hardly surprising when Ribbentrop was still trying to persuade Japan to join the German-Italian pact.⁵³ It is clear, however, that Molotov was receiving strong signals about the reluctance of the British to enter into a formal alliance.

The revised Anglo-French draft, which the British government believed was 'entirely reciprocal', proposed acting in accordance with the principles of the League of Nations, a scheme produced by Chamberlain to allow the British government to limit its commitments. For the first time, the idea of a three-power pact of mutual assistance, for which the French had been pressing for some time, was accepted.⁵⁴ After a preliminary interview between Seeds and Potemkin on 25 May,⁵⁵ where Seeds, perhaps unwisely, revealed some details, Molotov and Potemkin saw Seeds and Payart, the French chargé d'affaires, on 27 May, for the draft to be formally presented. Molotov took the opportunity to set the stage and tone for the negotiations which were to follow. Seeds reported:

The interview took place, exceptionally, in the Kremlin, with M. Molotov sitting at a large

desk on a raised dais, and M. Potemkin (who acted as interpreter), M. Payart and I at his feet below ... M. Potemkin then proceeded ... to translate aloud the draft into Russian. I noticed that M. Molotov had before him a paper on which he seemed to be checking M. Potemkin's translation.⁵⁶

Molotov claimed that he had already received a draft from Paris which he had studied, and to the astonishment of Seeds and Payart stated that his personal opinion was that the proposals were unacceptable because Great Britain and France merely wanted to continue conversations ad infinitum and not achieve concrete results. The introduction of references to the League of Nations, which made effective cooperation dependent on the interminable delays of League of Nations procedure, was clear evidence of this. Seeds's

repeated insistence on the 'the spirit' and 'principles' of the Covenant was only met by repeated insistence on the League's 'procedure.' He [Molotov] seemed to be either blindly acting on instructions or incapable of understanding.

Molotov continued to amaze Seeds and Payart by arguing that in Point 5 of the British proposals, which referred to 'rendering support and assistance ... without prejudice to the rights and position of other powers', the British and French were proposing to safeguard the rights and position of an *aggressor* state. On Seeds explaining that this referred only to states to whom it was proposed to lend assistance, Molotov retorted that this safeguarding of rights was typical of that 'reserve' which he read into the Anglo-French proposals, which was calculated to ensure the maximum of talk and minimum of results. He repeated that the Soviet government wanted immediate and concrete action which the British and French governments wished to avoid, and this applied especially to a military convention, clearly the crux of the differences for him. More wrangling over referring disputes to the League of Nations followed, Molotov stating that Russia would be bombed whilst Bolivia blocked action. His caution about the League of Nations was understandable since Article 16 of the League's Convention required a recommendation by the League's Council before assistance could be given. He had clearly seen through Chamberlain's motives for introducing references to the League. The meeting concluded with Molotov giving what was to become a standard response: he agreed to refer the proposals to his government,⁵⁷ i.e. he would consult Stalin.

The following day Molotov confirmed his major concern when he wrote to Surits that the British and French

now want to turn the first point of our proposal into a mere scrap of paper. This means that in the event of aggression, mutual assistance will not be rendered immediately as we are proposing, but only after deliberations of the League of Nations, with no one knowing what the results of such deliberations would be.⁵⁸

The next meeting took place on 29 May, at 10.30 p.m.: Molotov was already applying to foreign policy Stalin's late-night methods of work, although this was not unknown in the Litvinov period. There was very little progress although the whole draft was discussed again in detail. Molotov stated that the USSR's experience of the Franco-Soviet pact had convinced the Soviet government that it was essential to conclude simultaneous military and political alliances. This was contrary to all Western

diplomatic practice. The Western powers failed to appreciate the reason for the demand, and were not prepared to give the USSR any assurances until very late in the negotiations, although they were stipulated in the Soviet proposals of 17 April. It was something which became increasingly important for Molotov, who believed that without it the USSR was making an open-ended commitment to French security.⁵⁹

Molotov also raised the question of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, being absorbed by Germany if they made an agreement with that country.⁶⁰ When Seeds replied that neither the British government nor public opinion would accept the imposition on independent nations of guarantees of protection against their will, Molotov retorted that Britain might argue in that way with regard to the Baltic states but would not remain 'loftily aloof' if it were Belgium. When Seeds reminded Molotov that there was a danger of the USSR appearing as an aggressor, Molotov protested Stalin's principle of the USSR supporting victims of aggression (recalling a reference in Simon's 13 April speech),⁶¹ arguing strongly and at length that the question at issue was vital to his government. It is clear that Molotov was emphasising the USSR's fear of a German attack through Estonia and Latvia, which preferred a German occupation to a Soviet, whereas the Western states feared the USSR's ambition. The effect of Molotov's words was to emphasise for Seeds how important the question of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, was for the USSR,⁶² but he also believed:

It is my fate to deal with a man totally ignorant of foreign affairs and to whom the idea of negotiation—as distinct from imposing the will of his party leader—is utterly alien. He has also a rather foolish cunning of the type of the peasant as shown by his arguments about safeguarding the rights of *aggressor* states on 27 May.⁶³

This is a somewhat arrogant and dismissive assessment by Seeds, who considered a Soviet-German commercial agreement probable but a Soviet political alliance with Germany very unlikely, particularly because of the reassurance the USSR had gained from the British guarantees to Poland and Romania.⁶⁴ Perhaps if Molotov did not have the skills of the professional diplomat, he had a surer grasp of the realities of the situation and the determination to fight his corner.

On 31 May 1939, in his first major speech to the Supreme Soviet as head of Narkomindel, Molotov stated that the Soviet Union was not sympathetic to aggressors, nor would it gloss over the deteriorating international situation played down by those countries which had abandoned collective security for non-resistance to aggression. He mentioned Germany's occupation of Czechoslovakia despite the Munich agreement, its appropriation of Memel, and Italy's invasion of Albania. Molotov repeated Stalin's claim that the USSR stood for peace and preventing any further aggression, but counselled caution, recalling the Soviet leader's advice about being 'drawn into conflict by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them'; an obvious reference to Britain and France. He warned that the USSR did not 'consider it necessary to renounce business relations with countries like Germany'.

Molotov then spoke of 'a sharp change of policy' in Britain (an echo of Simon's speech) and the British guarantee to Poland, probably to pressurise Britain and France to come to an agreement. He reiterated the minimum conditions of the USSR in the

negotiations: an exclusively defensive but effective pact of mutual assistance against aggression; a guarantee to all the states of central and eastern Europe bordering the USSR; and a concrete agreement on the forms and extent of assistance the alliance powers would give in the event of aggression. Any agreement, he insisted, must be based on 'reciprocity' and 'equality of obligations,' but this elementary principle had not found favour in the original British and French proposals. It was now so 'hedged round by reservations regarding certain clauses in the Covenant of the League of Nations ... that it may turn out to be a fictitious step forward'.⁶⁵ Many ambassadors attended to hear the speech, but British and French diplomatic representatives, very unwisely, were conspicuous by their absence.⁶⁶

The main negotiations

On the same day that he made his speech, Molotov reiterated to Naggiar that the Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, and perhaps Lithuania as well, although it did not have a frontier with the USSR, should be given the same protection as Poland and Romania.⁶⁷ This was confirmed when, on 2 June, he gave to the French and British ambassadors the Soviet response to the Anglo-French proposal in the form of a modified version of their document, which confirmed the differences he had hinted at in his speech. As a concession to the Western proposals, reference was made to the principles of the League of Nations charter.⁶⁸ It specified by name the states to which assistance would be given in the event of hostilities arising out of 'direct' aggression against them or against one of the three signatories. Besides Belgium, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Poland, the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, which were opposed to a guarantee from the USSR, were included; but the Netherlands and Switzerland, countries which had been added by the French and British to the original list, were omitted. Naggiar suggested naming guaranteed countries in a separate unpublished protocol, but Molotov, perhaps suspicious that the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, would be left out, was dubious about this.⁶⁹ There was to be a clause preventing one of the powers making peace independently if it came to war. The Soviet draft also stipulated, and Molotov insisted on, the simultaneous entry into force of political and military agreements.⁷⁰

The initial French reaction to Molotov's speech and response was not entirely unfavourable,⁷¹ but Halifax pointed out to the British Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, on 5 June, that the Soviet text committed Britain and France to come to the help of the USSR if any of her neighbours were attacked, although the Soviet Union was not obliged to aid Britain and France if these countries became involved in war through German aggression against the Netherlands or Switzerland.⁷² Molotov's second clause, which necessitated an immediate and wide-ranging military agreement, was also found unacceptable. Despite these reservations, partly because Seeds had influenza and could not be recalled for a new briefing, it was decided to send a Foreign Office representative to Moscow to expedite matters. Molotov instructed Maisky to make it clear that the negotiations could not be concluded successfully without a satisfactory solution to the question of the Baltic states bordering the USSR, including the danger of an 'indirect attack' upon them. The same telegram demonstrated that the negotiations were a top priority for him at this stage, for he told

Maisky to hint to Halifax, who thought of going himself, that a visit from the British foreign secretary would be welcome.⁷³ This was a proposal of major significance, for negotiations at the ministerial level could well have clinched a treaty at this time. It came when Molotov was under considerable pressure, for on 7 June Germany had signed its non-aggression treaty with Latvia and Estonia.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Maisky did not see Halifax until 12 June, the day the Foreign Office representative left,⁷⁵ and Chamberlain not only discouraged Halifax but also refused to allow Eden to go. He had met Molotov in 1935, on the first visit of an important Western politician to Moscow since 1917.⁷⁶ If Molotov did not know these details, he might have suspected that the British were not serious about the negotiations when he learned that, on 21 and 26 June, Chamberlain had been asked in the House of Commons to send a minister but had refused to do so. On the first occasion it was pointed out that he had travelled to see Hitler three times. He was asked whether the USSR had requested a minister but did not answer. On 31 July Eden was still urging Chamberlain to send 'someone who can talk to M. Stalin', and the pressure to send a minister continued until early August.⁷⁷ That Molotov resented the failure to send a senior member of the government is demonstrated by two reports of the French government to the British Foreign Office to that effect, his comments to Schulenburg in August, describing Strang, the British emissary, as 'an official of the second class',⁷⁸ and his speech to the Supreme Soviet on the ratification of the Nazi-Soviet pact on 31 August, when he described the British and French negotiators as 'minor individuals who were not invested with adequate powers'.⁷⁹

William Strang, head of the Central Department at the British Foreign Office and former counsellor in Moscow, and his assistant Frank Roberts, arrived in Moscow on 14 June.⁸⁰ On the previous day a *Pravda* editorial emphasised the main points in Molotov's speech and insisted on a guarantee of security for the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland. Molotov saw the French ambassador, Seeds and Strang, the latter apparently instructed to take back concessions made in the previous Anglo-French proposals,⁸¹ on 15 June, at a meeting which lasted two and three-quarter hours, with Potemkin once again as translator. Molotov was suspicious of the way Seeds emphasised the extent of existing agreement, seeming to fear it was an attempt at compromising the Soviet position. He agreed to study the revised proposals, but expressed disappointment over the suggestions about the Baltic countries bordering the Soviet Union, about which there were to be consultations if they were threatened rather than guarantees, because Estonia, Latvia and Finland opposed such undertakings if the USSR was involved.⁸² The two ambassadors now found Molotov less stiff and hostile and more genial, although he still arranged the setting to his advantage, sitting at a large desk raised on a dais.⁸³ The desk was placed in the right hand corner of the room, facing the door. His visitors were in a semi-circle below him, Seeds on the extreme left, Strang next to him, then the French ambassador, and finally Potemkin. All except Molotov had to nurse their papers and make notes on their knees. There was a table on the left-hand side of the room but nobody suggested using it. Behind Molotov, to the left, was a door always left slightly open as if someone was listening. No one took any record of the conversations, although Molotov, who occasionally left the meeting, sometimes fiddled with a switch under the left-hand side of his desk, Strang assuming he was relaying those parts of the talks which he

wanted recorded.⁸⁴ Determined to have no respect for diplomatic niceties and prepared to take the greatest advantage possible from his position by emphasising his seniority, Molotov's behaviour also minimised the disadvantage of his own insecurity and inexperience as a diplomat. He was, as usual, in daily contact with Stalin throughout the negotiations: possibly it was Stalin who was listening and with whom Molotov was consulting. Earlier in the negotiations Molotov and Potemkin had seen Stalin on 11 and 27 May. On 15 June Stalin's diary records no interviews until 23.00 hours, so it is quite possible that he was a hidden observer of the first meeting when Strang was present. On 21 June, the date of another important meeting in the afternoon, Stalin's office diary records no meeting with Molotov, and no interview until 18.15, suggesting a similar situation.⁸⁵

Strang was convinced that there was an advantage in dealing with Molotov because he was closer to Stalin, who was now directing policy. He thought that this was why Molotov had very clear ideas about the objectives he was seeking and appeared to be impervious to argument. There was little give and take in discussion, nor was there the informal contact between assistants and experts normal in such negotiations. Strang wrote that

the Kremlin have taken foreign affairs into their own hands. The commissariat for Foreign Affairs has been drastically purged, and there is no one there, except Potemkin, competent to talk about the subject-matter of our negotiations ... Molotov's technique is stubbornly and woodenly to repeat his own point of view and to ask innumerable questions of his interlocutors.⁸⁶

He wrote later:

With Molotov ... one had to say exactly what one meant, neither more nor less, and to say it over and over again in the same words. There was no other way of convincing ... [him] that one really meant what one said. Any proposal made to a Soviet negotiator must be securely founded in a policy both well considered and tenaciously held, and must be fit to sustain the repeated and unsparing attacks of a mind, harsh, unbelieving and vexatious.⁸⁷

Like Seeds, Strang was struck by Molotov's unfamiliarity with diplomatic technique and apparent ignorance of foreign languages, although he may have been mistaken about this, for Molotov had achieved the top grades in French and German at the end of his school education.⁸⁸

On 16 June the Soviet press reported that fundamental differences of opinion had been discussed, but the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs did not regard the results of the conversations or the Anglo-French proposals in an 'entirely favourable' manner.⁸⁹ This was the first occasion a press statement had been issued after a meeting, indicative that the negotiations had reached a crucial stage for Molotov. The Soviet government's written reply, handed by Molotov to the British and French representatives on the same day, emphasised that Anglo-French proposals committed the Soviet Union to action if Poland, Romania, Belgium, Greece or Turkey were attacked, but Britain and France were not under similar obligations if Latvia, Estonia or Finland were subject to aggression, and that this lack of reciprocity was humiliating to the USSR. This left only the possibility of an agreement in the case of a 'direct' attack on one of the three signatories, with further discussion necessary on when the

arrangement came into force, and on a military convention. The reply also stated that the Soviet government was unwilling to consider a compact in which an individual signatory could make peace once the three were committed to hostilities, and that the USSR considered references to the League of Nations Covenant superfluous.⁹⁰ Molotov went on to stress these points verbally, saying that every time his government had made suggestions, one of its proposals had been rejected. If the British and French governments treated the Soviet government as 'being naive or foolish people' he, personally, could smile, but he 'could not guarantee that everyone would take so calm a view'. Using the words *naivny* and *duraki*, rendered later by Strang as 'nitwits and nincompoops' and by Seeds as 'simpletons and fools', Molotov emphasised the phrase by confirming with an embarrassed Potemkin that the latter had translated the last word appropriately, as 'imbeciles'.⁹¹ He also expressed suspicion that the Anglo-French draft precluded their help to the USSR if attacked by Poland, a rather unlikely event.⁹² Molotov had become exasperated and lost patience; he was prepared to apply to the negotiations tactics he had learned outside the field of diplomacy, implying that it was the French and British who were the 'simpletons' and 'fools'. Again he stressed that the USSR had agreed to undertake commitments in respect of *five* guaranteed countries, to which Britain and France had now added Switzerland and the Netherlands, but that they would not extend the list to *three* border countries vital from the Soviet point of view. He wrote to Maisky and Surits:

the English and French want to conclude a treaty with us which would be advantageous to them and disadvantageous to us, i.e. they do not want a serious treaty based on the principles of reciprocity and equality of obligations.

It is clear that we shall not accept such a treaty.⁹³

Aware of the suspicions of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, of Soviet intentions, the French and British governments now suggested replacing the names of countries with a general statement about assistance to countries 'which the contracting country had ... undertaken to assist'. Molotov responded, on 21 June, that he thought the Soviet government must insist that the treaty should specify the names of the eight countries concerned, and that each of the signatories guarantee all eight. The heavy burden on the USSR, which would need 100 divisions if guarantees to the five countries specified by the Western powers had to be fulfilled, meant that it was essential that the commitments to the Soviet government should be precisely defined and not left vague. He concluded that this proposal did not represent any progress.⁹⁴ A communiqué in the Soviet press confirmed this.⁹⁵

Molotov's formal reply, on 22 June, withdrew the proposal of 16 June for a more limited agreement, since it had not been accepted, the USSR reverting to its 2 June suggestion which specified the countries, required simultaneous political and military agreements, and synchronous ending of hostilities by the signatories. On being asked whether they could try to settle articles which were unlikely to cause difficulty before attempting to solve the fundamental problem, Molotov said it would be better to solve the main question first.⁹⁶ On 25 June he telegraphed Maisky and Surits that the latest British and French efforts did not create the impression that they were serious in meeting the USSR's concerns about the Baltic states bordering the Soviet Union.⁹⁷ An

article in *Pravda*, on 29 June, by Zhdanov, provocatively titled 'The English and French Governments Do Not Want an Equal Agreement with the USSR', designed to pressure Britain and France into speeding up the negotiations, contrasted the Soviet government's reply to various drafts in 16 days with the British and French waste of 59 in procrastination and delays. Again there was the metaphor of the USSR pulling chestnuts from the fire for Britain and France who, it was suggested, wanted an agreement for some ulterior motive.

Although they had done nothing to allay the suspicions of the USSR, an alliance with the Western powers remained the preference, for on 28 June Molotov rebuffed Schulenburg's attempt to raise the issue of better Soviet-German relations. As late as mid-July Soviet negotiators were stating that relations between the two countries could only be normalised slowly.⁹⁸ Moreover, on 1 July *Pravda* reported, in considerable detail, Halifax's Chatham House speech of 29 June, in which he emphasised the British government's determination to resist aggression, a clear hint of the significance given to the negotiations.

The Western powers now suggested that the Soviet Union should be allowed the right of deciding whether any aggression against one of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, constituted a threat to the independence or neutrality of that state, forcing the Soviet Union to go to war against the aggressor, and that an unpublished annexe should list the guaranteed countries and include both the Baltic countries and Switzerland and the Netherlands.⁹⁹ On 1 July, in response to a draft including what the Western powers regarded as this major concession, Molotov conceded that this might be a possibility. But he still objected to the addition to the list of Switzerland, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (only of significance to and recently added by the French). He again argued that the USSR was required to guarantee far more countries on the borders of the Western powers than vice versa, pointing out that it was difficult for the USSR to guarantee Switzerland and the Netherlands because the USSR did not have diplomatic relations with these countries. Molotov now raised the need for a definition of and reference to 'indirect aggression', as in the case of President Hácha's capitulation to Hitler in March 1939. He was clearly returning to the matter of internal subversion by Germany in Estonia and Latvia, where there was growing German penetration. When challenged that this was a new point, Molotov said that the Soviet government had the same rights as France and Britain to raise new issues.¹⁰⁰ This objection, after the addition of Luxembourg, which would have seemed insignificant to Molotov, must have reinforced any fears he had that the Western powers were not serious in desiring a treaty.

Molotov's official answer, on 3 July, incorporated the reference to 'indirect aggression' and restated his arguments about the states the USSR was required to guarantee. When the Western negotiators pointed to the concession they had made with regard to the Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, Molotov replied that the USSR had reciprocated by allowing the list to be included in an unpublished protocol, rather than in the main treaty.¹⁰¹ Initially he argued that it could not be extended beyond the original eight countries, because in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 May he had gained approval only for those. Later he changed his ground, saying that the Netherlands and Switzerland could be included if Poland and Turkey, having made pacts of mutual assistance with the USSR, were omitted, as

their aid would compensate the USSR for the additional burden. This was a concession to the strategic concerns of Britain and France, but Molotov was standing firm on issues which affected the vital interests of the USSR on which the Western powers seemed to be willing to wrangle eternally. He must have been heartened that he was gradually gaining ground from Western concessions even if doubts about the seriousness of Britain and France were growing.

The French government was angered by Molotov's attitude, describing his arguments about equality of obligations as 'unjustifiable in theory and indefensible in fact'. It feared that the concept of 'indirect aggression', now becoming central to the negotiations, gave one state the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another.¹⁰² Molotov's original definition of the term as 'an internal coup d'état or a reversal of policy in the interests of the aggressor'¹⁰³ was found 'completely unacceptable' by the French and British, the latter believing that since the chief objection of the Baltic countries bordering the Soviet Union to the proposed treaty was fear of Soviet interference in their internal affairs, it would drive them 'gratuitously' into the arms of Germany. Molotov appeared 'impervious' to this argument. The Western compromise was to use only the word 'aggression', not specifying 'direct' or 'indirect'.¹⁰⁴ It was hoped to secure Molotov's agreement to this modification in return for omitting the Netherlands, Switzerland and Luxembourg. But on 8 and 9 July he rejected this, quoting the precedent of the British guarantee to Poland, and a statement by Halifax to Maisky on 12 June that the British government recognised the desire of the Soviet Union to enjoy guarantees from Poland and Romania in the event of 'direct' or 'indirect' aggression against the Baltic countries.¹⁰⁵

Strang claimed that Molotov realised the 'impropriety' of his previous definition of 'indirect aggression' when, on 8 July, he suggested defining it as 'the use by a European Power of the territory of one of the undermentioned states for purposes of aggression either against that state or against one of the three contracting countries'.¹⁰⁶ Seeds believed that Molotov put forward this formula spontaneously, in an effort to be helpful.¹⁰⁷ This was a high point in the negotiations; Strang describes Molotov as 'affable and cooperative'¹⁰⁸ and there was now some chance of agreement.¹⁰⁹ This change in Molotov's attitude may have been caused by alarm over the warm reception of a German military mission to Finland, Latvia and Estonia in late June,¹¹⁰ or he could have been lulling the Western negotiators into a false sense of confidence to secure more concessions. On the next day he had refined the definition to

action accepted by any of the [listed] states under threat of force by another Power, or without any such threat, involving the use of territory and forces of the state in question for purposes of aggression against that state or against one of the contracting parties ...¹¹¹

The British government objected to the phrase 'without any such threat', fearing that this permitted the USSR to interfere in the domestic affairs of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland; and also 'against that state', which might allow Soviet intervention in the event of a coup d'état overthrowing an existing government.¹¹² Molotov was now prepared to accept the Netherlands and Switzerland in the list of countries, on the conditions he had already specified, but he ruled out Luxembourg, perhaps justifiably, as of 'too little importance to merit a special mention'.¹¹³ Now, possibly because of the deteriorating European situation, he made the military

agreement the priority, insisting that this should be signed simultaneously with the political one, saying the Soviet government was unanimous on this.¹¹⁴ Keeping Soviet interests in the Baltic countries bordering the USSR uppermost, whilst driving the British and French to discuss the vital military compact, Molotov may also have been aiming to put pressure on Hitler to offer a treaty, by forcing the pace on military staff talks with the two Western powers.

The French and British ambassadors were taken aback by Molotov's demands, and asked their governments for further instructions.¹¹⁵ The French government, always more anxious for an agreement with the USSR, authorised the French ambassador to express the willingness of his government to send a 'high military personality' to Moscow immediately, and the British government agreed that military talks might begin.¹¹⁶ It was hoped that this might persuade Molotov to accept a more satisfactory definition of 'indirect aggression'. Even at this late stage, fear of a Soviet understanding with Germany never seems to have been uppermost in the minds of either the British or the French, the British believing that reports of the possibility were manoeuvres in the negotiating process.¹¹⁷

Final stages

The next meeting, on 17 July, took place in an atmosphere which Seeds described as 'unfavourable'.¹¹⁸ German approaches about the possibility of a German–Soviet trade agreement may explain the change in Molotov's demeanour, suggesting he was trying to force an outcome so that the USSR could choose between alternatives if another option became available.¹¹⁹ In addition, Molotov had heard from Maisky that Chamberlain, who would have a free hand with the British Parliament in recess from August, was still reluctant to accept a pact with the USSR, and was endeavouring to put pressure on both Poland and Germany to be moderate.¹²⁰ The British and French representatives agreed to the inclusion of a definition of 'indirect aggression', but pressed Molotov to accept their interpretation of the term. Molotov, however, insisted on the inclusion of the phrases 'without threat of force' (showing that the example of President Háchá was central for him) and 'use of territory and forces'. When Seeds protested that this could result in a situation where one signatory could drag the others into hostilities, Molotov refused to discuss the matter further on the grounds that this was the official decision of his government, and pressed the French and British representatives to pass on to the next business. He seemed inclined to accept the omission of the Netherlands and Switzerland from the list of countries, covering their case with a general statement about consultations, although he had reservations about the wording proposed. He asked whether the French and British were willing to open military negotiations immediately, stressing that the simultaneous entry into force of political and military agreements was the priority of the Soviet government, making agreement on the precise wording of the political treaty a 'technical matter of secondary importance'.¹²¹ He wrote to his ambassadors in France and Britain on the same day:

We are insisting that the military pact is an inseparable part of a military–political agreement ... and categorically reject the Anglo-French proposal that we should first agree on the

'political' part of the treaty and only then turn to the question of the military agreement. This dishonest Anglo-French proposal splits up what should be a single treaty into two separate treaties and contradicts our basic proposal about concluding the whole treaty simultaneously, including its military part, which is the most important and most political part of the treaty. You understand that without an absolutely concrete military agreement, as an integral part of the whole treaty, it will be nothing but an empty declaration, and this is something we cannot accept ... Only crooks and cheats such as the negotiators on the Anglo-French side have shown themselves to be all this time could pretend that our demands for the simultaneous conclusion of a political and military agreement are something new in the negotiations, while at the same time leaking a *canard* to the press intimating that we are demanding a military pact first, that is, before signing a political agreement. It is hard to understand just what they expect when they resort to such clumsy tricks in the negotiations. It seems that nothing will come of these endless negotiations. Then they will have no one but themselves to blame.¹²²

Molotov told the Western negotiators that the Soviet government was astonished that the French and British governments had not seen fit to deny the press reports, and angrily accused them of briefing the press in their countries on the course of the negotiations. His comments on press leaks were justified and Seeds and Payart could only say, lamely, that it was impossible for their governments to deny every false report which appeared.¹²³

Strang, astonished that the British and French governments were expected 'to talk military secrets with the Soviet government' before there was a political understanding, commented:

Molotov does not become any easier to deal with as the weeks pass. He has ... now made himself familiar with the details of our problem; and ... the drafts he produces ... are ingeniously constructed, though they are, I am told, couched in inelegant Russian. But it is difficult to get to grips with him. He seems to be bored with detailed discussion ... It took us ... an inordinate time trying to make clear to him the difference between initialling an agreement, signing an agreement, and bringing an agreement into force, and even now we are not sure that he has grasped it. Indeed we have sometimes felt that the differences between us might perhaps be based on some colossal misunderstanding. And yet we have usually come to the conclusion in the end that this is not so, and that Molotov has seen clearly the extent of the differences between the respective positions on both sides.

The fact that Molotov saw these as very fundamental may well explain his lack of patience on detail. Strang went on to say that the negotiations had been humiliating because the British and French had continually made concessions and changed their position and Molotov seemed to sense they were doing this. This was perhaps inevitable, because the French and British, committed to building up a 'Peace Front', had taken the initiative in starting negotiations and believed, perhaps erroneously, that they were in far greater need of an agreement than the USSR. Strang quite correctly pointed out that the Russians might feel that Britain and France, having raised one difficulty after another only to yield in the end, had not changed their policy since they had given way to Germany, Italy and Japan, and were not serious in seeking an agreement.¹²⁴ Moreover, the USSR had at least two other options: isolation or 'accommodation with Germany'. The conclusion of a close political and military alliance with two capitalist powers was something completely new for the USSR.

Naggiar, the French ambassador, described Molotov's implacable method of negotiating as the reverse of that employed by an oriental government, echoing Chamberlain's comment in Cabinet when he spoke of 'bazaar haggling'.¹²⁵ But if the French and British regarded themselves as the sophisticates in the negotiations, they failed to understand what was at stake: that the USSR, suspicious of all capitalist powers but frightened both of isolation and of war on two fronts and in desperate need of an agreement, might go for a treaty with Germany.

Soviet press reports on 22 July of trade negotiations in Berlin now put pressure on Britain and France,¹²⁶ and on 23 July Seeds, supported by Payart, told Molotov that the British and French governments were willing to agree to the simultaneous implementation of political and military agreements. Molotov, who was also under pressure because of reports of Goering's economic adviser visiting London, expressed his 'keen satisfaction', saying he did not see that the definition of 'indirect aggression' presented insuperable problems, and it was essential that military conversations should be started immediately because 'the fact that the three countries were ... settling concrete details ... would be of great interest to possible aggressors'. The Western negotiators tried to insist that the chief obstacles to a political agreement, the definition of 'indirect aggression' and the wording on the simultaneous entry into force of political and military agreements, should be settled first, so that there was a satisfactory basis for the military convention. But Molotov refused to accept that 'indirect aggression' involved a 'threat of force' and abandonment of a state's neutrality, although Seeds insisted that this was a matter of principle for the British government. After some prevarication, the British and French representatives agreed that military negotiations might commence, providing a joint communiqué was issued saying that the three governments believed that sufficient agreement had been achieved in the political conversations to permit this. Molotov, who emphasised that the military agreement was more important than the political one, agreed to consider this.¹²⁷

On 27 July Molotov, although concerned about the delay of eight to 10 days envisaged before the Western military missions could be dispatched, was enthusiastic about the beginning of military talks,¹²⁸ saying that

the important point was to see how many divisions each party would contribute to the common cause and where they would be located.

Rejecting a plea by Halifax through Maisky to accept the British definition of 'indirect aggression' in return for Western agreement to the beginning of military talks,¹²⁹ Molotov suggested that both sides should try their hands at a revised version which, he said, needed to include an 'internal movement which modified the external position of another state'. But he would not agree to the Soviet government associating itself with the proposed press statement, on the grounds that it was premature and might be misleading. Nor was he in favour of independent announcements being made by the French and British governments; the only thing to which he might agree was a joint declaration that the military missions had arrived when this event had taken place. Molotov may have feared that it would give the impression to the Germans that an agreement with the Western powers was ready for signature, and that the USSR was about to throw in her lot with them. When

challenged by the French ambassador that, by refusing to agree to press statements he was preventing democratic governments keeping public opinion informed, Molotov replied that the USSR was the most truly democratic country but it was a mistake to risk misleading the public.¹³⁰

On 29 July Molotov authorised Astakhov in Berlin to indicate that the USSR would welcome the improvement of political relations with Germany.¹³¹ This action is not surprising: he was receiving information from Maisky of Anglo-German negotiations, that discussions with the USSR were becoming a lower priority for the British, and a pessimistic report from the Soviet ambassador in France.¹³² His concern for the success of the talks would have only been increased when he learned that, on 31 July, the British government had once more rejected pressure to send a ministerial representative to Moscow or to receive a representative of the Soviet government in London.¹³³ On the previous day, the 25th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, *Izvestiya* had published a strongly anti-fascist article stating that World War II had already begun and that the USSR stood for a general peace front to halt fascist aggression, based on 'reciprocity' and repudiation of the fatal policy of 'non-intervention'.

Molotov would have been surprised by the low priority allocated to conveying the military missions to Moscow. Rejecting travel by air and rail, and chartering a merchant ship rather than using a fast naval cruiser,¹³⁴ the missions would not arrive in Moscow until 11 August.¹³⁵ Nor would the composition of the military delegation have impressed Soviet leaders. The members may have been experts in their fields, but they were not front-ranking military personages of the seniority of Voroshilov.¹³⁶ Stalin observed to Molotov about this time:

They are not serious. These people cannot have proper authority. London and Paris still wish to play poker, but we would like to know if they have the ability to carry out European manoeuvres.

Molotov replied that it was essential that the talks should continue. 'Let them show their cards', he added. 'Agreed, if we must', replied Stalin.¹³⁷

What proved to be the final meeting in the political negotiations took place on 2 August, in an atmosphere which Strang later described as 'extremely cool'. Seeds reported the composition of the British military mission, and Molotov asked whether it would have full powers to negotiate. He then protested that Butler, in a statement in the House of Commons, had grossly misrepresented the Soviet formula on 'indirect aggression' as meaning that the Soviet government wished to infringe the independence of the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, whereas, on the contrary, it wished to guarantee their independence and neutrality.¹³⁸ The TASS report of Butler's speech, in *Izvestiya*, on which Molotov based his comments, was accurate; Seeds contested this, but he did not have an authoritative version of the speech.¹³⁹ Molotov also complained again that the negotiations were leaked to the Western press and that the Soviet view was misrepresented by official British government spokesmen. A long wrangle followed about a new definition of 'indirect aggression', suggested by the British and French ambassadors, but no progress was made. Molotov appeared to use Butler's statement as an excuse not to discuss modification of the draft or any new Soviet definition. Seeds reported that Molotov was 'a different man' since the

previous interview, and that he felt that the negotiations had received a 'severe set-back'. The French ambassador was more optimistic. He identified the question of 'indirect aggression' as the only remaining obstacle.¹⁴⁰ Molotov's attitude may have been a tactic to pressurise the British and French and the result of disappointment with the low priority given by them to the military conversations. It could also have been an indication that negotiations with Germany were now being considered, following a meeting between Schnurre and Astakhov, the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Berlin, on 26 July, details of which were received in Narkomindel on 31 July.¹⁴¹

Seeds and Naggiar felt that Molotov would avoid coming to an agreement on the outstanding political issues until the military talks had made considerable progress, and the British government decided not to change its definition of 'indirect aggression' immediately, particularly as the military conversations might delay the negotiations. It withdrew Strang, partly to report and partly because of pressure of business in his Foreign Office department, making the excuse that with attention focussed on the military negotiations his presence in Moscow was no longer necessary.¹⁴² This must have further undermined Molotov's confidence in the seriousness of the British negotiators. But when Butler mentioned his speech to Maisky the ambassador was conciliatory, saying that the TASS report had been inaccurate, and agreed to relay this information to Moscow, evidence that he at least still had instructions to mollify the British.¹⁴³

The end of the negotiations

The ambassadors presented the military delegations to Molotov on 11 August. Whereas Voroshilov had been most welcoming, it was a short and formal interview, Seeds putting the difference more down to

the personal inability of M. Molotov to unbend and be affable on official occasions than to any coldness on his part. He said indeed that he regarded the arrival of the Missions as being 'the greatest help'.

But Molotov did not attend the dinner given that evening for the mission.¹⁴⁴ The reasons for his behaviour may have been significant, indicating that, in the light of all the difficulties with Britain and France, and following Molotov's meeting with Schulenburg on 3 August, Stalin and Molotov were now beginning to put their faith in obtaining an agreement with Hitler.¹⁴⁵

The military discussions, if more favourable socially, were always difficult in the negotiating process. Whilst the French negotiators had been instructed that an agreement was urgent, the British had been told to proceed slowly until there was a political settlement.¹⁴⁶ At the first meeting Voroshilov asked whether the French and British delegations had the 'power to sign' as did the Soviet delegation. The French confirmed that they had, but the British were hurriedly forced to request written credentials and a definition of their powers from London,¹⁴⁷ an indication to Stalin and Molotov of the British attitude. When this problem had been surmounted the negotiations stalled on the fundamental question of Soviet forces passing through Romanian and Polish territory in the event of war, to which the Polish government would not give agreement in advance.¹⁴⁸ When it became clear that the British and

French could not solve this problem, Voroshilov proposed adjournment on the excuse that the absence of the senior Soviet personnel at the talks was interfering with the autumn manoeuvres of the Soviet forces. In fact it was because of the progress being made in the USSR–German negotiations: the talks with Britain and France were overtaken by the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact.¹⁴⁹

On 16 August, when Molotov saw Steinhardt, the American ambassador, he emphasised how important the discussions with Britain and France were for the USSR and tried, through him, to use his interview with Schulenburg the previous day to put pressure on the Western powers.¹⁵⁰ As late as 20 August he spoke enthusiastically to the new Turkish ambassador about a positive and speedy result, and his stalling on the date of Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow indicates that there were still hopes of a successful outcome of the Triple Alliance negotiations.¹⁵¹ On 22 August, however, the British government learned from the German press that Germany and the USSR proposed to conclude a non-aggression pact. On that day Molotov saw the British and French ambassadors individually about the negotiations for the last time. Having assured Naggiar that the maintenance of peace and resistance to aggression, the fundamental policy of the USSR, had not changed, he went on to say that the Soviet government had signed a number of non-aggression agreements and, in negotiating another with Germany, he did not consider that his government was deviating from its policy. He felt it was necessary to mark time for a few days, but denied that this was the end of conversations with Britain and France. When asked what the USSR would do in the event of German action against Danzig, neatly turning the tables, Molotov replied that the Soviet government could hardly assist Poland, as it was unwilling to accept Soviet assistance.¹⁵²

In his interview, Seeds had the

personal gratification ... after months of patience and self-control [of being able] to accuse the Soviet Prime minister to his face of 'bad faith' ... That the accusation had to be made through a subservient and very frightened M. Potemkin as interpreter and witness was particularly galling to the recipient, who savagely asked whether these words figured textually in my instructions.¹⁵³

Molotov angrily

rejected the accusation of bad faith: he would not admit the right of His Majesty's Government to employ that expression, or to stand in judgement on the Soviet Government ... His Majesty's Government did not inform the Soviet Government of modifications in their policy ...

But he soon recovered his composure and the interview ended normally, Seeds concluding

even a Soviet statesman may sometimes feel that his particular ideology, or conception of conduct, is not quite unassailable.

Molotov claimed that during the negotiations he had constantly reproached the British with insincerity. The height of this was the arrival of the military missions in Moscow, quite unprepared to deal with the question of Soviet troops passing through Poland and Romania, a question which the USSR had raised in the past on several

occasions at the time of the Czech crisis. This, in his opinion, showed that the British and French were only 'playing' with the Soviet Union, and

(either yesterday or the day before) the Soviet Government ... had accepted the proposal made to them by the German Government.

If Molotov's statement on the final decision to negotiate with Germany is accurate, he was sincere in negotiating with Britain and France throughout the talks. He was clearly embarrassed when Seeds asked him whether the USSR would now allow Germany to overrun Poland.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

In his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 August on the ratification of the pact with Germany, Molotov acknowledged that it was over the right of Soviet forces to cross Poland that the talks had broken down. He also specified, as contributory factors, the difficulties over the definition of 'indirect aggression', the dilatoriness of Great Britain and France during the negotiations, which they entrusted to persons of secondary importance, and the failure to send military missions to Moscow with clearly defined powers, the British mission having no mandate at all.¹⁵⁵ Molotov and Voroshilov continued to maintain in their public statements after the event that it was only well on in August, when the three-power negotiations had run into insuperable difficulties on Poland, that the Soviet government decided to negotiate a treaty with Germany. Strang, on reflection later, thought it was earlier, possibly about 11 August, citing the approach by Astakhov to the German Foreign Office on 12 August as being the key event, and Molotov became much more active personally in diplomatic negotiations with Germany from about this date.¹⁵⁶ All these facts support the revisionist case that the Soviet decision to negotiate a non-aggression pact was taken late and the Soviet contribution to the failure of the negotiations was not lack of motivation but a failure to understand the French and British political position and diplomatic tactics; that Soviet foreign policy was 'passive', 'reactive' and ad hoc.¹⁵⁷ It remains true, however, and must have been clear to Molotov and Stalin, that an agreement with Germany avoided an immediate war with that country and could satisfy Soviet territorial ambitions in eastern Poland, the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, and Bessarabia; an alliance with Britain and France offered no territorial gains and a war with Germany in which the USSR was most likely to bear the brunt of a German attack.

After the conclusion of the Soviet pact with Germany, Seeds and Naggiar saw Molotov on 25 August. He told them that the political situation had changed and the Soviet government did not consider that the negotiations should be continued. He confirmed Voroshilov's comments to the military delegation, that the question of the passage of Soviet troops through Poland and Romania was the reason for the failure of the negotiations.¹⁵⁸ Molotov told Naggiar that 'a great country like the USSR could not go and beg Poland to accept help which she did not desire at any price'. When asked whether the agreement with Germany did not have secret clauses, he replied by inquiring ominously whether France did not conclude treaties which contained them.¹⁵⁹

The Western representatives had found that the blunt methods which Molotov employed as a party secretary were being applied to international diplomacy and the discussions provided a good training for Molotov for the tortuous negotiations in which he was to be involved for the remainder of his career. He displayed, in 1939, many of the characteristics for which he was to become notorious and which were to become the trademarks of Soviet diplomatic method. He was not guided by the conventions of diplomacy, beginning with almost automatic opposition to the proposals of the other side and uncompromisingly advocating the Soviet point of view. He used the trivial as the first line of defence when his opponents were attacking crucial Soviet interests; he appeared to be in agreement but then reverted to his own point of view.¹⁶⁰

With his pince-nez and pedantic fussiness which [later] caused Western diplomats to refer to him as 'Auntie Moll,' he pursued his goal with the determined air of a maiden aunt who could not stand untidiness ...¹⁶¹

On the other hand he employed bad manners, invective, rudeness (his description of the Western negotiators as 'simpletons' and 'fools') and calculated delays, although not at this time walking out of meetings. These were tactics skilfully employed to wear down the opposition. He left a legacy of what has been described as 'grim professionalism';¹⁶² he was an 'iron civil servant' rather than a revolutionary hero.¹⁶³

Molotov's conduct of the negotiations does not support the contentions of one authority that he was 'one of the most inexorably stupid men to hold the foreign ministership of any major power this century'. If to some he seemed 'ignorant, stupid, greedy and grasping, incurably suspicious and immovably obstinate',¹⁶⁴ Kennan observed that his imperturbability, stubbornness and lack of histrionics, the 'master chess player who never missed a move, who let nothing escape him', often made him the ideal negotiator.¹⁶⁵ The Triple Alliance negotiations showed that he was logical and precise, working almost to a mathematical precision, dispensing with rhetoric.¹⁶⁶ He showed very little personal initiative, implementing Stalin's orders and, when there were problems, saying that he would have to consult his 'government'.¹⁶⁷

Molotov recognised Strang when he came to London in 1942, greeting him with the words: 'I am glad to see an old friend. We did our best in 1939, but we failed: we were both at fault'.¹⁶⁸ But if the negotiations had served as an apprenticeship for Molotov they ended Seeds's career. Despite the bluster when he accused Molotov of 'bad faith', he left Moscow in January 1940, having served as ambassador for only a year, and retired from public life.¹⁶⁹ On being consulted in September 1939 on whether Great Britain should declare war on the USSR as well as Germany he advised:

I do not myself see what advantage war with the Soviet Union would do to us, though it would please me personally to declare it on M. Molotov.¹⁷⁰

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¹ I have not included references to Russian published sources where I have consulted the original document in the archive.

² T.J. Uldricks, 'A.J.P. Taylor and the Russians', in G. Martel (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: the A.J.P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-five Years* (Boston, 1986), p. 173.

³ W. Strang, 'The Moscow Negotiations of 1939', in D. Dilks (ed.), *Retreat from Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century, Volume one 1936-1939* (London, 1981), p. 170.

⁴ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1962), pp. 229, 231.

⁵ See below p. 708; I. Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler* (London, 1964), pp. 151-152.

⁶ 'Soviet-British-French Talks in Moscow, 1939', *International Affairs* (Moscow), July 1969, p. 81; G. Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed: Moscow and the Triple Alliance Negotiations, 1939', *European History Quarterly*, 26, 3, 1996, p. 390; A. Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52, 1, 2000, pp. 36-50.

⁷ Uldricks, 'A.J.P. Taylor and the Russians', p. 169; Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 227, 229-230.

⁸ S. Aster, *1939: the Making of the Second World War* (London, 1973), pp. 175-179, 282; Public Record Office (hereinafter PRO), Cab27/624, FP (36) 38th Meeting 27 March 1939.

⁹ D.C. Watt, *How War Came: the Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London, 1989), p. 118. See Seeds' early conversations with Potemkin and Litvinov in 1939, *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossisskoi Federatsii* (hereinafter AVPRF), f. 69, op. 23, pap. 66 ll. 1, 5-8, ll.

¹⁰ W. Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), p. 198.

¹¹ Strang, 'The Moscow Negotiations', pp. 176-177.

¹² R.J. Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-40* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), pp. 236-237, 240; M.J. Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade": Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 45, 2, 1993, pp. 322, 324; J.E. McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe, vol. 1, The Origins of World War II, 1933-1941* (Arlington, 1968), pp. 170, 187.

¹³ Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 229, 232, 240-241.

¹⁴ A. Yakovlev, *Pravda*, 18 August 1989, quoted in G. Roberts, 'The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi-Germany', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 44, 1, 1992, p. 73.

¹⁵ See Roberts, 'The Soviet Decision for a Pact ...', pp. 57-78; and more recently D.V. Posrednikov, *SSSR-Angliya: na puti ot konfrontatsii k sotrudnichestvu* (Donetsk, 1996), pp. 41-53.

¹⁶ A.A. Gromyko et al., (eds), *SSSR v bor'be za mir nakanune vtoroi mirovoi voyny: (sentyabr' 1938g.-avgust 1939g.): dokumenty i materialy* (hereafter *SSSR v bor'be za mir*) (Moscow, 1971), pp. 383-387. Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade,"' p. 305.

¹⁷ PRO, FO 371/24825, Interview between Sir Neville Butler and Leon Helfhand; cf., S.M. Miner, 'His Master's Voice: Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov as Stalin's Foreign Commissar', in G.A. Craig & F. Z. Lowenheim, *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton, 1994), p. 73.

¹⁸ Watt, *How War Came*, p. 363; J. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* (London, 1984), pp. 207, 210; Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov ...', p. 38.

¹⁹ G. Roberts, 'Soviet Policy and the Baltic States, 1939-1940: A Reappraisal', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 3, 1995, p. 674.

²⁰ J. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East, 1933-41: Moscow, Tokyo and the Prelude to the Pacific War* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 129-134; A. Sella, 'Khalkin-Gol, the Forgotten War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18, 1983, p. 651.

²¹ Aster, *1939*, pp. 309-310.

²² Sella, 'Khalkin-Gol, the Forgotten War', p. 666.

²³ *Izvestiya*, 1 June 1939.

²⁴ Sella, 'Khalkin-Gol, the Forgotten War', p. 656.

²⁵ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 303, del. 2093, l. 142.

²⁶ Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed', p. 397; Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov ...', pp. 35-56.

²⁷ E.L. Woodward & R. Butler (eds), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, 3rd Series, (hereafter *DBFP*), vol. 5 (London, 1952), pp. 228-229; Carley, 'End of the "Low, dishonest decade"', pp. 315-320; cf. AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 25, del. 4, ll. 27-28. For the early stages in these negotiations see Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov ...', pp. 37-50.

²⁸ AVPRF, f. 69, op. 23, pap. 66, del. 1, l. 25.

²⁹ Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed', pp. 395-396; Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov ...', pp. 49-50. The Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland) were not included in the French proposal.

³⁰ *DBFP*, vol. 5, pp. 412-413; PRO, FO 371/23065, 211-212; Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, p. 124; AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 300, del. 2076, ll. 177-179.

³¹ PRO, FO 371/23065, 146–149, 23071, 243; DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 443–444, 448–450.

³² Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade"', pp. 314, 319.

³³ Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, p. 117; Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade"', p. 306; Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov ...', p. 41.

³⁴ For the precise nature of the commitments see M. Andreyeva & K. Dimitriyeva, 'The Military Negotiations between the Soviet Union, Britain and France, in 1939', *International Affairs* (Moscow), February 1959, pp. 107–123 and March 1959, pp. 106–122.

³⁵ In reply to a question on 13 April asking if a 'definite military alliance' between the United Kingdom, France and the USSR had ever been proposed, when he had described the British guarantees to Poland, Romania and Greece as a 'new policy ... an effort to build up a peace front', Simon said, and repeated, that the British government had 'no objection in principle'. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 346, House of Commons 1938–39 (London, 1939), col. 131–140.

³⁶ AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 26, del. 18, ll. 95–96; L.B. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude* (London, 1948), pp. 177–178. On 20 March Poland had refused to be associated with the USSR in a four-power guarantee (W.N. Medlicott, *The Coming of War in 1939* (London, 1963), p. 23) but there does seem to have been an improvement in Soviet-Polish relations at the time of Molotov's appointment; see P.R. Sweet *et al.* (eds), *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945* (hereinafter DGFP), Series D, vol. 6 (London, 1956), p. 466.

³⁷ PRO, FO 371/23065, 180; DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 469–471, 483–486; AVPRF, f. 5, op. 1a, pap. 25, del. 8, ll. 6–8. Bonnet, the French foreign minister, had on 3 May, in a fit of temper, revealed to the Soviet ambassador the French proposal, held in reserve in deference to the British. Aster, 1939, p. 173.

³⁸ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 471.

³⁹ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 571.

⁴⁰ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 303, del. 2093, ll. 60–61.

⁴¹ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 302, del. 2090, ll. 10–13; f. 59, op. 1, pap. 300, del. 2076, ll. 189–190. It is not clear how far Maisky's despatches convinced Molotov that the British government would prefer an understanding with Germany, or that British public opinion was likely to force it into a pact with the USSR; Watt, *How War Came*, p. 369. Maisky was in close touch with the anti-appeasement opposition, particularly Lloyd George and Churchill, trying to drive the government into an alliance with the USSR. See S. Aster, 'Ivan Maisky and Anti-Appeasement', in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: Twelve Essays* (London, 1971), pp. 317–357.

⁴² XVII S"ezd Vsesoyuznoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii(b), 10–21 Marta 1939g. *Stenograficheskiy otchet* (Moscow, 1939), p. 15.

⁴³ A. Roshchin, 'Soviet Pre-war Diplomacy', *International Affairs* (Moscow), December 1987, p. 120.

⁴⁴ AVPRF, f. 6, op. 16, pap. 27, del. 1, ll. 7–10. In August, when the pact with Germany had been negotiated, Molotov told Naggiar that the Soviet government considered that the 1935 Soviet-French Pact of Mutual Assistance was made void by the Franco-German Non-Aggression Declaration of December 1938. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude*, p. 289.

⁴⁵ In answer to a parliamentary question by Henderson on 8 May, Chamberlain had talked about 'obtaining the fullest co-operation with Russia', but had not mentioned an alliance, although this had been implied by Henderson, Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 347, col. 10.

⁴⁶ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 737; AVPRF, f. 6, op. 16, pap. 27, del., 1, ll. 7–10.

⁴⁷ AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 26, del. 18, ll. 119–120, 121; DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 589–590, 558–559, 567–568.

⁴⁸ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 302, del. 2090, ll. 22–31.

⁴⁹ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 568; PRO, FO 371/23071, 243–244; Aster, 1939, p. 182; AVPRF, f. 69, op. 23, pap. 66, del. 1, ll. 39–40.

⁵⁰ Watt, *How War Came*, p. 246; Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, pp. 128–130; A.P. Bondarenko (ed.), *God krizisa 1938–1939: dokumenty i materialy* (here after *God krizisa*), t. 1, 29 sentyabrya 1938g.–31 maya 1939 (Moscow, 1990), pp. 486–487.

⁵¹ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 298, del. 2057, ll. 11–12.

⁵² AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1, pap. 1, del. 2, ll. 24–26. Schulenburg was exploring the significance of Molotov replacing Litvinov. Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 248–250.

⁵³ DGFP, vol. 6, pp. 494–500.

⁵⁴ Aster, 1939, pp. 185–187; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 167.

⁵⁵ DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 668–669, 678; AVPRF, f. 11, op. 4, pap. 24, del. 7, ll. 65–67.

⁵⁶ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 710; PRO, FO 371/23067, 126–130.

⁵⁷ DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 680, 702, 712; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 168. For the Soviet account of this interview, recorded by Potemkin, which confirms the words of Molotov which struck Seeds and Strang most forcibly, see AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1, pap. 1, del. 2, ll. 41–47.

- ⁵⁸ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 303, del. 2093, l. 92.
- ⁵⁹ Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade"', p. 324.
- ⁶⁰ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 722; PRO, FO 371/23067, 49–50.
- ⁶¹ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 346, col. 137.
- ⁶² PRO, FO 371/23067, 135; DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 725–727.
- ⁶³ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 722; PRO, FO 371/23067, 49–50.
- ⁶⁴ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 736.
- ⁶⁵ *Izvestiya*, 1 June 1939.
- ⁶⁶ DGFP, vol. 6, p. 626.
- ⁶⁷ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 737.
- ⁶⁸ AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 26, del. 18, ll. 146–147.
- ⁶⁹ DBFP, vol. 5, pp. 753–754.
- ⁷⁰ PRO, FO 371/23071, 245.
- ⁷¹ *SSSR v bor'be za mir*, pp. 433–434.
- ⁷² PRO, FO 371/23067, 230–231.
- ⁷³ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 301, del. 2075, ll. 186–187.
- ⁷⁴ Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed', p. 402.
- ⁷⁵ Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, pp. 140–141; AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 300, del. 2077, ll. 59–61.
- ⁷⁶ Aster, 1939, pp. 264–265.
- ⁷⁷ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 348, col. 2205, 21 June, vol. 349, col. 5, 26 June, vol. 350, col. 2036, 31 July, col. 2818, 4 August.
- ⁷⁸ DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 2–4; R.J. Sontag & J.S. Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939–1941: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office* (here after *Nazi-Soviet Relations*) (Westport, CT, 1976), p. 60; *God krizisa*, t. 2, p. 270.
- ⁷⁹ *Pravda*, 1 September 1939.
- ⁸⁰ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, pp. 156–157; DBFP, vol. 6, p. 22. Roberts only stayed briefly; see *ibid.*, p. 216.
- ⁸¹ Carley, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade"', p. 323.
- ⁸² DBFP, vol. 6, p. 79; 115–119; PRO, FO 371/23069, 21–29.
- ⁸³ According to Aster, 1939, p. 268, Molotov's desk '*appeared mistakenly to be on a raised dais*' (my italics).
- ⁸⁴ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 175; PRO, FO 371/23071, 14.
- ⁸⁵ A.V. Korotkov *et al.* (eds) 'Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalina', *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1995, 6, pp. 37–41.
- ⁸⁶ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 174; DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 138–139. The French record of these conversations as published in Ministère des Relations Extérieures, *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932–1939* (2^e Série 1939–1939), t. xvi–xix (Paris, 1983–86) (here after *DDF*), is considerably more formal and contains far less comment than the British account.
- ⁸⁷ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 165.
- ⁸⁸ *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii*, f. 82, op. 1, del. 8, l. 13.
- ⁸⁹ *Izvestiya*, 16 June 1939.
- ⁹⁰ DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 85–87; PRO, FO 371/23069, 36–37; AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 25, del. 10, ll. 14–15.
- ⁹¹ DBFP, vol. 6, p. 89, 119; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, pp. 176–177.
- ⁹² DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 89–91, 139. Poland, as Molotov noted, had signed a treaty with Romania directed against the USSR.
- ⁹³ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 313, del. 2154, ll. 107–108.
- ⁹⁴ *DDF*, t. 16, pp. 937–8, t. 17, p. 9; DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 140–142.
- ⁹⁵ DBFP, vol. 5, p. 142; *Izvestiya*, 22 June 1939; PRO, FO 371/23069, 12.
- ⁹⁶ PRO, FO, 371/23069, 15–16; DBFP, vol. 6, p. 143; *DDF*, t. 16, pp. 951–952.
- ⁹⁷ 'Anglo-French-Soviet Talks in Moscow on the Eve of War, 1939', *International Affairs* (Moscow), September 1969, p. 69.
- ⁹⁸ G. Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (London, 1989), pp. 145, 150.
- ⁹⁹ DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 173–174, 179–184, 193–194, 208–209; PRO, FO 371/23069, 56–57, 63–65; *God krizisa*, t. 2, pp. 76–77.
- ¹⁰⁰ *DDF*, t. xvii, pp. 125–127, 151–153; DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 229–233.
- ¹⁰¹ DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 242–243, 249–251, 279–281; PRO, FO 371/23069, 102–103, 106; *DDF*, t. xvii, pp. 151–153, 168–169. The eight countries in the Soviet draft of 2 June were Poland, Romania, Turkey, Greece, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia and Finland.
- ¹⁰² DBFP, vol. 6, pp. 266–270; PRO, FO 370/23069, 94–95; 23070, 61–64. The frequently cited paradigm for 'indirect aggression' was the Austrian *Anschluss* of 1938; see P.D. Raymond, *Conflict and*

Consensus in Soviet Foreign Policy 1933–1939, Pennsylvania State University D.Phil thesis, 1979, pp. 579, 635; M.A. Poltavsky, *Diplomatiya imperializma: malye strany Evropy 1938–1939gg.* (Moscow, 1973), *passim*.

¹⁰³ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 179.

¹⁰⁴ *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 277; PRO, FO 371/23069, 94–95; 23070, 53–55; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 179. For the Baltic states representing their views to the British government see McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 191–192.

¹⁰⁵ PRO, FO 371/23070, 78.

¹⁰⁶ PRO, FO 371/23070, 165; *DDF*, t. 17, pp. 262–263.

¹⁰⁷ *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 314; PRO, FO 371/32070, 85.

¹⁰⁸ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁹ *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 308–310; PRO, FO 371/23070, 46–48, 156–157; *DDF*, t. xvii, pp. 278, 192–199.

¹¹⁰ ‘Anglo-French-Soviet Talks in Moscow 1939’, *International Affairs* (Moscow), October 1969, p. 62; Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, p. 221; *SSSR v bor’be za mir*, pp. 459, 471.

¹¹¹ PRO, FO 371/23070, 164; *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 313; AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 26, del. 16, l. 70. To explain the reference to ‘forces’, Molotov suggested the attachment of German officers to the Estonian or Latvian armies.

¹¹² PRO, FO 371/23070, 148–149, 155.

¹¹³ *DDF*, t. xvii, p. 267.

¹¹⁴ *DDF*, t. xvii, pp. 268, 312–317; *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 311–312.

¹¹⁵ *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 312; *DDF*, t. xvii, pp. 335–337.

¹¹⁶ PRO, FO 371/23070, 118–129, 151–152, 163, 168–169; *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 346, 360.

¹¹⁷ Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 372–374.

¹¹⁸ *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 379.

¹¹⁹ Aster, 1939, p. 284.

¹²⁰ ‘Anglo-French-Soviet Talks in Moscow in 1939’, *International Affairs* (Moscow), October 1969, p. 65a.

¹²¹ *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 375–377; PRO, FO 371/23070, 215–219.

¹²² *SSSR v bor’be za mir*, p. 496.

¹²³ PRO, FO 371/23070, 212. For the leaks in the press see Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude*, pp. 153, 179–202. The British government suspected that the Soviet embassy was responsible, endeavouring to influence British public opinion. *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 386. If this was the case it must have given Molotov considerable satisfaction to complain about press leaks he had inspired!

¹²⁴ *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 422–426; PRO, FO 371/23071, 132–135.

¹²⁵ *DDF*, t. xvii, p. 388; PRO, Cab 27/625, FP (36) 54th Meeting 26 June.

¹²⁶ *Izvestiya*, 22 July 1939.

¹²⁷ *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 456–460; PRO, FO 371/23071, 69–74; *DDF*, t. 17, pp. 469–467; M. Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War* (Cambridge, MA., 1951), p. 89.

¹²⁸ *DDF*, t. xvii, p. 539.

¹²⁹ AVPRF, f. 59, op. 1, pap. 300, del. 277, ll. 168–170.

¹³⁰ *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 509–510, 521–524; PRO, FO 371/23071, 126–127, 173–179.

¹³¹ McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, vol. 1, p. 199; Roberts, ‘The Soviet Decision for a Pact ...’, p. 64.

¹³² *SSSR v bor’be za mir*, pp. 504–505, 516; Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, pp. 159–160; ‘Anglo-French-Soviet Talks in Moscow, 1939’, *International Affairs* (Moscow), October 1969, pp. 66–67.

¹³³ Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, pp. 163–164, quoting Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 350, col. 2023.

¹³⁴ PRO, FO 371/23072, 64–67; Aster, 1939, p. 296.

¹³⁵ PRO, FO 371/23072, 7; 23073, 35; *DBFP*, vol. 7, p. 45.

¹³⁶ Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler*, pp. 165–167; Aster, 1939, p. 291.

¹³⁷ D. Volkogonov, *Triumf i tragediya: politicheskii portret I.V. Stalina* (Moscow, 1989), t. 2(1), p. 19.

¹³⁸ Butler had said that the main remaining difficulty was

whether we should encroach on the independence of the Baltic States. We [i.e. the British and French] are in agreement ... that we should not do so, and the difficulty of reaching a formula on that point is one of the main reasons why there has been a delay in the negotiations.

Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates* vol. 350, col. 2099.

- ¹³⁹ *Izvestiya*, 2 August 1939.
- ¹⁴⁰ PRO, FO 371/23074, 47–54; *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 570–574; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, pp. 187–188; AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1a, pap. 26, del. 18, l. 218; *DDF*, t. xvii pp. 658–660.
- ¹⁴¹ *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, pp. 32–34; *God krizisa*, t. 2, pp. 136–140.
- ¹⁴² *Home and Abroad*, pp. 187–188; *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 575, 592, 682–683; AVPRF, f. 69, op. 23, pap. 66, del. 1, l. 53.
- ¹⁴³ *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 594–595.
- ¹⁴⁴ *DBFP*, vol. 7, p. 46; PRO, FO 371/23073, 37.
- ¹⁴⁵ AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1, pap. 3, del. 1, ll. 2–6; *God krizisa*, t. 2, pp. 159–163.
- ¹⁴⁶ *DBFP*, vol. 6, pp. 682–683, 762 *et seq.*
- ¹⁴⁷ *SSSR v bor'be za mir*, pp. 543–549; PRO, FO 371/23072, 179, 185.
- ¹⁴⁸ PRO, FO 371/23072, 190; Strang, *Home and Abroad*, pp. 188–189. For a record of these negotiations see *DBFP*, vol. 7, pp. 558–614, *SSSR v bor'be za mir*, pp. 544–582, 589–603, 607–623, 631–636.
- ¹⁴⁹ *DBFP*, vol. 7, pp. 114–115, 589–590; PRO, FO 371 23073, 52–54; Raymond, *Conflict and Consensus*, pp. 612–613.
- ¹⁵⁰ AVPRF, f. 6, op. 1, pap. 3, del. 1, l. 21.
- ¹⁵¹ *DBFP*, vol. 7, p. 384; Carley, 'End of the "Low Dishonest Decade"', p. 330.
- ¹⁵² McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 224–225, 227, quoting G. Bonnet, *La Défense de la Paix, 1936–1940* (Geneva, 1948), vol. 2, p. 286.
- ¹⁵³ *DBFP*, vol. 7, p. 385.
- ¹⁵⁴ PRO, FO 371/23073, 80–81; *DBFP*, vol. 7, pp. 142–143, 385.
- ¹⁵⁵ V. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy: Four Speeches by V. Molotov* (London, 1941), pp. 12–14.
- ¹⁵⁶ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 195; *God krizisa*, t. 2, pp. 178 *et seq.*; *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, pp. 42–49.
- ¹⁵⁷ Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed', p. 384.
- ¹⁵⁸ *DBFP*, vol. 7, p. 225; PRO, FO 371/23073, 199.
- ¹⁵⁹ *DDF*, t. xvii, pp. 515–516.
- ¹⁶⁰ G.A. Craig, 'Totalitarian Approaches to Diplomatic Negotiations', in A.D. Sorkisson, *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in Honour of G.P. Gooch* (London, 1961), pp. 120–125.
- ¹⁶¹ C. Roetter, *The Diplomatic Art: An Informal History of World Diplomacy* (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 108.
- ¹⁶² US Congress Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behaviour: Emerging New Context for US Diplomacy* (Washington, 1979), p. xlviii. Eden recalled an occasion in 1943 when he said 'I may be mistaken' and Molotov replied 'You are', Craig, 'Totalitarian Approaches ...', p. 121.
- ¹⁶³ W. Hayter, *The Diplomacy of the Great Powers* (New York, 1960), p. 22.
- ¹⁶⁴ Watt, *How War Came*, p. 113.
- ¹⁶⁵ G. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Toronto, 1960), p. 335.
- ¹⁶⁶ Craig, 'Totalitarian Approaches ...', p. 122.
- ¹⁶⁷ G. Hilger & A.G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: a Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations 1918–1941* (London, 1953), p. 290.
- ¹⁶⁸ Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 159.
- ¹⁶⁹ Aster, 1939, p. 319.
- ¹⁷⁰ PRO, FO 371/23103, 289.