

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE:
THE PRE-WAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NAZI GERMANY AND THE SOVIET
UNION

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“And so the very fact of the conclusion of an alliance with Russia embodies a plan for the next war. Its outcome would be the end of Germany.”¹

“All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”

Through their political treatise, speeches, and policy, the National Socialist leadership made no secret of their contempt for the Slavic people during their reign in Germany. In 1925 Hitler repeatedly asserted that Germany must have soil on which the “noble” German race may comfortably sustain themselves, highlighting the fertile qualities of the Ukraine in his political dissertation *Mein Kampf*. He and other National Socialists were convinced of the Slavs’ inferiority to German blood. Hitler goes so far as to assert that the Russian state existed purely thanks to German nobility and intelligentsia, a state that the Bolsheviks would ultimately ruin. The National Socialists were adamant enemies of Communism. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had viciously attacked one another in the state press from the Nazi’s rise to power in 1933 to late 1938. It is therefore no understatement to say that the world was shocked when on August 24th, 1939 Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a Non-Aggression Treaty. To the two powers, however, it was the most pragmatic, expedient, and rational decision that best served the goals of both parties.

Joachim von Ribbentrop, Reich Foreign Minister and Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs signed *The Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, after months of hurried negotiations by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The *Treaty* is composed of seven articles and a secret protocol. Building from the “fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926” the

¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Boston: Mariner Books, 1998), Chapter 14.

Treaty's signatories agreed to enter no coalition directly or indirectly aimed against one another, to "desist from any act of violence" against one another, and to settle their differences through peaceful means such as arbitration commissions. In their secret protocol they agreed on "spheres of influence" in Eastern Europe, effectively dividing the continent and its small republics between the two and partitioning Poland "in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement."² The treaty also included an economic agreement, which literally fed and fuelled Nazi industry and military complexes and furnished the Soviets with much needed war materiel and industrial machinery. The result of this inclusive document was to relieve German *Wehrmacht* commanders of their fear of a two-front war and supplied their divisions, allowing almost immediately for the invasion of Poland and the ignition of World War II.

The "Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact" has been the subject of countless volumes of historical analysis and served as the topic of discussion in innumerable scholarly journal articles and monographs. It has proved to be a contentious issue for multiple reasons, the most important of which deals with nothing less than the perceived responsibility for collaborating with Germany and thus starting World War II. While it is no question that the Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Treaty with Nazi Germany, the question lies in the motives behind the Soviet Union's about-face. Some historians claim that Russia did so because they saw more gain in benevolent neutrality with Germany, while others argue that the Soviet Union had no choice because the fearful capitalist West rebuffed Communist advances.

² Joachim von Ribbentrop & Vyacheslav Molotov, *Nazi-Soviet Relations* (New York: Didier, 1948), 76-78.

Despite the vast amount of scholarly work done on the subject and for the purposes of this paper it has proved to be most prudent to focus specifically on a set of documents released by the U.S. Department of State, which was captured by the American Army during the invasion of Germany, along with selected memoirs of key German statesmen during the inter-war period. The reasons for focusing on these sources are simple. Most importantly, they are the most available and most referenced sources on the topic. They serve as authoritative voices in the discourse of pre-war diplomatic relations. They also give the most complete picture of the events that happened between April and October of 1939. Other sources, such as Soviet primary documents, are equally important to the discourse but, alas, are much harder to obtain for analysis. It is for these reasons that this paper focuses almost exclusively on German sources such as memoirs, memorandums, telegrams, letters, and other written correspondence.

The scholarship that has been done on pre-war Russo-German relations and specifically the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact can be divided up into three periods reflecting temporal changes in the goals and attitudes of the scholars: the post-war period, the Cold War period, and the post-Soviet period. The post-war period consists of scholarship done from 1945 to about 1960 and was largely written in a contemporary light, focusing on politics and relying on a narrow set of German and Allied documents and memoirs. The Cold War period consists of scholarship done from 1961 to 1991 and was written within the realities of a polarized world which was grappling with the Treaty's ramifications and questioning its legitimacy. The post-Soviet period consists of scholarship completed from 1992 to present day and has been written in a largely post-Communist world with more Soviet sources available. These divisions serve to compartmentalize scholars' work, but

are imperfect. Cold War politics spanned both post-war and Cold War periods, and also suffered from a lack of record. However, even though there are similarities between periods there are significant and distinct differences as well. These differences had more to do with their historical contexts than anything else, with factors such as availability of sources and political climates playing the most significant roles.

In the post-war period the memory of the war was fresh in the minds of scholars and society alike. It did not take long for societies to begin the analysis of the war and its causes, and popular press seized the chance to promulgate large amounts of sensational materials.³ As a consequence the *Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union* came under scrutiny almost as soon as Western powers confiscated the remaining German documents at the Foreign Ministry on Wilhelmstrasse. The research done in this period reflected not only the questions originating from the raw emotions of the time but the political climate as well.

Most of the sources used in this time period originated from the 1948 publication of *Nazi-Soviet Relations* from the U.S. Department of State, a selection of documents captured from the German Foreign Ministry's archives after the war.⁴ A direct challenge to the State Department's publication was the Soviet Union's *Falsifiers of History*. A Soviet government publication, it argued that expansion was not the goal of the Pact, rather to avoid "the conversion of these [East European] countries into downtrodden colonies of Hitler Germany."⁵ The USSR's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also produced a set of documents entitled *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second*

³ A. Rossi, *The Russo-German Alliance: August 1939-June 1941* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), vii-viii.

⁴ Geoffrey K. Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2-3.

⁵ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 9-13.

World War, which focused exclusively on the Soviet Union's deteriorating relationship with Britain and France and supported the arguments made in *Falsifiers of History*. These sources, however, seem to have been rarely used in western scholarship, likely due to the dichotomy present in the post-war era. Media outlets before and during the war, personal experiences in the form of memoirs and journals, documents produced from interrogation of responsible Nazis, selected Nazi documents of meetings between Hitler and his high-ranking officials released by Britain and the US, and other selectively released state documents from major belligerents were also resources used by academics.⁶

The post-war period witnessed a political debate centering on the Non-Aggression Treaty rather than historical analysis. The Treaty of Non-Aggression was considered an extremely important moment in diplomatic history but suffered from analysis through an almost strictly political lens in the post-war period. As such questions of the period focused why the USSR signed an agreement with Germany and not the Entente, a term used to define the diplomatic partnership between Britain, France, and Russia in World War I and a label that Britain and France carried in the inter-war period, whether or not the Treaty partially or wholly triggered the Second World War, and what the objectives of Soviet policy makers were?⁷

The result was a dichotomy, which emerged in response to these questions. Some scholars, such as D.N. Pritt, were sympathetic to what must be termed Soviet politics. Pritt, a British intellectual and Soviet sympathizer even before the outbreak of war, questioned the motives of the State Department's release of Nazi documents.⁸ This is not

⁶ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 9-13.

⁷ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 9-13, 2-3.

⁸ D.N. Pritt et al., *The State Department and the Cold War: A commentary on its publication, "Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941"* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), p.7-12

without reason. Western governments did not immediately publish all records that they seized and were selective and peculiar when they did so, although whether this was due to anti-Communist sentiment or an attempt at influencing public opinion must be left in the realm of conjecture.⁹ Others, such as A. Rossi, viewed the Treaty of Non-Aggression, and Stalin in particular, as having just as much if not more to gain in the way of territory and resources from the Pact as Germany, and acted according to ambition as well as desperation.¹⁰ In short two opinions began to form, one sympathetic to Stalin's position and arguing that the USSR was rebuffed by the West and had no choice but to stave off the inevitable war by placating Hitler, the other arguing that Stalin and the Soviet Union was just as aggressive and expansionist as their fascist ally and couldn't be trusted, a charge which carried with it much weight in a world in which the USSR was rapidly consolidating power.¹¹

From the early 1950s to the late 1980s scholarship continued on the subject of inter-war Nazi-Soviet relations. According to Geoffrey Roberts during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s Western governments were "disgorging" relevant documents.¹² These documents, however, only served to "bog down" the historical discussion because historians were working with an incomplete picture. Impressions and guesswork filled Western documents and were often refuted by German documents, creating a sense of confusion. Scholarly interest in the subject slowed in the late 1960s due to this confusion.¹³ Meanwhile scholarship in the USSR was dictated chiefly by regime change. Scholarship under Stalin, for instance, sharply contrasted with Western conclusions. The

⁹ Rossi, *The Russo-German Alliance*, vii-viii.

¹⁰ Rossi, *The Russo-German Alliance*, 67.

¹¹ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 3.

¹² Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 4.

¹³ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 4.

majority of differences between Soviet and Western scholarship, however, stemmed from the fact that the Soviets had a different set of sources, namely their own, to work with that were unavailable to Westerners. Official pro-Stalin lines, such as those touted in *Falsifiers of History*, were no longer necessarily valid under a critical Khrushchev regime. During this period of de-Stalinization authors such as Aleksandr Nekrich, who was critical in his 1965 publication *June 22, 1941* of the Stalin regime in regards to preparations to defend against a potential German offensive, were free to publish critical opinions.¹⁴ While this agreed with the Khrushchev line, a more sympathetic Brezhnev regime ostracized him, withdrew his book from circulation, and eventually forced him to emigrate in 1976.¹⁵ While he was actively publishing in the United States until his death in the mid 1990s he was not able to complete his work on pre-war relations, nor be read in his homeland, until perestroika was complete.¹⁶

Academic interest in the West increased in popularity in the latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s due mainly to two reasons. Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost slowly and selectively opened up Soviet records of the era, allowing historians a peek into the Soviet national perspective of the events.¹⁷ Glasnost, among other things, also led to more public debate in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Republics in particular took up the question of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.¹⁸ The Baltic States were particularly interested in the Pact because of the Secret Protocol, specifically the spheres of influence agreed upon by Ribbentrop and Stalin. Authors such as Izidors Vizulis took up the argument that

¹⁴ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 4, 14-15.

¹⁵ Aleksandr Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1941*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), vii.

¹⁶ Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators*, vii.

¹⁷ Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators*, xiii-xiv.

¹⁸ Izidors Vizulis, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939: The Baltic Case* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), vii-viii

the Secret Protocol was contrary to the sovereignty of the Baltic Republics guaranteed by the League of Nations in the Treaty of Versailles, a current that was gaining momentum in the late 1980s with increasingly nationalist Baltic populations.¹⁹ Accurate analysis was therefore not only of interest to academics and historians, but to millions of people as well.

It was not just an increase in the access to Soviet archives that changed with glasnost, perestroika, and Gorbachev. Soviet attitudes changed as well. Up until mid 1988 the Soviet government officially denied the Secret Protocol. In a series of articles, publications, and speeches both Soviet politicians and historians were grappling with inter-war Soviet diplomacy in a comparatively open light.²⁰ As a result of this openness and renewed interest also came new perspectives and new questions. The narrative was no longer one-sided, and questions of how the Nazi-Soviet Pact affected the Comintern, the Balkans, and the Baltic States were asked. Historians expanded their focus beyond the major belligerents to include the ramifications of their decisions in the wider European context. The result is a large body of work that takes into account the lesser inter-war powers.

The debate in the Cold War setting borrowed heavily from the post-war period and formed two general opinions, one sympathetic to Stalin and the Soviets and the other critical. The critical opinion held that the Soviet Union, and Stalin in particular, was eager to take back lands that were lost since the Red Revolution. Critical voices include Izidors Vizulis and Marilyn Hitchens. Vizulis argues that the Soviet Union was militarily vulnerable and wary of Western attempts of alliance, partially because Stalin

¹⁹ Vizulis, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939*, vii-viii.

²⁰ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 19.

did not believe that they would respect the USSR's territorial and hegemonic claims.²¹ Hitchens argues that the Soviets had an ideological long term strategy which would ultimately benefit from Fascist and Liberal-Capitalist strife and that Stalin viewed lesser outlying powers as belonging to one or another great power.²² Authors like Jonathan Haslam attribute much of the responsibility for Stalin turning to Hitler to the Entente, that is the Franco-British alliance, refusing to hear out the Soviets' efforts to build Collective Security in the inter-war period.²³ Other authors like Anthony Read and David Fisher and Geoffrey Roberts take a more comprehensive approach, looking at political, economic, and historical factors leading up to the signing of the Pact. Read and Fisher take a centrist approach, citing efforts on the parts of Britain, France, Poland, Germany, and the Soviet Union to keep their options open, not just Stalin playing the Entente off of Hitler, but Hitler and Chamberlin playing the same diplomatic game literally up until the signing of the Non-Aggression Treaty.²⁴ Roberts is a good example of a pragmatic historian who echoes Haslam in his assessment of pre-war diplomacy. Roberts argues

The root cause of the pact with Nazi Germany was the failure of the collective security program...the proximate cause of the pact was the collapse of the triple alliance negotiations between the USSR, Britain, and France, the final decision of the Soviet Government to opt for rapprochement with Germany was not made until mid-August 1939. The basis of that decision was a calculation that Britain and France might abandon the USSR in the face of the coming German invasion of Poland. The substance of the Soviet decision was a retreat into isolation with a view of securing Soviet interest through independent action.²⁵

²¹ Vizulis, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939*, 20-21.

²² Marilyn G. Hitchens, *Germany, Russia, and the Balkans: Prelude to the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 264-267.

²³ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933-39* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 230-232.

²⁴ Anthony Reed and David Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace : Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939-1941* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1988), 176-190.

²⁵ Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, 5-6.

Due to the fall of Communism, contemporary historians have more puzzle pieces to work with through the further opening of old Soviet archives and, more importantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union made fear of regime change or official political histories a thing of the past. Contemporary politics are largely irrelevant to the Non-Aggression Treaty, therefore political questions do not characterize scholarship. Indeed, contemporary scholars actually have a chance to study the Russo-German relationship less in the light of politics and more in the light of history.

With this fundamental change came different questions and focuses of study. Even through perestroika and glasnost the Soviet Union denied the existence of the Secret Protocol of the Pact.²⁶ It wasn't until after the fall of Communism that the Russian Federation admitted to the Protocol and its intentions of directly or indirectly dominating neighboring countries. During the Cold War period questions acceptable to Soviet historians were limited to two: did Soviet leaders know of the imminent attack and were they prepared for it.²⁷ With abundant resources and greater freedom to pursue research works such as Edward Ericson's *Feeding the German Eagle* are possible. In his monograph Ericson argues that the economic factor of the Pact has been largely overlooked by past scholars, which has unequivocally been the case, and plays just as an important role as the glamorous diplomatic posturing and intrigue if not more.²⁸

The timeframe in which the Russo-German rapprochement began as early as 1938, but that is not to say that there was a lack of cooperation between Russia and Germany before then. During World War I the German Empire had actively supported

²⁶ Nekrich. *Pariahs, Partners, Predators*, xiii-xiv.

²⁷ Nekrich. *Pariahs, Partners, Predators*, xii-xiii.

²⁸ Edward E. Ericson, *Feeding the German Eagle: Soviet economic aid to Nazi Germany 1933-1941* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 4-5.

revolutions in Czarist Russia in hopes of ending a long two-front war.²⁹ As “outcasts of Versailles” Germany and the Soviet Union were no strangers to working with one another. The Treaty of Rapallo, signed by the two powers in 1922, normalized diplomatic relations, renounced territorial claims against one another, and set a framework for further economic agreements.³⁰ On its entrance to the League of Nations Germany insisted on staying neutral in diplomatic clashes between the Soviet Union and the West despite a gradual breakdown of relations.³¹ This uneasy cooperation met its demise, as Germany’s internal politics raised fears once more of the German Communist Party and the acceptance that Germany could no longer escape the fact that “Bolshevism” and “Russia” were now synonymous.³²

Hitler’s contempt of the Slavic “race” and his strong belief that German expansion was to take place to the east was an integral part of his foreign policy. The theme of Slavic inferiority and the ideas of a *Drang nach Osten*, a term literally meaning “eastward push” and encapsulating Germany’s goal to settle Slavic lands, continually surfaced in pre-war Nazi party rallies.³³ Nazi-Soviet relations met an all-time low when Hitler signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan in 1936, which focused primarily on containing the perceived Communist threat.³⁴ This, along with competing interests in the

²⁹ John Hiden, *Germany and Europe 1919-1939* (London & New York: Longman), 7-17.

³⁰ Hilden, *Germany and Europe*, 111-119.

³¹ Hilden, *Germany and Europe*, 119-123.

³² Hilden, *Germany and Europe*, 123-124.

³³ Anthony Reed and David Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace : Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939-1941* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1988), 198-210.

³⁴ Hiden, *Germany and Europe*, 95, 128-130. It should also be noted that the Anti-Comintern Pact was specifically aimed at Communist International, but the signatories also agreed that, in the case of war between one of the signers and the Soviet Union, the other would maintain a benevolent neutrality. Furthermore, The Pact also had anti-British and anti-French implications. Hitler had indeed envisioned a quadrilateral worldwide organization including Germany, Italy, Japan, and Britain. Once it became painfully clear that Britain would stay loyal to their Anglo-French alliance Hitler strived increasingly to turn the tripartite into a military alliance against Britain.

Spanish Civil War and the failure of Stalin's Collective Security added to a complete breakdown in relations.³⁵

In order to effectively understand the process by which Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union came to an understanding with one another it is important to know the details of the discussion between late 1938 and September of 1939. The best sources for such an analysis consist of correspondence between the German embassy in Moscow and the *Auswartiges Amt*, or German Foreign Office, in Berlin and the memoirs of high ranking German officials involved in the process. Taking this into account, this paper focuses on the documents in the U.S. Department of State's *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, the memoirs from Gustav Hilger and Ernst von Weizsäcker, and the journal of Italian Count Ciano. From these sources it is possible to reconstruct the process, fears, and goals of the parties involved. To do this effectively these sources have been broken into sections in order to present first an observation of the developments between April and August 1939 by looking at selected documents from *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, then adding the thoughts and conclusions of key figures involved in this process by highlighting important aspects from the memoirs of Hilger, Weizsäcker, and Ciano.

Rapprochement between the two powers began in 1938 and, as evidenced in *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, continued at break-neck speeds in 1939. *Nazi-Soviet Relations* is the United States Department of State's publication of selected diplomatic documents that detail the rapprochement and partnership of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union from April 1939 to June 1941 and one of the most authoritative sources for historians studying the diplomatic relationship between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The documents

³⁵ Hiden, *Germany and Europe*, 128-129.

were captured by the Ninth Division of the US Army in a series of chateaux in a small village in the Hartz Mountains called Degenershausen. Proposals and counter-proposals, letters, and correspondence of all types were neatly organized and stacked into separate piles by a German Foreign Office archivist who refused to follow commands to destroy them.³⁶ In late 1947 Raymond James Sontag, professor of European History at the University of California Berkeley, and James Stuart Beddie, a former history professor and State Department staffer, finished compiling the compendium. The release of the documents, however, was postponed until after a conference between the victorious Allied powers in London that sought to produce a German peace treaty and recovery program.³⁷

The reason for this delay is likely due to the less than friendly language in the introduction itself. James Reston, the author, considers the Non-Aggression Treaty a triple-cross and accordingly identifies three groups of “victims”. The first victims, according to Reston, were the British and the French, who were also seeking a diplomatic and military alliance with the Soviet Union. Reston considers the second victim as Poland because the Germans were trying to rush through an agreement so that Hitler could then begin his war with Poland. Molotov, the head Soviet foreign official, was well aware of this, but did nothing to stall for more time. The third victim was Japan, whose government had signed the anti-Comintern Pact in an effort to contain the Soviet Union. After the signing of the Non-Aggression Treaty the Germans told the Japanese that the anti-Comintern Pact was not aimed at the Soviet Union, rather the Western

³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, V.

³⁷ James Reston, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, V-VI.

Powers.³⁸ This interpretation solicited a strong rebuttal from the Soviet Union and its sympathizers in the form of *Falsifiers of History*, a Soviet publication released in 1948 in the form of a small booklet. Frederick Schuman, author of the introduction, and unnamed Soviet scholars argue that it was in fact the Soviet Union that was betrayed by the West and their sinister plans to unleash Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union in an effort to weaken or destroy both.³⁹

The Department of State's publication is a compilation of memorandums, letters, and diplomatic agreements authored by high-ranking Nazi and Soviet officials. The documents are, in essence, the conversation that the German and Soviet government had between April 1939 and June 1941. Key German figures include Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Reich Foreign Minister, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, and Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, German Ambassador in the Soviet Union. These three Germans were the most intimately involved in the rapprochement process. Important Soviet figures include Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs and Georgei Astakhov, Counselor of Embassy of the Soviet Embassy in Germany.

The topic of rapprochement is central in the first hundred pages of the State Department's publication. As shown, correspondence begins cautiously between the two powers, as both extend what may be termed "feelers" towards one another. Once it was established that both sides were warm to the idea of rapprochement talks began, starting with the perpetuation of existing trade contracts. These developed into a full blown diplomatic exchange, with both sides aiming for an economic and political agreement.

³⁸ James Reston, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, Vi-VII.

³⁹ Frederick L. Schuman, *Falsifiers of History: An Historical Document on the Origins of World War II* (New York: Committee for Promotion of Peace, 1948), 3-18.

The first tentative steps towards rapprochement were taken on April 17th, 1939 and are detailed in a memorandum written by The State Secretary in the German Foreign Office Ernst von Weizsäcker. Weizsäcker met with the Soviet Ambassador to Germany Merekalov in regards to the fulfillment of contracts made between Russia and Skoda Works, a Czechoslovak arms manufacturing company, for war materiel. Merekalov indicated that the fulfillment of such contracts would determine whether or not the German government was truly willing to “cultivate and expand [Germany’s] economic relations with Russia.”⁴⁰ To this Weizsäcker said that the atmosphere for delivering supplies to Russia was not necessarily conducive given reports of a British-French-Russian air pact. The Soviet Ambassador took the chance to turn the discussion to politics, asking about the German government’s opinion of current events in Europe and asked bluntly what the Germans thought of German-Russian relations. Weizsäcker responded by saying that Germany wanted a “mutually satisfactory commercial relations with Russia” to which Merekalov responded, “Russian policy had always moved in a straight line.” Merekalov continued, pointing out that ideological differences hardly influenced Italian-Russian relations and didn’t have to “prove a stumbling block” with Russo-German relations. Furthermore, Russia had hardly exploited the friction between Germany and the West. Merekalov ended the meeting by saying that there was no reason why Russo-German relations couldn’t be normal, and from normal couldn’t improve.⁴¹

The conversation must have had an impact on the Nazi government because on May 5th Karl Schnurre, Germany’s Councilor of Legation and Head of the Eastern European Section of the Political Division of the German Foreign Office, informed the

⁴⁰ Weizsäcker, “Memorandum by the State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, April 17, 1939,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 1.

⁴¹ Weizsäcker, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 1-2.

Soviet Charge, Counselor of Embassy Astakhov, that the Germans would fulfill the Skoda Works contracts as Merekalov had asked.⁴² Upon receiving this information Astakhov “was visibly gratified at the declaration and stressed the fact that for the Soviet Government the material side of the question was not of as great importance as the question of principle”. Astakhov then asked if the Germans would resume earlier unspecified negotiations. He also asked what the Germans made of the replacement of Litvinov with Molotov and whether or not it would change Germany’s position towards the Soviet Union.⁴³ Maxim Litvinov was a chief proponent of Collective Security and the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs until May 3rd, and it is generally accepted that Stalin replaced Litvinov with Molotov because of the former’s Jewish heritage in an effort to signal his intentions of rapprochement to Nazi Germany.⁴⁴

On May 20th 1939 Schulenburg sat down with Molotov in Moscow to discuss the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The air was filled with suspicion as neither party said much. Ribbentrop had explicitly instructed Schulenburg not to. In the conference Molotov asserted that the resumption of economic negotiations did not satisfy the Soviet Union as a political gesture of goodwill, and to move forward “more extensive proposals of a political nature” were necessary.⁴⁵ Schulenburg was wary of this assertion, cautioning Weizsäcker in his memo written on the 22nd of May that such proposals could simply be used against Germany in the negotiations underway between Russia, England, and France. To make matters more complicated Schulenburg was unable to gather any reliable details of the tripartite negotiations and could only offer

⁴² Schnurre, “Foreign Office Memorandum, May 5, 1939,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 3.

⁴³ Schnurre, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 3.

⁴⁴ Read and Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace*, 80-82.

⁴⁵ Schulenburg, “The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, Berlin, May 27, 1939,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 8-9.

Weizsäcker suppositions and speculation. Such speculation included the idea that one of the principle reasons why England had not yet concluded a deal with the Soviet Union was because of the Russo-Japanese conflict. If England guaranteed Russia's borders it would make an enemy in Japan, and thus "drive Japan in [Germany's] arms."

Schulenburg warns in a veiled statement "if Japan should come into our arms voluntarily, this consideration for England should be eliminated."⁴⁶

On May 30th, 1939 Weizsäcker informed Schulenburg of the official change in policy regarding Nazi Germany's relationship with the Soviet Union. In his telegram Weizsäcker details a conversation he had with the Soviet Charge Astakhov.⁴⁷ Weizsäcker asked Astakhov, in light of the disparaging conference ten days earlier, whether or not Astakhov's comments in April were in fact an accurate representation of the Soviet Government's diplomatic goals regarding Nazi Germany.⁴⁸ Astakhov alluded that the Soviets were simply proceeding cautiously to avoid a diplomatic breakdown. He asserted that in Molotov's view political and economic matters could not be separated and there was, in fact, "a definite connection."⁴⁹ Weizsäcker agreed, pointing out the Soviet Union's apparent orientation towards England and argued that such an orientation affected even the smallest agreements, referring to the fulfillment of the Skoda Works contract. Weizsäcker acknowledged that Communism would continue to be rejected by the Nazi Party and National Socialism would continue to be rejected by the Soviet Union, but implied that this should not hamper diplomatic relations between the two. Astakhov

⁴⁶ Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 8-9.

⁴⁷ Georgei Astakhov, whose official title was "Counselor of Embassy of the Soviet Embassy in Germany, was an important Soviet diplomatic agent who served under Alexei Merekalov, the Soviet Ambassador in Germany.

⁴⁸ Weizsäcker, "The State Secretary in the German Foreign Office to the German Ambassador In the Soviet Union, Telegram, Berlin, May 30, 1939," *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 15.

⁴⁹ Weizsäcker, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 16.

responded by saying that there was a strong possibility “of a very clear separation between principles governing internal policy on the one hand and the attitude adopted in foreign policy on the other.” Weizsäcker finished the conversation with the assertion that the Nazis were not asking nor wanted anything from Moscow, but were simply avoiding being charged with building “an impassable wall of silence.”⁵⁰

On June 5th, 1939 Schulenburg sent a letter to Weizsäcker regarding his general impressions of the diplomatic situation and his interpretations of the current events. In his letter he addressed some of the diplomatic concerns that had begun to surface in Berlin, focusing primarily on the misconception that Molotov had rejected a German-Soviet “arrangement” in his earlier discussion with Schulenburg. Schulenburg gets straight to the point, acknowledging the Japanese as an important factor in rapprochement. Schulenburg points out that it is “obvious” that Japan was completely opposed to a Russo-German agreement because it would ease pressure on the Soviet Union’s western frontier. More importantly, Schulenburg quickly moves on to address the suspicion of Berlin that the Russians would simply use any Russo-German negotiations as leverage in parallel negotiations with Great Britain and France. Schulenburg argues that, while the Nazis should approach the subject cautiously, Molotov had in effect offered to open political discussions.⁵¹ In Schulenburg’s estimation there was no reason as to why the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany could not move forward in their relationship. There were “no points of friction, no controversial issues, between Germany and the Soviet Union.” Schulenburg agreed with von Toppelskirch’s argument that Germany’s nonaggression treaties with the Baltic republics were a “political down payment” because

⁵⁰ Weizsäcker, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 16-17.

⁵¹ Schulenburg, “The German Ambassador In the Soviet Union to the State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 5, 1939,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 18-19.

of the increased security they represented. Schulenburg went on in his letter, explaining that it is easy to earn Moscow's distrust and extremely hard to earn their trust. According to him "distrust is aroused very easily [in Moscow] and, once aroused, can be removed only with great difficulty." Schulenburg notes that, while the Soviets distrusted the Germans, they distrusted the West too.⁵²

Schulenburg's analysis of Soviet distrust surfaced again in a letter written to the German Counselor of Legation Schliep on August 7th, 1939. In his letter Schulenburg notes that one can note the great distrust of the Soviets "at every word and at every step." More importantly Schulenburg notes the Soviet distrust and obstinacy towards Western Military Mission and political negotiations. According to Schulenburg's informants, Molotov was silent through the political negotiations, speaking only to remark on the inadequacy of the Western proposals.⁵³ This led to the considerable frustration of the French and English ambassadors.

Schulenburg also reported on Soviet feelings of other pacts and treaties that Germany had made with smaller countries. Molotov noted the German-Danish Non-Aggression Treaty as well as Germany's Non-Aggression treaties with the Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia with interest. Though Molotov was silent on Soviet thoughts about the German-Danish treaty he was outspoken about German cooperation with the Baltic States, taking the position that such Treaties "indicated an inclination toward Germany." Baltic ambassadors countered that they had made similar treaties with the Soviet Union

⁵² Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 20.

⁵³ Schulenburg, "The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to Counselor of Legation Schliep of the German Foreign Office, Moscow, August 7, 1939," *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 42-43. Schulenburg quotes Molotov as saying "Your statements do not appear to me entirely satisfactory. I shall notify my Government." The French ambassador said to one of Schulenburg's informants "Thank God that that fellow will not participate in the military negotiations."

and were natural outcomes of the pursuit of peace. Molotov, however, remained unimpressed and could not be swayed in opinion.⁵⁴

By mid-August Nazi leaders had apparently fully committed themselves to rapprochement with the Soviet Union and were eager to have something on paper. In the early morning hours of August 15th, 1939 Ribbentrop sent a telegram marked “most urgent” to Schulenburg. It marked the definitive change in outward German attitude towards the Soviet Union. The telegram rationalized fully coming to terms with the Soviet Union and set a roadmap towards a pact between the two superpowers in a series of six points. The first point argues that the only thing that stood in between cooperation was a difference in ideology, which, as evidenced by recent events, should not prove to be an obstacle to the development of “a reasonable relationship.”⁵⁵

The second point states, “There exists no real conflicts of interest between Germany and the U.S.S.R.” The document continues on to detail that, while the *Lebensraum* of each country touched each other they do not conflict with one another, and therefore the German government had no designs, no aggressive intentions against the Soviet Union. Questions of hegemony in the Baltic region, Poland, and Southeastern Europe could be settled via cooperation to a greater degree. Tellingly, the Nazi’s second point ends with the statement, “In such matters political cooperation between the two countries can have only a beneficial effect. The same applies to German and Soviet economy, which can be expanded in any direction.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 43.

⁵⁵ Ribbentrop, “The Reich Foreign Minister to the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Telegram, Berlin, August 14, 1939-10:53pm,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 50.

⁵⁶ Ribbentrop, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 50.

The third point recognizes the unique position in which Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union found themselves. Ribbentrop, in no uncertain language, implied that the time was now or never to make a deal with Germany. “On those decisions,” declared the Germans, “will depend whether the two peoples will some day again and without any compelling reason take up arms against each other or whether they pass again into a friendly relationship.”⁵⁷

The fourth and fifth points acknowledge the mud-slinging that had been going on for the past few years and established a conspiracy theory involving the “capitalistic Western democracies” respectively. The fourth point argues that despite the decidedly negative language each side had been using, the truth was that there still existed much good will towards Russians in Germany, which could form the basis of a new agreement. The fifth point asserts that the West certainly considered itself an enemy to both National Socialist Germany and Communist Russia. Their pursuit of a military alliance with the latter was therefore nothing but a ploy to drive the U.S.S.R. into war with Nazi Germany, which would destroy them both to the profit of the Western democracies.⁵⁸

The sixth and final point of the telegram detailed why the Germans desired a speedy process of rapprochement. It cites the “English agitation for war” regarding German-Polish relations as the cause of pressure for a “speedy clarification of German-Russian relations...” The point continues on to say that without a Russo-German friendship events in Eastern Europe could “deprive both Governments of the possibility of restoring German-Soviet friendship and possibly of clearing up jointly the territorial

⁵⁷ Ribbentrop, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 50-51.

⁵⁸ Ribbentrop, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 51.

questions of Eastern Europe...It would be fatal if, through mutual lack of knowledge of view and intentions, our peoples should be finally driven asunder.”⁵⁹

The telegram ends with the suggestion that Ribbentrop come to Moscow to directly negotiate a treaty with Stalin himself! Only through such a direct approach was the Nazi government willing to negotiate a treaty. Further directions were given in the form of an annex, requesting that Schulenburg read aloud the telegram to both Molotov and Stalin personally. While it was read to Molotov later that day, Stalin was not present and Schulenburg had to settle with Molotov’s assurances that it would reach Stalin and the Soviet government in as an exact form as possible.⁶⁰

In the early morning of August 18th, 1939 Schulenburg sent a telegram to Berlin detailing the Soviet response to the German August 15th telegram. Schulenburg’s telegram first details an explanation for the Soviet foreign policy of the mid to late 1930’s. Molotov had related to Schulenburg that the Soviets had, until recently, had the impression that Nazi Germany actively worked towards an excuse for a clash with the U.S.S.R., that it was preparing itself for such a clash via an increase in armament and the forging of the Anti-Comintern Pact, which the Soviets correctly identified as an attempt to build a unified front against the Soviet Union.⁶¹ Molotov argued that it was thus understandable that the Soviet Union had strived for a defensive front in the form of a

⁵⁹ Ribbentrop, “The Reich Foreign Minister to the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Telegram, Berlin, August 14, 1939- 10:53pm,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 51.

⁶⁰ Schulenburg, “The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the German Foreign Office, Telegram, Moscow, August 16, 1939- 2:30am,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 53. That Stalin was not present at the reading should not imply that he was not making the decisions. Molotov’s initial reaction, that he “received with greatest interest the information [Schulenburg] had been authorized to convey, designated it as extremely important, and declared that he would report it to his Government at once...”, implies that he immediately consulted Stalin after Schulenburg had read aloud the telegram from Berlin.

⁶¹ Schulenburg, “The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the German Foreign Office, Telegram, Moscow, August 18, 1939- 5:30am,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 59.

group of states prepared to repel such aggression, typically referred to as “Collective Security.” If, however, the Nazis had a true change of heart and sincerely worked for an improvement in political relations with the Soviet Union Molotov asserted, “...the Soviet Government can look upon such a change only with pleasure and is on its own part prepared to alter its policy in the direction of an appreciable improvement in relations with Germany.”⁶²

Molotov continued, explaining that the Soviets had never had any ill will or aggressive intentions toward Germany. Furthermore, according to Molotov, the Soviet Union felt that peaceful solutions could be reached on all questions concerning Russo-German relations. Ideological differences played no part in the long established principles of Soviet foreign policy.⁶³

After this initial and familiar explanation and justification Molotov detailed the Soviet prerequisites for cooperation. First on the list was a trade and credit agreement, followed by the conclusion of a nonaggression pact or reaffirmation of the neutrality pact of 1926 and a special protocol “which would define the interests of the signatory parties in this or that question of foreign policy and which would form an integral part of the pact.” Molotov finished the meeting by saying that the proposed trip of Ribbentrop to Moscow indeed showed the sincerity of the Germans, unlike the English who had sent “an official of the second class to Moscow”, but the Soviet Government did not like the publicity such a journey would cause.⁶⁴

The next day on August 19th Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union completed the German-Soviet Trade Agreement, which was negotiated by

⁶² Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 59.

⁶³ Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 60.

⁶⁴ Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 60-61.

unnamed German and Soviet officials. The Agreement opened by crediting the Soviet Union 200 million Reichsmarks worth of merchandise through the German Golddiskontbank and carrying a 100 percent guarantee by the German government at an interest rate of four and a half percent. This credit would be used to finance Soviet orders for industrial products specifically listed in the document and consisting mainly of machine tools and, to a lesser extent, armaments from Germany.⁶⁵ The German credit would then be liquidated by Soviet raw materials selected by both governments. Deliveries from the Soviet Union of “lumber, cotton, feed grain, oil cake, phosphate, platinum, raw furs, petroleum, and other goods which for us have a more or less gold value” were to begin immediately. The last few provisions of the Agreement declare that, due to the rushed nature and previous slump in commerce between the two nations the Agreement was in no way comprehensive, and indeed only served as a scaffolding of sorts on which to build and facilitate further trade and commerce⁶⁶.

With the economic credit and trade agreement completed on August 19th, Ribbentrop requested in a telegram to Schulenburg that more pressure be applied for formal negotiations between him and Molotov in Moscow.⁶⁷ Schulenburg wrote back with a positive answer, telling Ribbentrop that Molotov agreed to receive Ribbentrop one week after the conclusion of the economic trade agreement, thus scheduling negotiations for the 26th or 27th of August.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Schnurre, “Foreign Office Memorandum, Memorandum,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 83.

⁶⁶ Schnurre, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 84-85.

⁶⁷ Ribbentrop, “The Reich Foreign Minister to the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Telegram, Berlin, August 18, 1939- 10:48pm,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 61-62.

⁶⁸ Schulenburg, “The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the German Foreign Office, Telegram, Moscow, August 19, 1939- 5:50pm,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 63.

The Soviets and Nazis, specifically Molotov and Ribbentrop, then began to formulate what would become the *Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*.⁶⁹ In a series of telegrams on the 19th the Soviets had been successful in creating a first draft of a nonaggression pact. Their draft served not merely as an outline. Most of the language in the Soviet's first draft presented to Ribbentrop by Schulenburg in his August 19th telegram survived to the final draft.⁷⁰ The Soviet draft consisted of five articles and a postscript. Article one prohibited both parties from attacking one another, article two prohibited allowing both parties from helping a third party attack the other, article three obligated both parties to settle disputes by "peaceful means and mutual consultation", article four set a time limit of five years on the treaty, and article five obligated a speedy ratification. The postscript stipulated that any pact would only be valid with the addition of a "special protocol" signed simultaneously and "covering the points in which the High Contracting Parties are interested in the field of foreign policy."⁷¹

The wishes of both parties, then, were no secret when Ribbentrop flew to Moscow to meet with Molotov and Stalin. On the eve of August 23rd and into the wee hours of the 24th the two great powers hashed out a deal, discussing a plethora of issues. In a memorandum Andor Hencke, Under State Secretary in the

⁶⁹ It should be noted that both Molotov and Ribbentrop were acting on behalf of their respective heads of state. That is to say that none of the ideas within the correspondence between the German embassy in Moscow and Berlin were the ideas of Molotov or Ribbentrop, rather of Stalin and Hitler.

⁷⁰ Schulenburg, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 65. See the text of the Non-Aggression Treaty for comparison. The language itself was subject to minor tweaks, but there was little that was added or subtracted outside of the secret protocol, which the Soviet draft had stipulated.

⁷¹ Schulenburg, "The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union to the German Foreign Office, Telegram, Moscow, August 19, 1939- 11:30pm," *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 65-66.

German Foreign Office, detailed the events of that fateful night by breaking down major discussion topics extraneous to the Treaty and its text. The first “problem” discussed was the question of Japan. Ribbentrop offered to use Germany’s influence with Japan to improve Russo-Japanese relations. Stalin replied that the Soviet Union desired an improvement, but were willing and prepared to fight a war with Japan if necessary. He also asserted that any approach by Germans to improve Russo-Japanese relations should not be interpreted as a Soviet initiative.⁷²

The second problem was Italy. Stalin inquired as to Italian goals in Southeastern Europe. Ribbentrop replied that Albania was the extent of Italy’s goals and that Mussolini “was a strong man who could not be intimidated.” Ribbentrop gave an example of this, citing the “Abyssinian conflict.”⁷³ Ribbentrop ended by assuring Stalin that Italy welcomed friendly relations between Germany and the Soviet Union.⁷⁴

The third problem they discussed was Turkey. Stalin asked Ribbentrop what Germany thought of Turkey. Ribbentrop responded, saying that Germany desired friendly relations with Turkey and had done everything possible to achieve this goal, but was rebuffed when Turkey “became one of the first countries to join the encirclement pact against Germany and had not even considered it necessary to notify the Reich Government of the fact”. Stalin noted

⁷² Hencke, “Memorandum of a Conversation Held on the Night of August 23d to 24th, Between the Reich Foreign Minister, on the One Hand, and Herr Stalin and the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Molotov, on the Other Hand,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 72-73.

⁷³ “Abyssinian conflict” in this case is a euphemism for the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the result was the conquest of Ethiopia and the consolidation of Mussolini’s power.

⁷⁴ Hencke, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 73.

that the Soviet Union also had similar experiences with “the vacillating policy of the Turks.”⁷⁵

The fourth problem was England. Both Stalin and Ribbentrop took to criticizing the English military mission to Moscow because it had never told Moscow its true designs. Ribbentrop followed up by asserting that England was simply trying to prevent the resumption of friendly relations between Germany and the Soviet Union because “England was weak and wanted to let others fight for its presumptuous claim to world domination.” Stalin “eagerly concurred” and observed that the English Army was weak, its Navy no longer deserved its reputation, and its Air Force lacked pilots. He asserted that if England continued dominating the world, it was due to the “stupidity” of other nations. Ribbentrop mentioned that England had recently attempted a “stupid” political move. Stalin remarked that the move must have been Chamberlain’s letter to Hitler, and added that England, though weak, would “wage war craftily and stubbornly.”

The fifth problem was France. Stalin remarked that France had an army “worthy of consideration” to which Ribbentrop responded that the German Army outnumbered the French by two to one. Ribbentrop further pointed out that the West Wall, Germany’s western defenses, was five times stronger than the Maginot Line. He ended the topic by declaring that if France were to wage war with Germany “she would certainly be conquered.”⁷⁶

The sixth problem was the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact. Ribbentrop argued that the Anti-Comintern Pact was not directed against the Soviet Union,

⁷⁵ Hencke, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 73.

⁷⁶ Hencke, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 74.

but against the Western democracies. He claimed to know that the Soviet Government knew this due to inferences from the Russian press. Stalin mentioned that the Anti-Comintern Pact had frightened small British merchants and London more than the Soviets. Ribbentrop responded by relating a joke popular in Berlin at the time: “Stalin will yet join the Anti-Commintern Pact.”⁷⁷

The seventh and final problem addressed was the attitude of the German people towards a potential Non-Aggression Treaty. Ribbentrop declared that Germans from all social classes, but especially “the simple people,” would welcome an understanding with the Soviet Union. Ribbentrop said that the Germans knew that there were no “natural conflicts of interests” between the two countries, and also realized that the upset of friendly relations was the result of foreign intrigue, particularly from England. Stalin replied that he believed this and that he knew that the German people wanted peace and would therefore welcome friendly relations. Ribbentrop interrupted him to say that, while the German people did desire peace, indignation against Poland was so high that every man was willing to fight to stop “Polish provocation.”⁷⁸

On the same night, and after months of discussions and a long process of rapprochement Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union came to an agreement. The *Treaty of Nonaggression Between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, or the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was the result. It consists of seven concise articles and a secret protocol, both of which are signed by Ribbentrop and

⁷⁷ Hencke, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 75. Hencke relates: “What the German people thought of this matter is evident from a joke which had originated with the Berliners, well known for their wit and humor...” Here German people is likely referring generally to Berliners, and not to a certain segment of the population.

⁷⁸ Hencke, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 75.

Molotov⁷⁹. The Nonaggression Treaty's first article establishes that neither party shall attack the other. The second forbids aiding the enemy of the other contracting party. The third article obligates the two parties to stay in continual contact with one another. The fourth article forbids joining a group hostile to the other party. The fifth article establishes a peaceful process to settle disputes. The sixth article establishes a timetable of ten years regarding the validity of the Treaty, and the seventh article stipulates a speedy ratification.⁸⁰

In the *Secret Additional Protocol* the two parties clearly establish what are termed "spheres of influence" in Eastern Europe. The *Protocol* is broken into four parts. The first part establishes a line of delineation "in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement" in the Baltic area. Everything north of the northern border of Lithuania was considered in the Soviet sphere, and everything south German. The second part effectively partitioned Poland by establishing a German sphere east of, and thus a Soviet sphere west of, the Narew, Vistula, and San rivers. It also establishes that both parties would decide upon the fate of an independent Polish state mutually and "by means of a friendly agreement." The third part recognizes Soviet claims to Bessarabia, that is the modern nation of Moldova, and declares disinterest in the area. The fourth part recognizes the strict secrecy of the *Protocol*.⁸¹

On the same day of the signing of the *Treaty* the Reich Foreign Minister Count Schwerin-Krosigk had a conversation with Italian Foreign Minister Count

⁷⁹ Please see the attached copy of the Molotov-Ribbentrop text in its entirety.

⁸⁰ Ribbentrop, Molotov, "Treaty of Nonaggression Between German and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 76-77.

⁸¹ Ribbentrop, Molotov, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 78.

Ciano, who initiated the conversation. The main topic was foreign policy. After congratulating the Germans on “the great diplomatic success” with Russia, Ciano had recently spoken with the French and English Ambassadors, who assured him that if Germany were to go to war with Poland they would make good on their guarantees of Poland’s independence. Ciano stressed that this presented a problem because the Italians were not ready for a prolonged war of attrition. Schwerin-Krosigk asked Ciano if the Germans should then continue to “look on passively” at Polish transgressions. Ciano replied that the Axis powers would have to fight “with the utmost tenacity”, because if they were defeated it would mean the end of the Axis states.⁸²

While the correspondence between German officials in Berlin and Moscow contained in *Nazi-Soviet Relations* provides historians with the discussion between the diplomats of the two countries it does not tell historians the thought process of those diplomats. Memoirs from high-ranking German officials such as Gustav Hilger, however, provide a narrative that colors the rapprochement process and detail the fears, goals, opinions, and conclusions of the Germans and those suspected of the Russians. Gustav Hilger was a German diplomat with a long history of service in the Soviet Union. His career began in 1918 with efforts to repatriate German prisoners of war and ended in the service of the CIA in the mid 20th century.⁸³ During the inter-war period he was assigned to Germany’s embassy in Moscow and served as the Counselor of Legation and later as

⁸² Scherwin-Krosigk, “The Reich Finance Minister to the Reich Foreign Minister, Rome, August 23, 1939,” *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 79-80.

⁸³ Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Meyer. *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations 1918-1941* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), 17.

the Counselor of Embassy in the German Embassy in the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ As Counselor of Legation and later the Counselor of Embassy in the German Embassy in the Soviet Union, Hilger was a key player in the Russo-German negotiations that led up to the Pact, acting at times as a translator between Molotov and Ribbentrop.⁸⁵

In his memoirs titled *The Incompatible Allies* in its English version, Hilger details his experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of the critical time in Russian and German diplomacy. Hilger also theorizes on the possibility of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact given the degeneration of the relationship between Russia and Germany. In Hilger's analysis the possibility of an alternative to collective security was never off of the table during the "Litvinov era", named after the Soviet foreign affairs minister until that fateful date in May 1939. Hilger asserts that there was a common feeling found in Russia in the 1930s that Nazi Germany posed a direct threat to the contemporary Soviet regime. Two approaches were available, friendly and hostile. When the Nazi regime came to power Litvinov was among the Soviets who tried to convince the new German government that "the change of governments in Berlin need not be an obstacle to the maintenance of friendly relations." Ultimately, however, the Soviets failed in their endeavor to cooperate with Germany and as a result the Soviet Union began signing pacts with Germany's neighbors, seeking to isolate the threat.⁸⁶

For the next six years the relationship between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany was less than friendly. According to Hilger the first signs that tensions were beginning to ease were noticed in the summer of 1938. At this point German and Russian propaganda had viciously attacked the each other's Head of State to the point of

⁸⁴ United States State Department. *Nazi-Soviet Relations*. (New York: Didier, 1948), XIII.

⁸⁵ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 272.

⁸⁶ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 305-306.

becoming “intolerable.” Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union, approached Litvinov in regards to toning down negative rhetoric and press. Discussions began between the German embassy and the Soviet foreign affairs office, and ended with Schulenburg and Litvinov coming to an oral understanding by October 1938, thus marking the first turning point in Nazi-Soviet relations.⁸⁷

In Hilger’s estimation Stalin was willing to be amiable due to the outcome of the Munich Conference in late September 1938. Hilger asserts that due to the weak Western response Stalin reassessed his position on working with rather than against Germany. Out of this reasoning the Germans found a receptive audience to a thawing of relations in Moscow, and indeed shortly after the two countries agreed to limit hostile rhetoric. They renewed a trade agreement faster than usual, serving as “the prologue to further German-Soviet talks that had been suggested by the trade representation of the USSR.”⁸⁸

This prologue, however, would not lead directly to further economic talks between the two nations. Though the Soviet government repeatedly signaled that it wanted to continue friendly relations with the new National Socialist government when they came to power in 1933, the Nazis had squandered their political capital with the Bolsheviks, and as a result the Soviets wanted a political agreement before continuing with larger economic negotiations.⁸⁹ German diplomats were somewhat dubious of Soviet intentions. With full knowledge of the diplomatic talks Russia was having with the Western Powers, the Germans could not help but question the motives of the Soviets. As Hilger puts it, the Germans were asking themselves “whom Stalin was out to double-cross.”

⁸⁷ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 288.

⁸⁸ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 289.

⁸⁹ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 296-297.

Despite these doubts “toward the end of July, Hitler apparently decided to take the initiative in working for a settlement with the Russians.”⁹⁰ Dr. Karl Schnurre, Counselor of Legation, “had a long conversation with the charge and the Soviet trade representative on July 26th.” Both of the Soviet officials stressed rapprochement as being important to the “vital interests” of both countries. Hilger himself spoke with Molotov on August 3rd, gaining the “impression that the Kremlin was indeed ready to improve its relations with Germany.” According to Hilger, by August 15th Hitler was convinced of the importance of Russian neutrality in the event of a war with Poland by the end of the summer. At this point Ribbentrop had instructed the German embassy to advance “frank overtures.” This allowed Molotov to “stall and to bargain”, cautioning that such a trip warrants careful preparations and alluding that they would only agree if Germany would be willing to conclude a nonaggression pact and discuss questions of Japan and the Baltic republics. Only after affirmative answers and the suggestion by Schulenburg that an economic treaty should be followed by a non-aggression pact complimented with a secret protocol settling “certain important questions of foreign policy” did the Soviets agree to receive Ribbentrop.⁹¹

During the negotiations of the Pact it was apparent to Gustav Hilger who was in charge of the Soviets. The negotiation of the Treaty of Non-Aggression was the first time Stalin spoke with foreign representatives with few exceptions until May of 1941 when he also became the chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars. His surprise presence throughout the negotiations was, in Hilger’s estimation, a tactic designed to throw the

⁹⁰ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 298.

⁹¹ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 299.

Germans off balance and a message that if a decision was not made that night, it would not be made at all.⁹²

According to Hilger's account the negotiations proved to be an easy task. Because there was a large body of preparatory work between Schulenburg and Molotov, and because Hitler had already agreed to the Soviets' proposal in principal, the negotiations were relatively short and little modification was made to the already agreed upon draft. There were two important differences made to the Pact during negotiations: Article 3 stipulated that both parties would "inform each other continuously on all diplomatic steps to be taken in matters of interest to the other party", and Article 4 which stipulated that neither party could join any "power bloc" which proved to be hostile to the other. Hilger also notes that during the negotiations the Soviets "put greatest emphasis on the secret protocol."⁹³

After the secret protocol was concluded von Ribbentrop turned to a communiqué which he had drafted using grandiloquent terms to describe the Nazi-Soviet Pact. With one look at the draft, Stalin smiled and pointed out that for years both Nazi and Soviet propaganda had been "pouring buckets of slop over each other's heads" and that public opinion would have to be slowly and carefully groomed to receive the news of the diplomatic about-face. With this the diplomats wrote a more modest communiqué to present to the press.⁹⁴ With this last gesture the Soviets and Nazis had cemented the Treaty of Non-Aggression, and with it the fate of Europe.

In Hilger's estimation the Soviets, and Stalin in particular, had resuscitated the idea of rapprochement with Germany since the Munich Agreement of 1938, the outcome

⁹² Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 300-301.

⁹³ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 303-304.

⁹⁴ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 304.

of which was the cession of the Sudetenland, the most financially and militarily important portion of Czechoslovakia, to Nazi Germany without Czechoslovakian representation by the West. Stalin accurately perceived this to be a failure of the West to honor their agreements, including a military pact between France and Czechoslovakia, and face down an aggressively expanding Nazi Germany.⁹⁵ Though Stalin and the Soviets did not have the specifics of the end product in mind until the two parties began to repair relations the idea of an agreement with Nazi Germany had many benefits for the Soviet Union. According to Hilger Moscow had always assumed that capitalist powers would fight one another thereby weakening themselves. If Russia could stay out of the conflict they would emerge the dominant power. Indeed the German declarations made before the negotiations had convinced the Soviets that Germany would invade Poland soon, and the Soviets were certain that the Western powers would come to Poland's aid. The resulting war, Stalin calculated, would be long and exhaustive for all parties involved.⁹⁶

Another positive aspect of signing a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany was that it simultaneously removed pressure from the Soviet Union's eastern and western frontiers. To the west the Russians would not have to worry about a German attack, the danger of which, according to Hilger, "had weighed on the Soviet government and people like an evil nightmare ever since 1933..." To the East it had the potential to mitigate the growing conflict with the Japanese Empire over East Asian dominance and the Sakhalin Island among other contentious issues because of Germany's influential partnership with the Japanese government. This relief of pressure was important to Stalin and the Soviets even more so due to the military purges of 1937-1938, which left the Soviets with few

⁹⁵ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 306.

⁹⁶ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 306-307.

experienced officers. In addition to an alleviation of fear and military struggle, Stalin saw in a deal with Hitler an opportunity to establish the USSR's western frontier. In such a deal the Soviets could, and did, negotiate spheres of influence in which Soviet Baltic interests would be included.⁹⁷

Another source of Nazi thought during rapprochement is Ernst von Weizsäcker. Ernst von Weizsäcker was the State Secretary in the Germany Foreign Office during the pre-war period. A member of the Foreign Office since 1920 and in the position of State Secretary since 1938, Weizsäcker was in a key position and a big player in German foreign policy for the entire inter-war period and during World War II. He played a significant role in the Sudeten Crisis and Munich Agreement of 1938, the Czech Crisis of March 1939, and the rapprochement with the Soviet Union.⁹⁸

According to Weizsäcker it was Stalin who had initiated the process of rapprochement with Germany. Since the Munich Agreement Stalin had felt isolated, a feeling that Hitler shared after the Czech Crisis. This mutual feeling of isolation provided the incentive for both sides to consider rapprochement, and Weizsäcker conjectures that Hitler may have thought rapprochement would be useful for defensive purposes at least. Furthermore, Hitler considered Stalin his equal and had more respect for him than any other perceived adversary.⁹⁹

Rapprochement would be different than the agreements between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1922. Weizsäcker asserts that in 1922 “two cripples had come together in their common distress.” To go about it was not a problem in Weizsäcker's eyes. There

⁹⁷ Hilger & Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, 307.

⁹⁸ Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 11-12.

⁹⁹ Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker*, 186.

was no dispute between the two countries regarding boundaries and there was no Soviet influence in Germany's internal politics. Furthermore, rapprochement ignored political dogmas for the sake of denying German enemies unwavering German hostility towards Russia. According to Weizsäcker rapprochement meant, "a real foreign policy was being initiated, that the cause of peace was being served..."¹⁰⁰

That being said, it is clear that Weizsäcker did not believe that Germany and Russia would reach anything more than a normalization of relations. He was well aware of the Western powers attempting to "woo" Moscow into a Triple Alliance. Weizsäcker conjectures that even though Hitler made a sharp U-turn and went from abusing Stalin to grasping his hand, he was hesitant to abandon his hostility towards Russia in the name of peace.¹⁰¹ Hitler had, after all, spent most of his political career declaring that future German colonies were not in Africa, but in Eastern Europe. *Lebensraum* was, in the mind of Hitler and Ribbentrop, equated with Russian territory. Therefore, once rapprochement was considered, Weizsäcker argues, "Hitler's lustful eyes could no longer be fixed on territory in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Hitler could not satisfy his appetite for Polish territory so long as he was not sure of Moscow's attitude." Weizsäcker thus estimated that if the uncertainty of Moscow's position endured until the winter months peace would be preserved at least until the next spring.¹⁰²

Although Hitler was eager to deal with the "Polish crisis" and therefore resolve Moscow's position, he did not want to appear desperate to Stalin. The German embassy and *Auswärtiges Amt* were well aware of and informed on the negotiations between England, France, and the Soviet Union and Weizsäcker claims to know that the British

¹⁰⁰ Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker*, 186-187.

¹⁰¹ Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker*, 187.

¹⁰² Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker*, 188.

Government had no intention of “being outmaneuvered by Hitler”. Hitler therefore held back his “undue eagerness” and did not pressure Moscow for an immediate agreement. It was for this reason, Weizsäcker argues, that Hitler deliberately kept economic issues in the foreground so that the Russians would bring politics into the negotiations.¹⁰³

While it is extremely important to understand the German thought process, it is also helpful to get an outside perspective of rapprochement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. *The Ciano Diaries* can be used to this end. Galeazzo Ciano, Count di Cortelazzo, was the son of one of the most prominent leaders of the Fascist movement in Italy. He was a captain in the Italian Navy during World War I and was immediately ennobled once Mussolini assumed power. His father’s connections within the Fascist movement afforded him opportunities to gain a fortune and rise quickly in rank. He married Mussolini’s daughter in the late 1920’s and solidified his status as an ardent Fascist. In 1935, at the age of 33, he became the Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁰⁴

In late August 1943 Count Ciano had disappeared from Rome, and by December 23rd it became apparent to the Italians that the Nazis had captured him on trumped up pretexts of his family being in danger. The Gestapo held him for three brutal months until he met death by execution in January of 1944. Before he was captured, however, he instructed his wife to publish his journals. After his death Edda Ciano smuggled his diaries to Switzerland and later the United States. In his dairies and his letter to the King of Italy Ciano asserts that only one man is to blame for Italy’s involvement in the war: Mussolini.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Weizsäcker, *Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsäcker*, 199.

¹⁰⁴ Galeazzo Ciano & Sumner Welles, *The Ciano Diaries: 1939-43*. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1946), xxix-xxxi.

¹⁰⁵ Welles, *The Ciano Diaries*, v-vi.

In his journal entry on August 22nd Ciano writes on the subject of Ribbentrop's trip to Moscow and the agreement that was being negotiated between Germany and Russia. Ciano proclaims, "There is no doubt the Germans have struck a master blow. The European situation is upset." According to Ciano the English and French were counting on an alliance with the Soviets to contain Nazi Germany. Ciano also notes that the Russian decision to sign with Germany created confusion in the diplomatic world. Ciano, for his part, was telling fellow diplomats that Italy would work towards peace and use whatever influence they had to convince Hitler to continue with negotiations.¹⁰⁶

Ciano's August 23rd entry continues to relate the first impressions of the Russo-German agreement. Ciano wrote, "The day is charged with electricity and full of threats." France and England "trumpet to the four winds" that they will honor their pacts with Poland despite the lack of Russian support. The Japanese "signaled their discontent", and Ciano and "the Duce", or Mussolini, agreed to approach the British with a solution in which Danzig would be returned to Germany and would thereafter participate in "a great peace conference." Hitler's answer, however, is a harsh rebuff, and it became clear to Ciano that the agreement meant war. In Ciano's words, "Another hope [for peace] is gone."¹⁰⁷

The memorandums, telegrams, letters, and general correspondence between the Nazi staff and between the Nazis and the Soviets, coupled with the memoirs of important and engaged individuals in the rapprochement provide a picture of the process the two countries went through and, more importantly, allow analysis of why they thought it necessary to reconcile their differences. The picture is clear: Nazi Germany and the

¹⁰⁶ Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 126.

¹⁰⁷ Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 126-127.

Soviet Union signed the *Treaty of Non-Aggression* because it was the most pragmatic decision either had in August 1939.

According to both Gustav Hilger and Ernst von Weizsäcker there is no doubt that Adolf Hitler was dictating Nazi foreign policy. Though there were some initiatives taken by lower-level German officials, there was a close working relationship between Ribbentrop and the German Embassy in Moscow. Ribbentrop, in turn, carried out Hitler's will. Neither Hilger nor Weizsäcker attribute any foreign policy decisions to Ribbentrop. Furthermore, both Hilger and Weizsäcker attest to the strength of Stalin's leadership throughout the negotiating process. Though neither could have been certain who was truly dictating Soviet foreign policy, both seemed to be convinced that Stalin was the man in charge of the Soviet government. It is true that Molotov is the chief Soviet representative throughout the process. Indeed, Soviet Charge Astakhov attributes the foreign policy decision of dealing with economic and political Nazi-Soviet relations simultaneously to Molotov in his late May discussion with Weizsäcker. Hilger observes, however, that Stalin's presence at the signing on August 23rd was more than ceremonial, and the record of discussions kept by the Germans shows a conversation between Ribbentrop and Stalin, not Ribbentrop and Molotov. Moreover, the fact that it was the only instance Stalin personally dealt with foreign dignitaries signifies both the importance placed on the Pact by the Soviets as well as whose decision it truly was to make the deal.

There is no doubt, then, that the key policy decisions were being made by Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin. Both of these leaders were strongmen and, more importantly, opportunists. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were neither the best of bedfellows,

nor were they the bitterest of enemies as of August 1939. They were competitive powers with intentions of expanding that power. To do that each country needed a few key things.

To wage their war with Poland, and thus likely Britain and France, Nazi Germany needed raw materials. As evidenced by the timetable, the “Polish Crisis” was in the forefront of German minds in the summer of 1939. There is no mistaking Germany’s preparation for a hostile takeover of Poland. But for Hitler to accomplish a successful attack he and his generals could not afford the dreaded prospect of a two-front war. Hitler, much like Stalin, played his odds and tried to woo the British into a state of neutrality so that he would have a free hand on the continent. Indeed, Hitler had achieved this until the invasion of Poland.

Once it became fairly clear that Britain and France were committed to upholding their agreement with Poland, unlike their agreements with Czechoslovakia as evidenced by their about face at Munich, Hitler had to turn somewhere else for support and benevolent neutrality. The only other option, the only other power that could give him exactly what he needed to pursue his expansionistic designs of the summer of 1939, was the Soviet Union. It was for this reason and this reason only that Hitler reversed his position on *Lebensraum* in the East on August 15th 1939 and aggressively pursued an agreement with the Soviet Union.

Stalin and the Soviet Union found themselves in a similar situation. With conflicts on its eastern frontier with Japan and its painfully unprepared military Stalin was fearful of a two-front war himself, especially given the existence of the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Soviet industrial complex could not meet the military’s needs for war materiel, and

needed upgrading. While the Soviets were continually trying to isolate Germany even up until the eve of the signing of the *Treaty* they, were disappointed not only with the sincerity, or lack thereof, of the Western powers, but were also disappointed in what they could not or refused to offer.

That the Soviets continually spoke to the West until the very last moment signifies that the Soviet Union had never truly given up on Collective Security. In fact, negotiating with both Nazi Germany and the Western powers was the best option the Soviets had until a deal materialized. It allowed them two options to weigh and provided a bargaining chip in negotiations with both Germany and the West. Ultimately, however, the West did not believe that Germany and Russia would sign their own pact, and refused to give the Soviet Union what they demanded.

Throughout the rapprochement process, the Soviets showed their anxiety over German influence in what used to be Czarist territory such as the Baltic republics, betraying their worry that Russian influence and hegemony was ebbing. The idea of Stalin scheming to retake pre-war Czarist lands must be regarded as conjecture. However, the discourse of the rapprochement, and indeed the secret protocol itself, supports the conclusion that Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe was in the forefront of Soviet minds. The Soviets were clearly concerned about their “sphere of influence” covering much of what the Czar ruled before World War I.

The Soviet Union was seemingly ready to continue the normal relations that led to the Rapallo Treaty when the Nazis came to power. The Nazis, however, were unwilling, and made no secret of their hostility of both Bolshevism and the Slavic “race.” The Soviets then turned to Collective Security in an effort to isolate Germany. While they

were successful in signing pacts and agreements with the new satellite nations in Central Europe, the Soviets were unsuccessful in convincing the Western powers to sign any pacts, by all accounts due to the West's contempt, and even fear, of Communism. Furthermore, Stalin's faith in the West was likely undercut by the latter's pandering, which the Munich Agreement signified.

This effectively led to a three-way struggle for power on the Eurasian continent. On one side there were the Western, capitalistic, liberal governments who were contemptuous and suspicious of National Socialism as well as Communism. In the center stood Nazi Germany, which was incensed by the Versailles Treaty and the responsible powers to the west, and declared itself the archenemy of the Communism that flanked them to the east. To the other side stood the Russians, who correctly identified an alarming and growing threat in Nazi Germany and whose stated goal was to overthrow the capitalist systems that ran life in the West. These three distinct ideological entities played a delicate diplomatic game with one another in the hopes of coming out ahead at the expense of the other two.

It is, therefore, not incorrect to say that Stalin was hopeful in staying neutral in the coming conflict in order to dominate the international stage afterwards. But what often goes unsaid, especially by Western authors, is that this was the same hope that the Entente also kindled. In this climate, distrust was the rule with no discernable exceptions. This is evidenced by the quantity and prominence of German statements from multiple statesmen that the Russians were quick to distrust and slow to trust. The Germans themselves did not trust the Russians, believing for much of the early summer that they were being played so that the Soviets could get a better deal with the Entente. This

distrust clearly illustrates that the *Treaty* was no agreement made out of friendship, and readily points to the conclusion that both powers begrudgingly acknowledged the usefulness of the other in their own designs.

This conclusion is also firmly supported by the repeated sentiment of both Germans and Russians that, while vehemently opposed to one another, the ideologies of Communism and National Socialism could simply be set aside when dealing with foreign policy. Weizsäcker himself admits that National Socialism would never accept Communism and vice versa in his May 30th letter. Stalin very pragmatically pointed out after the *Treaty* was signed, with a smile on his face nonetheless, that the two governments had primed their peoples to despise one another's governments and it would take quite some time and explaining to convince the German and Russian people of an earnest change. Though one cannot say the sentiments of the people themselves were hostile to one another, it is without question that National Socialist and Communist ideologies were irreconcilable. Therein lied the brilliance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: It was the most unexpected turn of events on the international stage *because* of its unlikelihood.

To diplomats such as Ciano the signing of a nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was clear. The ramifications of the *Treaty* were nothing less than war. With the fears of a two front war alleviated in the minds of Hitler and his generals, and the raw materials they needed to fight, they felt comfortable going to war with Poland and thus France and Britain. Ciano knew that war was immanent once the *Treaty* was signed and made one last attempt to convince Hitler to wait to invade Poland

in the hopes that another appeasement deal could be worked out and war could be averted until Italy felt itself completely prepared to fight.

The study of the process Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union went through to sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact also reveals a running theme in inter-war diplomacy. The *Treaty of Nonaggression* was made in the shadow of an earlier, less beneficial treaty for Germany and Russia. Weizsäcker mentions in his memoir that the two countries had come together in 1926 out of desperation, as outcasts of the Versailles Treaty. Hitler's entire premise for war with Poland, re-taking the Free City of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, was an outcome of Versailles. It can easily be inferred from the strong desire of the Soviet leadership for a "sphere of influence" encompassing pre-war Russian territory that the Soviets were also seeking to regain the prominence they once had on the continent. Furthermore, they were held in contempt by the very authors of the Treaty of Versailles, who refused to work with the socialist government, and had no choice but to turn to Nazi Germany for aid and security. In this sense the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and much of the inter-war diplomacy on the continent is a direct legacy of the Treaty of Versailles.

A number of influences led the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany to sign the *Treaty of Non-Aggression*. The Nazis were eager to pursue their invasion of Poland before the winter of 1939 and needed to do so without the risk of developing a two front war as well as with the required resources. Hitler and the Nazis had only one place to turn to insure both of these things – Moscow. Hitler's need to right the perceived wrongs of the Versailles Treaty outweighed the anti-Russian and anti-Communist National Socialist rhetoric. The Soviets, on the other hand, had failed to effectively isolate Germany, and

the West's unwillingness to check Hitler severely hampered what can only be described as lackadaisical diplomatic efforts at East-West partnership. Moreover, not only were the Germans more willing to guarantee the Soviet Union's desired "sphere of influence", they were able to use their influence in Tokyo to mitigate the pressures on the Soviet eastern frontier. Previous Russo-German economic agreements laid a foundation for an exchange of raw materials for much needed finished products. In short: The marriage of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in late August 1939 was a natural outcome of the context in which both countries found themselves. It was a marriage of convenience.

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Text of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact

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

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

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

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

Article IV. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties shall participate in any grouping of Powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

Article V. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

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

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

Secret Additional Protocol.

Article I. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognized by each party.

Article II. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish States and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

Article III. With regard to Southeastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in these areas.

Article IV. This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.