BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS THE USSR

AND THE ONSET OF

THE SECOND WORLD WAR, MARCH 1938-AUGUST 1939

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the description and analysis of Anglo-Soviet relations and the onset of the second world war, from March 1938 to August 1939. It is intended to examine the Soviet aspect of appeasement. Did Stalin's foreign policy offer the Chamberlain government an alternative to appeasement; was it viable or not; and why was it rejected? When it was apparently explored in 1939, why did it fail? What was to be the relation of the USSR to a hopefully pacified Germany? Does British policy in eastern Europe support the contention that a free hand - whether by design or implication - was offered to Germany?

An introductory background analysis traces the relation of the Soviet Union to the aims of appeasement. This indicates that British foreign policy was always cautious when defining its interests in eastern Europe; and that as long as German pacification remained the intention, the USSR could a priori not participate. An examination of Anglo-Soviet relations from March to September 1938 shows that the exclusion of Moscow from the Munich conference is the inevitable outcome of Anglo-French efforts at a peaceful solution of the Czech-German crisis. The conference symbolizes the decisive rejection of the Soviet alternative. The strongest evidence on British policy in eastern Europe is embodied in the immediate post-Munich period. On various issues Britain and France pursued the logical sequel to the desired Anglo-German

agreement: <u>désintéressement</u> in eastern Europe. The tripartite negotiations in the spring and summer of 1939 are seen to have their origins in the sudden attempts by London in January 1939 to improve relations with Moscow. This was to ensure the latter's benevolent neutrality in case of war. The Anglo-French-Soviet political and military negotiations are then analyzed in terms both of Britain's inability to harmonize short term methods - a deterrent front including the USSR, with long range aims - German appeasement, and of a change in Soviet interests and priorities.

This study makes use of the available official government documents on foreign policy, and various collections of private papers. The quite substantial amount of archival material appearing in Russian monographs and articles, despite its selective nature, was found of considerable value.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

An analysis of the diplomatic relations between Great Britain and the USSR on the eve of the second world war involves certain bibliographical limitations. This study is based on the published British, American and German government documents. Although of vital importance these volumes still leave uncharted the internal debates and correspondence of cabinet and foreign office relating to the formulation of policy. A further specific limitation of the British documents is the paucity of published material on Anglo-Soviet relations in the period March to September 1938.[1] Two explanations can be advanced for this situation. Such correspondence may have proved relatively unimportant and was therefore retained. Or, it may in fact not exist at all. Either case would reflect equally on the secondary role of the USSR in British foreign policy considerations in 1938. It appears extremely doubtful that any correspondence

1. See the comments on this problem, in reviews of E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919 - 1939, /hereafter: D.B.F.P./, 3rd Series, vols. 1 and 11 (London 1949-), by E.A. Adamov and L.N. Kutakov "Angliiskie Falsifikatory Istorii" (British Falsifiers of History), Izvestiya Akademii Nauk, Seriya Istorii i Filosofii, vol. VII, no. 2, Mar.-Apr. 1950, p. 168; and W.N. Medlicott, "La Politique Britannique et la Crise de la Tchécoslovaquie", Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, vol. II, no. 7, July 1952, p. 40.

of major importance was deliberately withheld.

The documentary evidence published by the Soviet government has been selective and generally intended to counter various western publications. Relevant Soviet documentary collections include: Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War, vols. I and II;[1] New Documents on the History of Munich;[2] and "Negotiations Between the Military Missions of the USSR, Britain and France in August 1939".[3] Furthermore, there exist several studies (aside from articles) by Soviet historians which, although repeating the 'official' view of inter-war diplomacy, contain a considerable selection of extracts from unpublished archival material. The more important sources in this respect are: P.N. Pospelov, et.al., Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soyuza, 1941-1945, vol. I;[4] A.A. Gromyko, et.al., Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III;[5] B.N. Ponomaryov,

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, (Moscow 1948), /hereafter: Documents and Materials, vols. I - II/.
2. V.F. Klochko, et. al., (Prague 1958), /hereafter: N.D.H.M./.
3. International Affairs (Moscow), nos. 2-3, Feb.-Mar. 1959, pp. 110-123, 106-122, /hereafter: "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", parts I-II/.
4. (The History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, Moscow 1960), /hereafter: Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, vol. I/. Relevant selections have been translated in International Affairs (Moscow), nos. 10-12, Oct.-Dec. 1960, pp. 110-117, 103-110, 87-94, nos. 1-2, Jan.-Feb. 1961, pp. 126-132, 91-96, /hereafter: "Great Patriotic War", parts I-V/.
5. (The History of Diplomacy, 2nd edn., Moscow 1965), /hereafter: Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III/.

A.A. Gromyko and V.M. Khvostov, eds., Istoriya Vneshnei Politiki SSSR, vol. I, 1917-1945gg;[1] V.I. Popov, Diplomaticheskie Otnosheniya Mezhdu SSSR i Angliei, 1929-1939gg;[2] and Yu. V. Borisov, Sovetsko-Frantsuzskie Otnosheniya, 1924-1945gg.[3]

Other sources, secondary in a study of British policy, are primary materials on the Soviet Union. The speeches of Joseph Stalin, Maxim Litvinov, commissar for foreign affairs until May 1939, and Vyacheslav Molotov, who succeeded Litvinov, memoranda handed to British diplomats in Moscow or transmitted to the foreign office, the conversations of Soviet diplomats with their British (and foreign) counterparts, and communiqués published in the Soviet press are all significant. The expressions of editorial opinion in Pravda and Izvestia are very useful guides.

There are also the voluminous diplomatic memoirs of Ivan Maisky, Soviet ambassador in London from 1932 to

1. (The History of the Foreign Policy of the USSR, vol. I, 1917-1945, Moscow 1966), [hereafter: Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I].
2. (The Diplomatic Relations Between the USSR and Britain, 1929-1939, Moscow 1965), [hereafter: Popov, SSSR i Angliya].
3. (Soviet-French Relations, 1924-1945, Moscow 1964).

1943.[1] These can be supplemented and often verified by reference to memoranda on conversations with the ambassador made by various of his British political contacts.[2] Further extracts from Maisky's diaries of particular importance to the Munich crisis have also appeared.[3] Finally, N.G. Kuznetsov, appointed commissar for the navy on April 27, 1939 and a participant in the tripartite Moscow talks, has published his memoirs.[4] The sum of

1. Kto Pomogal Gitleru? (Who Helped Hitler? Moscow 1962; English trans. London 1964); Ispanskie Tetradi (Spanish Notebooks, Moscow 1962; English trans. London 1966); Vospominaniya Sovetskogo Posla, Voina 1939-43 (Memoirs of a Soviet Ambassador, The War 1939-43, Moscow 1965; English trans. London 1967). Maisky's collected memoirs have appeared in a two volume edition: Vospominaniya Sovetskogo Posla (Moscow 1964). See also, the bibliography of his works in V.G. Trukhanovsky, et. al., Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, Politika, Diplomatiya (International Relations, Politics, Diplomacy, Moscow 1964), pp. 9-19. In April 1966 Sovetskaya Kultura criticized Maisky's memoirs for being too "subjective". See the report in The Times, Apr. 25, 1966.
2. The Lloyd George Papers (Beaverbrook Library, London), and the Hugh Dalton Diaries and Papers (British Library of Political and Economic Science, London) are most revealing.
3. Ivan Maisky, "The Munich Drama", New Times, nos. 42-44, 46-47, 49, Oct. 19, 26, Nov. 1, 16, 23, Dec. 7, 1966, pp. 16-21, 24-27, 25-28, 26-29, 18-22, 23-26, [hereafter: Maisky, "Munich Drama", parts I-VI]. See also, his "Stranitsy iz Dnevnika" (Pages from a Diary), Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya, no. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1966, pp. 118-128, no. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1967, pp. 102-113.
4. Nakanune (On the Eve, Moscow 1966). Relevant selections have appeared in International Affairs (Moscow), nos. 10-11, Oct.-Nov. 1966, pp. 94-104, 93-101.

all the Soviet material indicates that the historian is not as badly served by primary evidence as has usually been suggested.

The bulk of material, however, is still largely one-sided. This imbalance will remain for some time. The Soviet government is now publishing an official series of foreign policy documents on the inter-war period, but relevant volumes for 1938-1939 will not be available for several years.[1] The choice therefore has been made to fully employ the quite substantial body of accessible material. Two considerations make this feasible. First, even the prospect of more revelations from Soviet archives may not prove of decided significance. If one can project on the basis of past publications, it seems very probable that future collections relating to the origins of the second world war will be highly selective and, to a degree unacceptable to the western historian, tendentious. There is no immediate prospect that Soviet historians will end their scholastic 'cold war'. Second, Stalin's foreign policy during 1938 and the early months

1. Dokymenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR (Documents on the Foreign Policy of the USSR, Moscow 1957-). As of 1968, 14 volumes covering the period 1917-1931 have appeared. A further joint series with the Polish government - Dokymenty i Materialy po Istorii Sovetsko-Polskikh Otnosheny (Documents and Materials on the History of Soviet-Polish Relations, Moscow 1963-) - so far covers the period 1917-1932 in five volumes.

of 1939, at least in relation to European problems, was essentially a reaction to events. Whatever his attitude or aims, the initiative in action did not rest primarily with the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, it is in deference to the above bibliographical limitations that Anglo-Soviet relations from March 1938 to August 1939 will be studied from the point of view of British policy towards the USSR.[1]

1. English or French translations, where they already exist for Russian sources, have been used as indicated. Otherwise all translations are those of the writer.

CHAPTER ONE

APPEASEMENT AND THE USSR

Despite numerous diplomatic studies on the origins of the second world war, Anglo-Soviet relations have been curiously ignored. While there has been some analysis of specific aspects, a general study using available British and Russian documentary evidence has been lacking.[1] The aim therefore is to describe comprehensively and analyze British policy towards the USSR from March 1938 until August 1939.

There is needed a documentary basis for the present welcome shift in historical interpretation on the 1938-1939 period. Historians seem to have gone through several phases, specifically in their views on Anglo-Soviet relations. Prior to and during the second war, and immediately following 1945 many rejected appeasement diplomacy as a policy of weakness and betrayal. They

1. K.W.B. Middleton, Britain and Russia (London 1947); J.A.R. Marriott, Anglo-Russian Relations, 1689-1943 (London 1944); and E. Crankshaw, Russia and Britain (London 1944) are all based on secondary sources. W.P. and Zelda K. Coates, A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations, vol. I (London 1944), /hereafter: Coates, vol. I/, is largely based on the press. However, it does contain much information which W.P. Coates, in his capacity as secretary of the Anglo-Russian parliamentary committee, personally received from the Soviet embassy in London.

supported instead the Churchillian 'grand alliance' idea which advocated close collaboration between Britain, France and the Soviet Union. In reaction to the cold war, the Soviets began to be more harshly treated in historical investigation. Scepticism and criticism replaced a largely pro-Soviet interpretation. Recently, in light of Soviet refusal to case the least moral or political doubt on Stalin's pre-1939 diplomacy,[1] historians are taking a more balanced point of view. There is an increased tendency to examine with an open mind British policy and aims towards the Soviet Union. It is now more frequently suggested that both Chamberlain and Stalin were to blame for errors of short-sightedness. Faults, it is now found, can be scored against both the British and the Russians.

A series of letters to the editor in the correspondence columns of The Times was especially revealing. On February 17, 1964 The Times reviewed a volume of memoirs by the former Soviet ambassador to Britain, Ivan Maisky. The review suggested amicably that in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations of 1939 there were faults on both sides.

1. In his secret speech to the 20th congress of the C.P.S.U., Khrushchev criticized both the purges for the harm caused to Soviet defence preparations and Stalin's diplomacy just prior to June 1941. Nothing was said, however, about the course of Soviet foreign policy on the eve of the war. Bertram D. Wolfe, Khrushchev and Stalin's Ghost (New York 1957), pp. 154-156,166.

Maisky answered the review[1] and as W.N. Medlicott phrased it, the ambassador "agrees, except that he cannot admit any Soviet faults." Medlicott added that "one of the classic blunders of diplomatic history" was committed by Britain in giving a guarantee to Poland before bringing the Soviets into their security scheme.[2] E.L. Woodward, in turn, commented that "few if any western historians would now try to defend the diplomacy of the western Powers during this period with the tireless self-justification practised by M. Maisky in his defence of Soviet diplomacy.... "[3] Finally, Lord Strang, former head of the central department of the foreign office, similarly adopting a middle of the road attitude, quoted Molotov as having said to him in June 1942: "We did our best in 1939, but we failed: we were both at fault." Strang concluded: "That seems to me to be the truth of the matter."[4]

However, even with this welcome shift in historical interpretation, controversy still persists on the nature of British relations with the USSR. It has been argued that an Anglo-Soviet alliance in 1939 was perhaps "the

1. See Letter to the Editor, The Times, Mar. 12, 1964.
2. The Times, Mar. 17, 1964.
3. The Times, Mar. 19, 1964.
4. The Times, Mar. 24, 1964. See also, Maisky's Letter to the Editor, The Times, Apr. 7, 1964, summing up this correspondence.

one chance of preventing the Second World War, or of ensuring Hitler's early defeat."[1] Another historian, while denying the usefulness of such speculation, asserts that "failure to achieve this alliance did much to cause it."[2] Critics of appeasement contend that British acquiescence to the April 1939 Soviet offer of a triple alliance could have averted the war.[3] And of course Soviet historiography virtually bristles with emphatic assurances that if "caught in the vice of the system of collective security," then Hitler's"chances of success in unleashing the Second World War would have been reduced to a minimum."[4] This view has been contested with equal emphasis. Lord Halifax, who succeeded Anthony Eden as foreign secretary in February 1938, expressed his gravest doubts whether anything Britain or France could have done in 1939 would have influenced Russia to provoke a possible

1. L.B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-9 (London 1948), /hereafter: Namier, Diplomatic Prelude/, p. 143.
2. A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (Penguin edn., London 1964), p. 301.
3. Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, vol. I, The Gathering Storm (London 1949), /hereafter: Churchill, vol. I/, pp. 325-326; Coates, vol. I, p. 716, quoting Lloyd George; Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, 1914-1939 (London 1966), /hereafter: Macmillan, Winds of Change/, p. 405.
4. Soviet Information Bureau, Falsifiers of History (London 1948), /hereafter: Falsifiers of History/, pp. 17-18.

reaction from Germany.[1] Most British diplomats and cabinet ministers of the 1930's have argued along these lines. Viscount Templewood (Samuel Hoare), most eloquent of Chamberlain's defenders, posed the question whether his government was "unduly suspicious of Russia, and would a more sympathetic policy have brought the Soviets over to the Allied side in 1938 and 1939?" Acknowledging that Churchill's answer was "an unhesitating 'yes'", he continued: "There is, however, another view that is not unsupported by evidence to the effect that the Soviet was not reluctant to see war between England and Germany, and was above all bent upon playing for time."[2] While an answer to an historical if can only remain speculative, it still remains necessary to examine the Chamberlain government's conception of the Soviet Union and assess the manner in which these conclusions influenced its behaviour.

1. Earl of Halifax, Fulness of Days (London 1957), p. 207. See also, "Foreign Policy 1938-9: An Unpublished Note", Hickleton /Halifax/ Papers (Garrowby, York), A4.410.12.1, /hereafter: "Note on Foreign Policy", Hickleton Papers A4.410.12.1/. This note was in fact used by Halifax in his memoirs, Fulness of Days, pp. 204-207; and in Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax, The Life of Lord Halifax (London 1965), pp. 437-438.
2. Viscount Templewood, "'A Formidable Indictment'" /Review of The Second World War, vol. I, The Gathering Storm by Winston Churchill/, The Listener, vol. XL, no. 1028, Oct. 7, 1948, p. 533. Cf. Lord Strang, The Moscow Negotiations, 1939 (Leeds 1968), /hereafter: Strang, Moscow Negotiations/, p. 16.

Controversy has also surrounded what Hoare has above posited as the possibly undue suspicious attitude of his government towards the USSR. If one is to understand Chamberlain's Soviet policy (leaving until later the criticism which can be made), it is possible to show how this policy was rooted in certain definite guidelines. In other words, the dilemma behind Britain's continued rejection of Litvinov's proposals for collective security - either collective action under the auspices of the League of Nations, or a straight triple alliance between Britain, France and the USSR - can be explained; particularly if one considers the useful distinction between distrust of Russia and the fear of bolshevism.[1] The former can be adequately described in historical, diplomatic and military terms. The latter, encompassing problems of attitude and opinion, needs sociological categories for its analysis.[2] It is essentially the former which will be dealt with here.

To understand the background to Chamberlain's distrust of the Soviet Union, one must turn to his

1. This distinction is made inter alia in Max Beloff, The Great Powers; Essays in 20th Century Politics (London 1959), p.50; and extensively used in Donald N. Lammers, Explaining Munich: The Search for Motive in British Policy (Stanford 1966). In the Soviet view Chamberlain's foreign policy is described simply as "one unbroken madness, fermented in the yeast of class hatred, stupidity and illiteracy." Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p.71.
2. See e.g., Margaret George, The Warped Vision, British Foreign Policy, 1933-1939 (Pittsburgh 1965); Lammers, op.cit., pp. 1-25.

conception of appeasement diplomacy.[1] He believed firstly that under no circumstances must Britain accept the notion of the inevitability or imminence of a European war; that "catastrophic conception of Europe always on the brink of the abyss".[2] This view was based on a passionate desire to spare the continent a recurrence of the devastating first world war. More important was the wish, stemming from moral and historical reasons, to redress "any genuine and legitimate grievances"[3] resulting from the Versailles peace treaty. This meant rejecting any disposition to prejudge Germany or see Hitler as inevitably bent upon unleashing a conflict. It was held that a policy of treaty revision would satisfy the limited and just demands

1. The term appeasement will be here used in the neutral sense denoting negotiation, pacification and peaceful revision. For general discussions of appeasement diplomacy, see: John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, Prologue to Tragedy (Papermac edn., London 1966), /hereafter: Wheeler-Bennett, Munich/, pp. 3-8; William R. Rock, Appeasement on Trial (Hamden, Conn. 1966), pp. 3-7, 337-338; Christopher Thorne, The Approach of War, 1938-9 (London 1967), pp. 9-23; Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London 1966), /hereafter: Gilbert, Roots of Appeasement/, esp. pp. 179-188; Letter from Orme Sargent to John W. Wheeler-Bennett, quoted ibid., appendix V, pp. 220-223; /D.C. Watt/, "Appeasement Reconsidered, Some Neglected Factors", Round Table, vol. LIII, no. 212, Sept. 1963, pp. 358-371; and the same author's "Appeasement: the Rise of a Revisionist School?", Political Quarterly, vol. XXVI, no. 2, Apr.-June 1965, pp. 191-213; C.B. Pyper, Chamberlain and His Critics (London 1962), passim.
2. Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London 1946), p. 301; H.H.E. Craster, ed., Viscount Halifax, Speeches on Foreign Policy (London 1940), /hereafter: Halifax, Speeches on Foreign Policy/, p. 116.
3. Speech at Birmingham, Apr. 9, 1938, in Neville Chamberlain, The Struggle for Peace (London 1939), p. 171.

of Germany whereupon she would take her place among the satisfied nations of Europe. Thus the continuing search for solutions by reason and not force was an urgent prerequisite to peace.

Given this assumption it follows secondly that the most favourable condition for its fulfilment was to maintain a fluid relationship among the states of Europe. "Our policy is not one of dividing Europe into two opposing blocs of countries," Chamberlain argued, "each arming against the other amidst a growing flood of ill-will on both sides, which can only end in war." Such a policy was "dangerous and stupid."[1] This opinion was rooted in the belief that the rivalry between the triple alliance and the triple entente caused the first war. The need to avoid a repetition of such contending blocs was a theme the prime minister and his cabinet perpetually reiterated during 1938 and, indeed, as late as May 1939 both in the Commons and in public. Thirdly, and closely related, was the belief that Germany must never be given the opportunity of raising the encirclement cry. A policy of continental alliances would immediately provoke a hostile German reaction. To ensure against this, Chamberlain made it an axiom of his policy that never must Britain be engaged by unspecified commitments

1. Ibid.

operating under conditions not immediately foreseen. Except where she had direct interests, military obligations were to be avoided.

Thus reluctant to accept the inevitability of war or the division of Europe into blocs, and desiring to avoid both the encirclement of Germany and a policy of alliances, Chamberlain totally rejected balance of power politics. As early as 1936 he addressed the Commons on his objections to alliances, with Britain holding the balance. "We believe that system has gone", he declared, "and is not likely to be revived".[1] Likewise, Halifax at about the same time argued that "the war-scarred history of Europe" during which the balance of power policy was pursued gave "no encouragement to hope that war would not again result from a renewal of that same policy...."[2] In light of these considerations it is possible to see why Britain rejected on so many occasions various Soviet proposals to concert measures to meet German aggression.

The public statements of Soviet diplomats were quite clear as to their views on European events. Hitler they considered entertained limitless, insatiable ambitions.

1. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series [hereafter: H.C. Deb.], vol. 317, Nov.5, 1936, col. 381.
2. Halifax, Speeches on Foreign Policy, p. 34.

A war to prevent German dominance on the continent was therefore inevitable. During 1938 and 1939 Litvinov was perpetually predicting the outbreak of hostilities. To meet this nazi threat a solid, armed bloc of peaceful nations must be gathered to concert a policy of collective defense. Maisky argued the case thus: "The most sensible and logical way of counteracting nazi aggression would seem to have been for the USSR, Britain and France to form a defensive bloc. The Soviet government persistently recommended this."[1] The encirclement of Germany was therefore strategically desirable. And finally, a policy of precise military obligations was considered imperative. It was partly the public enunciation of the means whereby the Soviets intended to resist German aggression that most alienated their policy from the British.

The Soviet Union, having joined the League of Nations in 1934, became one of the strongest supporters of the collective security provisions of the covenant. Unfortunately by 1938 the League, as an instrument of conciliation or a focus of resistance, was being politely ignored. The 100th session of the council in January 1938 confirmed that, aside from the support of Russia, Jordan and China, it had lost all influence over

1. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part 1, p. 19.

the main course of international events.[1] It could therefore little benefit the Soviet Union to couch their demands for collective resistance to aggression in the form of increased support for the League. Especially as Britain's League policy by 1938 was entirely negative. In his February 22, 1938 speech to the house of commons, Chamberlain went the furthest he had ever done in rejecting both adherence to the principles of the covenant relating to collective security and any attempt to apply them. The prime minister defined collective security as a "system under which the collective action of a number of States is assured to prevent aggression, or if aggression is undertaken, to put a stop to it and punish the aggressor." He further distinguished two methods of applying this policy. The first, under the auspices of the League, was firmly rejected. It was Chamberlain's view that the League, weakened by the failure of sanctions against Italy and the desertion of several members, could no longer discharge the functions with which it was originally invested. On this point he was most emphatic: "the League as constituted to-day is unable

1. F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, vol. II (London 1952), p. 768.

to provide collective security for anybody".[1] These views were to a large measure designed to counter the opposition Labour party arguments. Their proposals tended in public to be a simple statement of support for the League and the collective security provisions of the covenant. What in fact this policy meant was clarified much later by Clement Attlee: "What they [the Chamberlain government] ought to have done when the League was no longer any use was to try to get a line-up with all the other peaceable powers - what Winston used to talk of as the Grand Alliance. That's what we wanted." But, Attlee continued, Chamberlain, having a "violent anti-Communist bent", would not accept this "because a Grand Alliance would have had to include Russia."[2]

It is indeed true that Chamberlain equally rejected this second scheme of collective security. In doing so, the prime minister was opposing an alternative policy being propogated from three diverse sources: the more articulate and realistic in the Labour party; groups of

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 332, Feb. 22, 1938, cols. 226-229. For Chamberlain's views on the failure of the League, see Feiling, op.cit., pp. 295-296, 324-325. See also, the exchange of letters between Halifax and Lord Cecil following the February 24, 1938, foreign affairs debate in the house of lords for a further statement of government policy on the League. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers (British Museum), 51084.
2. Francis Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers (London 1961), pp. 12-13, 16.

Tory rebels led by Churchill or Eden; and finally, and most important, the Soviet Union. The latter unfortunately mixed its calls for alliances to oppose Germany with references to the League. This enabled Chamberlain to dismiss the general conception without answering the specific proposals. However, the essence of what all three groups were proposing was the Churchillian formula: the "Grand Alliance, which was the kernal of collective security".[1] The scheme as enunciated by Churchill argued thus:

> If a number of States were assembled around Great Britain and France in a solemn treaty for mutual defence against aggression; if they had their forces marshalled in what you may call a grand alliance; if they had their staff arrangements concerted; if all this rested, as it can honourably rest, upon the Covenant of the League of Nations, agreeable with all the purposes and ideals of the League of Nations; if that were sustained, as it would be, by the moral sense of the world, and if it were done in the year 1938... then I say that you might even now arrest this approaching war.[2]

In rejecting any form of collective security, which by implication meant Soviet involvement, it would seem to

1. A.L. Rowse, All Souls and Appeasement (London 1961), p. 72.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 333, Mar. 14, 1938, cols. 99-100. In his memoirs Churchill described his proposals simply as a straightforward "Franco-British-Russian alliance". Vol. I, p. 245. For a further elaboration, see Winston S. Churchill, Step by Step, 1936-1939 (London 1939), pp. 215-218; and below, pp.76-77

suggest Chamberlain was on a headlong, obstinate and narrow-minded pursuit of a policy upon which he had staked both his reputation and British survival. But this may be too superficial a view. Chamberlain was very clear on the reasons why he rejected this approach; the two most important being its similarity to the old alliances of pre-world war one days, and the lack of adequate military force to make such a deterrent effective.[1] Nevertheless, there are several indications that some version of a collective security scheme, while overtly ignored before March 1939, lay somewhere in the thoughts of Chamberlain, not too far below the surface.

Eden relates that on January 30, 1938, the prime minister suggested to him that if Britain could not reach agreement with Germany, she might have to aim at the encirclement of Germany and a "possible alliance with Russia."[2] Two further pieces of evidence appear in Keith Feiling's biography of Chamberlain. He quotes from a March 13, 1938 letter by the prime minister. Chamberlain noted that the Austrian Anschluss proves "that force is the only argument Germany understands,

1. See also, below, pp. 77-78, 86-90.
2. Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs, Facing the Dictators (London 1962), /hereafter: Avon, Facing the Dictators/, pp. 570-571. Cf. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Jan. 30, 1938, Viscount Templewood Papers (University Library, Cambridge), XIX:(C)II.

and that collective security cannot offer any prospect of preventing such events, until it can show a visible force of overwhelming strength.... And if that is so, is it not obvious that such force and determination are most effectively mobilised by alliances...." The letter continued: "I don't want to get back to alliances, but if Germany continues to behave as she has done lately, she may drive us to it."[1] Such a policy of alliances would obviously have had to include the USSR. Then in a diary entry of March 20, 1938, Chamberlain confirmed that the "plan of the 'Grand Alliance', as Winston calls it, had occurred to me long before he mentioned it". The prime minister dismissed it on the grounds, inter alia, of its impracticability.[2] But this alternative to his own policy seems to have stayed very much with him. In January 1939 he was privately advised to "make a grand alliance against Germany. In other words", he observed, "better abandon my policy and adopt Winston's! Fortunately, my nature is as Lloyd George says extremely 'obstinate', and I refuse to change, but if anything happened to me I can see plainly that my successor would soon be off the rails...."[3]

Inherent in Chamberlain's attitude and policies is

1. Quoted in Feiling, op.cit., pp. 341-342.
2. Quoted ibid., p. 347.
3. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Jan. 8, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.

the rejection of collective security and by implication a role for the Soviet Union. And in this lies what can be criticized as one of the major weaknesses of his foreign policy. That is, while considering the Russian role in European pacification, he made the mistake of leaving them too much alone. "It would be disastrous to leave Russia in isolation", the Czech president, Eduard Benes, warned Eden in 1935. Such a policy, the former predicted, would force Russia to "make an agreement with Berlin at the expense of the West."[1] And thus being left alone - in Chamberlain's view held in reserve, in the Soviet view ignored and snubbed - Russia, when needed, proved elusive.

Not surprisingly it is the Soviet aspect of appeasement which raises a variety of questions. Previously the main focus of any discussion of appeasement diplomacy has been Anglo-German relations. This is both natural and logical. But it overlooks the fact that appeasement aimed at more than the pacification of Germany alone. Eden, for example, when using the term appeasement said that "it was the appeasement of Europe as a whole that we have constantly before us."[2] His visit to Moscow in 1935 and his subsequent disagreement with Chamberlain in

1. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 172.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 310, Mar. 26, 1936, col. 1446.

1938 make it clear that he envisaged the USSR playing some role in a pacified Europe. In contrast, the prime minister was most explicit when discussing specifically his search for German and Italian appeasement. He did indeed speak in the Commons of a "general appeasement throughout Europe".[1] But he also made it abundantly clear that the "peace of Europe must depend upon the attitude of the four major Powers - Germany, Italy, France and ourselves." Britain was therefore to seek a normalization of relations with Germany and Italy, the two countries with which she was at odds.[2] Success in this effort could lead to the four power pact.

In light of this one is forced to consider what view Chamberlain held in regards to the Soviet aspect of appeasement diplomacy. An agreement to ensure peaceful revision of the Versailles treaty could exclude the USSR, if confined to western Europe. But any settlement of east European difficulties ultimately had to include the Soviet Union. What then was to be its relation to a pacified Germany and to Europe as a whole? What were Chamberlain's objectives particularly in central and

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 332, Feb. 21, 1938, col. 63. See also, Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London 1954), pp. 373-374; and the speech by Halifax in Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, /hereafter: H.L. Deb./, vol. 107, Feb. 17, 1938, col. 790, where appeasement is discussed as a world policy.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 332, Feb. 21, 1938, col. 64.

eastern Europe?[1] These questions assume crucial importance in view of Soviet condemnation of appeasement.

Central to Soviet post-war historiography is the thesis that Britain "rejected collective security because it stood in the way of their newly adopted policy of 'appeasement' of German aggression..."[2] Furthermore, this policy had a twofold purpose: to construct a four power pact thereby isolating Russia diplomatically; and to permit and encourage German expansion in eastern Europe leading to a Nazi-Soviet conflict. Maisky claims Chamberlain's"true object was to use the fascist dictators and above all Hitler as a battering-ram against the USSR."[3] By satisfying Hitler's grievances in the west, he could then be deflected eastwards and encouraged to seek German Lebensraum at Soviet expense. Maisky's despatches from London appear to have particularly attributed such motives to the British prime minister. Lloyd George told the ambassador on July 1, 1937 that it was perfectly clear that

1. Of the very few historians who have considered this question, one concludes that "the ultimate aims of the Chamberlain policy are decidedly obscure." W.N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles (London 1940), /hereafter: Medlicott, British Foreign Policy/, p. 221. Another writes: "British and French statesmen were far too distracted by the German problem to consider what would happen when Germany had become the dominent Power in Eastern Europe." Taylor, op.cit., p. 204.
2. Falsifiers of History, p. 16.
3. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part I, p. 19. See also, his Spanish Notebooks, pp. 24-25.

"Chamberlain's 'general plan' was leading to the following: during the next year to secure an agreement with Germany and Italy and conclude a four power pact."[1] After his first interview with Chamberlain, during the course of which the prime minister outlined his plans for appeasement, Maisky noted:

> The general impression I have from the conversation with Chamberlain can be reduced to the fact that he is now seriously concerned with the four power pact idea and the organization of western security, being ready for the achievement of this idea to go far to meet Germany and Italy.[2]

Chamberlain's alleged efforts to create an anti-Soviet front in western Europe is seen as the constant element in his foreign policy in the late thirties.[3]

1. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 333.
2. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted ibid., pp. 328-329.
3. See e.g., Pavel Eisler, Munich, A Retrospect (Prague 1958), pp. 19-20; Andrew Rothstein, The Munich Conspiracy (London 1958), passim; Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 328-343; Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 206-207; V.G. Trukhanovsky, Vneshnyaya Politika Anglii na Pervom Etape Obshchego Krizisa Kapitalizma, 1918-1939gg. (British Foreign Policy in the First Stage of the World Capitalist Crisis, 1918-1939, Moscow 1962), [hereafter: Trukhanovsky, Vneshnyaya Politika Anglii], pp. 288-309. Communist historians are not unique in propounding this view of Chamberlain's intentions. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 296, notes: "Behind the general desire for peace and for an 'accommodation' with Hitler, there lay, if not in the mind of Mr. Chamberlain himself, at any rate in the mind of some of his advisers, the secret hope that, if German expansion could be directed toward the East, it would in time come into collision with the rival totalitarian imperialism of Soviet Russia." The theme of "Conservative Red-obsession" and the free hand for Germany in eastern Europe is yet again restated in George, op.cit., esp. chapter 6. Cf. the analysis in Lammers, op.cit., pp. 1-25.

Despite the axiomatic nature of these views in communist historiography, the explicit evidence substantiating the interpretation is not overwhelming. It is interesting to note that discussion and analysis of Anglo-Soviet relations in British diplomatic memoirs is generally sparse. (The paucity of published official documents has already been noted). The few direct references to the view of a Chamberlain embarked on a policy of making Germany strong to defeat Russia dismiss it as "wholly fantastic" and "nonsense",[1] contrary to the "inherent British sense of morality, humanity, and freedom"[2] and "hard to believe".[3] On the whole evidence seems to suggest that the USSR, as a factor in European politics, was not especially uppermost in the thoughts of the British cabinet or diplomats in 1938. The Soviet Union, it has been observed, "hardly came into the picture."[4] Nonetheless a fundamental ambivalence remains. Was there in fact a conscious conspiracy, a plot to bring about a

1. Viscount Maugham, The Truth about the Munich Crisis (London 1944), /hereafter: Maugham, Munich/, p. 2; and his At the End of the Day (London 1954), pp. 392-393.
2. Nevile Henderson, Failure of a Mission (N.Y. 1940), p. 280. Cf. Entry of Oct. 28, 1937, Dalton Diary.
3. Strang, Moscow Negotiations, p. 16.
4. L.S. Amery, My Political Life, vol. III, The Unforgiving Years, 1929-1940 (London 1955), /hereafter: Amery, vol. III/, p. 227.

"conflict between Germany and the USSR, with the aim, once both these Powers had been bled white in an exhausting war, of dictating to Europe a peace advantageous to Great Britain."[1] While so highly absorbed by the problem of Nazi Germany was any consideration given to what would happen when this powerful, satiated power faced the vast rich expanses of the Soviet Ukraine? Was there to be a policy of the free hand for Germany in eastern Europe?[2] Or, is it possible that Chamberlain's policy towards the USSR was ill-defined, obscure and rather ambiguous? In effect, how much truth is there in the constantly reiterated allegation that appeasement was an anti-Soviet policy?

Not until March 1939 did the British government definitely bind itself politically and militarily in eastern Europe. But the problemsof that area had previously impinged on British foreign policy, if only indirectly. Immediately following the first world war and up to the mid-1930's France had sought security in various alliances with countries east and southeast of Germany. To this was later added a natural community of

1. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 207.
2. For an interesting discussion of the arguments both for and against giving Germany a free hand in eastern Europe, see Foreign Affairs Group, All Souls, Oxford, Minutes for Jan.-May 1938 (Martin Gilbert Archives, Oxford).

French interests with Great Britain in dealing with Nazi Germany. Aware, therefore, that France's eastern obligations might one day produce a conflict, some expression of British attitude to these relations had become necessary.

With the withdrawal of Germany from the disarmament conference in October 1933, and its total collapse the following June, European diplomats reverted to more traditional methods of security. Mussolini's proposal for a four power pact received British support but was never ratified.[1] Instead, France and the USSR, fearing a new anti-Soviet combination, proposed an 'eastern Locarno' - a regional pact of mutual assistance. For French foreign minister Louis Barthou, this scheme offered the prospect of regional security, with Russia reintroduced into Europe as a useful counterpoise to Germany.[2]

1. For a discussion of the evolution of the four power pact idea, see René Albrecht-Carrié, "Four Power Pacts: 1933-1945", Journal of Central European Affairs, vol. V, no. 1, Apr. 1945, pp. 17-35. On Soviet reaction to the 1933 negotiations, see Konrad Hugo Jaurush, The Four Power Pact, 1933 (Madison 1965), pp. 105-108, 172-173.
2. The proposals envisaged two interlocking treaties. The first, to be signed by the Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, pledged mutual assistance in case of aggression by any one of the contracting powers. The second was a Franco-Soviet agreement. The Soviets were to accede to the Locarno treaty in exchange for French accession to the proposed eastern pact. See André Géraud, "France, Russia and the Pact of Mutual Assistance", Foreign Affairs, vol. XIII, no. 2, Jan. 1935, pp. 226-235; and William Evans Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, The Origins of the Franco-Soviet Pact (Durham, N.C.1962). Cf. Z.S. Belousova, Frantsuzskaya Diplomatiya Nakanune Myunkhena (French Diplomacy on the Eve of Munich, Moscow 1964), pp. 9-161.

Litvinov's support was equally understandable. Aside from traditional fear of an anti-Soviet concert of Europe, the Russians also viewed with apprehension the fanatical anti-bolshevism of Hitler. The Soviet ambassador in Berlin, Vladimir Potemkin, (later deputy foreign commissar), informed his government that "hostility towards the U.S.S.R.... is the basis of Hitler's tactical line in foreign policy."[1] Furthermore, the despatches of both Potemkin and Maisky described British policy as primarily concerned with western European security and willing to give Germany a free hand in the east.[2] "The British Government's attitude towards the idea of an Eastern pact", Maisky wrote,

> has, in point of fact, always been unfavourable.... An Eastern pact would considerably strengthen our international position, make secure our Western frontier and ease our position in the Far East.... Britain, has never liked France to be strong.... An Eastern pact which would inevitably cement all France's connections with the East and would very considerably guarantee France's own security, would promote an extra-ordinary growth in France's international might. For precisely this reason the

1. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in M. Andreyeva, and K. Dmitrieva "From the Prehistory of the Second World War", International Affairs (Moscow), no. 5, May 1961, p. 75.
2. Ibid., p. 76. The British ambassador in Moscow, Viscount Chilston, confirmed that the Soviets were indeed anxious lest Britain come to a separate agreement with Germany. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 130.

> attitude of British diplomacy towards the proposed Eastern pact could not be enthusiastic.[1]

However, it was German and Polish refusal to participate which destroyed the wider Barthou-Litvinov scheme.

Notwithstanding Maisky's observation, Britain had officially voiced a measure of support for the plan. On the grounds of approval of Locarno-type regional pacts, then foreign secretary, John Simon, had recommended it but emphasized Britain could undertake no new continental commitments.[2] Furthermore, this support was dependent on both the inclusion of Germany in any Franco-Soviet agreement and equality for German rearmament. When the comprehensive eastern European scheme failed there remained instead a straightforward Franco-Soviet pact of mutual assistance. But it was precisely this outcome which worried Britain most. The reasons for this were crucial for they partially explain Chamberlain's

1. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in M. Andreyeva and L. Vidyasova, eds., "The Struggle of the U.S.S.R. for Collective Security in Europe During 1933-1935", International Affairs (Moscow) no. 6, June 1963, p. 114. The Soviet version of the east pact negotiations, backed by considerable archival material, is related in this article and its continuation, ibid., nos. 7, 8, 10, July, Aug., Oct. 1963, pp. 116-123, 132-139, 112-120. See also, "Angliiskaya Diplomatiya i Vostochnuy Pakt" (British Diplomacy and the Eastern Pact), Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya, no. 3, May-June 1963, pp. 49-65.
2. Hoesch to German Foreign Ministry, June 13, 1934, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 [hereafter: D.G.F.P.], Series C, vol. II (London 1959), no. 502, p. 901.

attitudes during the 1938 Czech-German crisis.

The Franco-Soviet rapprochement was a major step in Europe's drift back into an alliance system with Barthou formulating the reconstruction of the pre-1914 triple entente. British opposition to any such move was immediately apparent. Simon had supported an eastern Locarno including Germany because it averted "the threatened alternative of a formal Franco-Russian alliance". But Britain wished to avoid the latter "as being the decisive step towards relapsing into the system of pre-war alliances."[1] The Franco-Soviet pact, finally signed on May 2, 1935 and supplemented by a Czech-Soviet treaty on the 16th,[2] was less binding than the British feared but more than they were willing to condone. Suspicion and caution characterized the British attitude. Paris, it appears, was not encouraged to conclude a military convention with the USSR,[3] although the French government was itself not enthusiastic. This enormously hindered negotiations on possible Soviet

1. Hoesch to German Foreign Ministry, July 20, 1934, D.G.F.P., Series C, vol. III (London 1959), no. 102, pp. 200-204.
2. For a study, based on archival sources, of the conclusion of the Czech-Soviet pact, see S.I. Prasolov and P.I. Rezonov, eds., Sovetsko-Chekhoslovatskie Otnosheniya Mezhdu Dvumya Voinami, 1918-1939 (Soviet-Czechoslovak Relations Between the Two Wars, 1918-1939, Moscow 1968), pp. 135-201.
3. Feiling, op.cit., p. 302.

military collaboration both in 1938 and 1939.[1] Sympathy for Germany's revisionist aims gradually increased while anxiety over France's alliances continued unabated.

Closely related to general discontent with France's alliance policy was the fact that in 1935, as in 1938, British foreign policy makers were reluctant to contemplate fighting alongside Bolshevik Russia against Germany in consequence of events outside their control. This fear of being drawn in on the side of the USSR because of France's treaties, either through ill-considered action, or from outright deceit, could not have been but a source of some anxiety to the British government.[2] When Hitler used the excuse of the ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact to re-enter the Rhineland, Britain had to face momentarily the unwelcome possibility of resistance in concert with France and her ally. The long term effects of the re-occupation were even more important. It opened the prospect of Britain having to aid France and Russia in a struggle between the Czechs and Germans, but without the

1. Georges Bonnet, Défense de la Paix, vol. II, Fin d'une Europe (Geneva 1948), /hereafter: Bonnet, vol. II/, p. 176, acknowledges that this was "une erreur grave".
2. This sentiment was apparently not absent from the minds of certain Frenchmen as well. Gamelin quotes Laval as saying in November 1935 that he feared lest the Soviets "entraînassent la France dans une guerre". Maurice Gamelin, Servir, vol. II, Le Prologue du Drame, 1930-Août 1939 (Paris 1946), /hereafter: Gamelin, vol. II/, p. 180.

strategic advantage formerly offered by the demilitarized Rhineland. Soviet involvement in the Spanish civil war brought even more disturbing prospects. Baldwin warned Eden "that on no account, French or other, must he bring us in to fight on the side of the Russians."[1]

It was, however, essentially the 'eastern entanglement' which British foreign secretaries seemed to fear most. Halifax voiced the apprehension thus: "I am not oblivious to the anxiety of those who see indirect but grave danger to the West of Europe from possible complications in the East linked, as in the judgement of many observers East and West are, by the Franco-Soviet pact."[2] Nevertheless, the policy of the British government had been to strictly define her sphere of interests. With those aspects of the Locarno agreements of 1925 dealing with Poland and Czechoslovakia, the government had remained unassociated. On July 30, 1934 Baldwin declared the frontier of British defence lay on the Rhine.[3] Later, in his much quoted Leamington speech of November 30, 1936, Eden argued that "nations cannot be expected to incur automatic obligations save for areas where their vital interests are concerned."[4] Likewise Halifax, while admitting Britain was not disinterested in

1. Quoted in Thomas Jones, A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950 (London 1954), p. 231.
2. H.L. Deb., vol. 104, Mar. 3, 1937, cols. 497-498.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 292, July 30, 1934, col. 2339.
4. Anthony Eden, Foreign Affairs (London 1939), p. 167.

central or eastern Europe, was "unable to define beforehand what might be our attitude to a hypothetical complication" in these areas.[1] With remarkable astuteness, if perhaps questionable wisdom, British foreign policy managed to weather the crisis of 1938 without greater explicitness on their interests in eastern Europe. Only the events of March 1939 finally forced a change.

Besides the above objections, British reserve towards France's system of east European commitments had a more pragmatic basis. The implicit aims of Barthou's policy had been the defensive encirclement of Germany and the preservation of the status quo in eastern Europe. In contrast British policy, tentatively under MacDonald and Baldwin, and definitely under Chamberlain, was moving in favour of general agreement with Hitler's revisionist demands.[2] Appeasement was gaining over a policy of containment. Simon's proposal to concede equality of armaments to Hitler at the disarmament conference, the Anglo-German naval agreement of June 18, 1935, and the favourable reaction to Hitler's March 1936 offer to negotiate a European settlement, all followed quickly upon each other with a wide degree of British government support. Consequently, any Franco-Soviet attempt to police eastern Europe or refuse revision of the Versailles treaty,

1. H.L. Deb., vol. 104, Mar. 3, 1937, col. 498.
2. Gilbert, Roots of Appeasement, pp. 138-158.

elicited considerable opposition. As Eden pointed out, "opinion inside the cabinet, as well as outside it, would certainly not have favoured anything so like the encirclement of Germany".[1]

What made the situation even more disconcerting for Britain was Hitler's pronounced anti-bolshevism and his declaration that "Russia should simply not have been allowed to enter Europe."[2] Russian entry into the League of Nations, and the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet pacts initiated a violent German propaganda campaign.[3] Hitler considered these pacts as part of France's encirclement diplomacy and hence a direct threat to Germany. He denounced the seating of Russia at the League and expounded on the new dangers to European civilization. Communism, he declared, was a contagious infection and Germany the barrier to prevent its westward expansion. Joachim von Ribbentrop, appointed German ambassador to London in 1936, embarked on an aggressive personal campaign designed to convince British opinion of Hitler's role in western Europe's defence against bolshevism, "'the most terrible of diseases'".[4]

1. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 129.
2. Ribbentrop to Henderson, Mar. 4, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I (London 1949-) no. 138, Enclosure, p. 245.
3. See the description in Walter Laqueur, Russia and Germany (London 1965), pp. 168-195.
4. Quoted in H. Wickham Steed, "The Anti-Bolshevist Front", International Affairs, vol. XVI, no. 2, Mar.-Apr. 1937, p. 179. Cf. Jones, op.cit., pp. 185-186, 188, 241; and Evelyn Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times (London 1955), p. 362.

The nature of British government support for these ideas and their impact on policy making, as distinct from any sympathy possibly elicited in certain sections of British society, is difficult to estimate. As to the former, Simon readily acknowledged that France's treaty system "lent colour to Germany's suspicion of a policy of encirclement."[1] During a visit to Hitler on November 19, 1937, Halifax explained, in an attempt perhaps to reach Hitler on familiar ground, that he "was not blind to what he (Hitler) had done for Germany, and to the achievement from his point of view of keeping Communism out of his country."[2] Feiling took great care to point out that ideological considerations did not motivate Chamberlain's conduct or views of the USSR. "Not a trace can be found in his letters of an ideological motive; he was not made up like that, and any notion that he resisted war for fear of its potential social consequences, is entirely legend."[3] As to the latter, British visitors to Hitler's

1. Viscount Simon, Retrospect (London 1952), p. 242.
2. Halifax, Fulness of Days, p. 185.
3. Feiling, op.cit., p. 407. Cf. ibid., pp. 321-322, 403. Jones, op.cit., p. 209 alleges that Baldwin was "not indisposed" to attempt forming an Anglo-German bulwark against the spread of communism.

Germany did lend a ready ear to the propaganda campaign.[1] Robert Vansittart personally believed that the "Anti-Comintern stuff of Hitler and Co. had... had surprising success in Mayfair".[2] The "right wing of Conservatism", in the opinion of Duff Cooper, was not unaware of Hitler's possible role in protecting Europe from the 'red peril'.[3] And finally, the so-called 'Cliveden set', probably less than the extra-governmental cabinet alleged by Soviet historiography,[4] but more than the mere social meetings maintained by its participants,[5] was supposed to have been particularly receptive to German anti-bolshevik propaganda. The fact remains, however, that the popular front movement and Soviet involvement in the Spanish civil war gave Hitler's assertions a certain credibility and sense of immediacy.

It is clear that his views on bolshevism and France's east

1. Gilbert, Roots of Appeasement, pp. 198-204; Lord Londonderry, Ourselves and Germany (London 1939), pp. 87-91, 94-106; J.R.M. Butler, Lord Lothian (London 1960), pp. 335, 346. The foreign office minutes on Lothian's interview with Hitler exhibit an interesting division between officials agreeing with the policy of giving Germany a free hand in eastern Europe and those objecting to it. See the copy of these Minutes, in Lord Vansittart Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge).
2. Entry of Sept. 17, 1938, Dalton Diary.
3. Alfred Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget (London 1953), p. 266.
4. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 69, calls Cliveden the "main citadel of the enemies of the Soviet Union". See also, Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 331-332. The article by Claud Cockburn, "Britain's 'Cliveden Set'", Current History, vol. XLVIII, Feb. 1938, pp. 31-34, was immediately translated into Russian in Mirovoe Khozyaistvo i Mirovaya Politika, no. 3, Mar. 1938, pp. 85-91.
5. E.g., Jones, op.cit., pp. XXXIV-XL.

European diplomacy were considered as obstacles to be surmounted in any program to normalize Anglo-German relations. Furthermore, by making his attacks on Russia ideological, that is, by denouncing the Comintern rather than the USSR, Hitler hindered any possible western co-operation with Stalin for fear of international communism.[1]

The Czech-German crisis of 1938 became a test case of the above considerations. It was precisely the event many in Britain had feared they would be involved in because of Franco-Soviet policy. Ostensibly in 1938 Britain had few common interests with Czechoslovakia or in the question of the Sudeten-German minority. As late as September 27, 1938 Chamberlain could characterize the problem as a "quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing."[2] Yet in the peace settlement after world war one Britain had agreed to the incorporation of Sudeten-German territories into Czechoslovakia; a decision likely regretted later, until finally reversed. For almost fifteen years the problem was ignored. Politically the only point of common Czech-British interest was membership in the League of

1. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 227. Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Philby Affair", Encounter, vol. XXX, no. 4, Apr. 1968, pp. 3-26, discusses the alleged anti-communist bias of the British intelligence service.
2. Chamberlain, op.cit., p. 275.

Nations. The fact that Czechoslovakia was often described as a 'model democratic state' was of dubious value in assessing national interest.

The fact, however, that Czechoslovakia was the principal state of the little entente and since Versailles the corner-stone of the French system of alliances east of Germany, certainly did not increase Anglo-Czech cordiality. In an interview on March 3, 1938 with Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador, Hitler made it quite clear that he considered the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet pacts a threat to Germany.[1] The latter pact and the whole nature of Czechoslovakia's relations with the Soviet Union aroused no British enthusiasm. It seems to have been accepted by the Chamberlain government that in the cause of German appeasement the Czech treaties with France and Russia no longer made for security, but were rather an irritant to further pacification.

Goebbels' propaganda was very effective in choosing the topic most calculated to alienate British opinion from Czechoslovakia. Prague was described as the "organizing

1. Ribbentrop to Henderson, Mar. 4, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 138, pp. 244-245. See also, Henderson, Failure of a Mission, p. 115.

centre of Bolshevist plots against Europe."[1] Hitler accused the Czechs of allowing themselves to be used by bolshevism "to possess a canal leading into Central Europe."[2] It was also in 1938 that the anti-Comintern first used the label 'the aircraft carrier of Bolshevism in central Europe' to describe the potential Czech reliance on Soviet air power for resistance. These descriptions of the Czech situation must have struck a responsive note in government circles in London, for there exists nothing to suggest the accusations were questioned. Indeed, on May 27, 1938 Halifax asked the British embassy in Moscow to persuade Litvinov to influence, through Comintern channels, the Czech communists towards moderation.[3]

German epithets, however, in no way describe the actual relationship which existed between Prague and Moscow. Benes believed Hitler was attempting to isolate the USSR from western Europe in order to conclude a Russo-German agreement at a later date. If this policy were to succeed, Benes

1. Speech by Joseph Goebbels, Sept. 10, 1938, quoted in Monica Curtis, ed., Documents on International Affairs, /hereafter: D.I.A./, 1938, vol. II (London 1943), p. 191. For an eloquent contemporary refutation of the German charges, see the article in L'Epoque, Dec. 24, 1938, by General Eugène Faucher, the head of the French military mission in Prague, quoted in Hubert Ripka, Munich: Before and After (London 1939), pp. 296-297.
2. Norman H. Baynes, ed., The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939, vol. II (London 1942), /hereafter: Speeches of Adolf Hitler/, p. 1519.
3. Halifax to Vereker, May 27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 331, p. 390.

feared that all of central and eastern Europe would be threatened. To forestall this development, he argued that Czechoslovakia must take the initiative and bring about an agreement between Russia and the rest of Europe. With keen foresight he claimed Europe would have "neither balance nor real peace" without the Soviets.[1] Thus he played a leading role in efforts to seat Russia at the League of Nations, and encouraged further Soviet alliances with other European states. But actual Czech-Soviet co-operation either in the political or military sphere was minimal; the treaty relationships with Russia as the German ambassador, Ernst Eisenlohr, recognized "has not mellowed ... it has paled." German anti-communist propaganda, he continued, had resulted in a disinclination to effect too close co-operation with the USSR.[2] Furthermore, the information at the disposal of the German foreign ministry suggested that as a result of the purges the Czech general staff had lost confidence in the Red army.[3] The Czechs themselves, being well-

1. Eduard Benes, Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Benes, From Munich to New War and New Victory (London 1954), /hereafter: Benes; Memoirs/, p. 6. See also, ibid., pp. 6-7, 24-25, 34; and Carr to Hull, Mar. 2, 1938, Foreign Relations of the United States /hereafter: F.R.U.S./, Diplomatic Papers, 1938, vol. I (Washington, D.C. 1955), pp. 410-412. For further discussion of Benes' attitude towards the USSR, see below, pp. 109-112, 184-189.
2. Eisenlohr to German Foreign Ministry, Jan. 12, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 47, pp. 99-100.
3. Schliep to Schulenburg, Mar. 14, 1938, ibid., no. 82, Enclosure, p. 165.

informed on Soviet affairs, did not share this view.[1] The German campaign to prove the bolshevization of Czechoslovakia, however, did succeed in its primary aim of confusing foreign opinion.

Concurrent with this trend in German propaganda was another which received definite British support; namely, Hitler's campaign in favour of the Sudeten-German cause. Basing himself on a brilliant exploitation of Britain's respect for the principle of national self-determination and her desire to rectify the territorial anomalies of the Versailles treaty, Hitler soon had the Chamberlain government accept the reasonableness and, indeed, the justice of the Sudeten-German case. Simon agreed that Czechoslovakia was created "in defiance of the doctrine of self-determination and without regard to distinctions of nationality."[2] "It is morally unjust", Henderson wrote to Halifax, "to compel this solid Teuton minority to remain subjected to a Slav central Government at Prague."[3] The British government agreed, therefore, that Czechoslovakia constituted a forcible union of disparate nationalities with strong separatist tendencies. This being the case, strong arguments were put forward by the Chamberlain government and

1. Benes, Memoirs, p. 42; R.W. Seton-Watson, Munich and the Dictators (London 1939), p. 90.
2. Simon, op.cit., p. 239.
3. Letter from Henderson to Halifax, Apr. 17, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, appendix I, p. 623.

its advisers that a negotiated settlement based on self-determination was perfectly feasible. With the necessary frontier rectification a war "arising over an issue of boundaries"[1] could be avoided.

Inherent in this view of the dispute was a rejection of the views of the Czechs and the Soviets. These two allies considered that Hitler was not really concerned with the minorities' dispute but aimed at continental hegemony. In Litvinov's opinion Hitler was "as little interested in the Sudeten Germans as ... in the Tyrolese Germans; it is a matter of conquest of lands and of strategic and economic positions in Europe."[2] Unfortunately in 1938 Chamberlain and his government did not as yet share this view of Hitler's ambitions. The prime minister did not consider that the "great issues"[3] were at stake: ambitions for world domination and the use of force instead of negotiation. Rather it was hoped that the Sudeten problem could be used to illustrate Britain's goodwill in seeking peaceful solutions to German grievances. Czechoslovakia was dismissed, therefore, as a suitable pretext for going to war with Germany.

1. Simon, op.cit., p. 243.
2. Letter from Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 14, p. 40. See also, Ripka, op.cit., pp. 21-22, 36.
3. Chamberlain, op.cit., p. 276.

Britain's rejection of a forcible solution to the Sudeten question stems equally from reasons other than mere concurrence in the just application of the self-determination principle. It has already been shown why Chamberlain rejected a policy of collective security and its implied collaboration with the Soviet Union. These factors taken together vitiated any move to permit the Soviets a possible political role in a negotiated settlement. It is unlikely in any case that they would have agreed to participate in an imposed solution detrimental to their interests in eastern Europe. Nor would Hitler have agreed to allow their participation. The conclusion drawn by Chamberlain was that if Britain intended to genuinely appease Germany a political role for the USSR was impossible. The logic of his policy and attitudes demanded in effect the isolation of the USSR.

Furthermore, the picture of the military situation in the Soviet Union, as derived in the foreign office, confirmed the impossibility of any military involvement for the Soviets should events turn from pacification to resistance. The first and most obvious factor affecting any strategic consideration was geographical. The redrawing of boundaries after the first war left Russia isolated from central Europe by a cordon sanitaire running from Finland through the Baltic states, Poland and Rumania down to the Black Sea. Effective Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia depended either on an appeal to the League or on prior military

planning. The first alternative proposed by Litvinov on several occasions during 1938 was received with little enthusiasm. The second had similarly failed: Czech-Soviet or Franco-Soviet staff talks never materialized. Therefore assistance could only be rendered with Polish or Rumanian co-operation in allowing the passage of the Red army. The difficulties and complexities involved in securing Rumanian consent, the most likely avenue of support, were such as to leave both the British and the French convinced of its improbability.[1] Russia, Chamberlain pointed out, was "100 miles away"[2] from Czechoslovakia and hence dismissed as a viable ally.

However, the essential consideration was the actual British military assessment of the Soviet Union's capacity to fight an offensive war against the background of Stalin's purges. These purges of the years 1936 to 1938 had a profound effect on British (and European) evaluations of the Soviet armed forces. The opinion of almost all Chamberlain's cabinet colleagues, diplomats and many foreign office officials was that the purges had so weakened Soviet society, its economic viability, military structure, and political stability as to vitiate Russia's worth as a reliable ally. In 1936 foreign estimates of

1. See below, pp. 116-119, 166-169.
2. Feiling, op.cit., p. 348.

Soviet strength had been exceedingly favourable. Lord Ismay, who was responsible for British military intelligence on Russia from 1933 to 1936, explained that by 1938 it was generally assumed that the Red army had lost its former efficiency.[1] In November 1937 Eden was already describing Russia's "lost value" to France and Britain as a result of the recent "internal symptoms."[2] Both Chamberlain and Halifax repeatedly asserted that on the basis of information given them by the British and French general staffs, it was considered doubtful whether the Soviets were in a condition to fight. Halifax pointed out that the re-establishment of the Red army as an effective fighting force was considered to be a long task. The purges were believed to have completely destroyed efficiency, morale and effectiveness.[3] These views were confirmed by

1. Lord Ismay, The Memoirs of Lord Ismay (London 1960), p. 234.
2. B.H. Liddell Hart, The Memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart, vol. II. (London 1965), /hereafter: Liddell Hart, vol. II/, p. 137.
3. Feiling, op.cit., p. 325; Halifax, Fulness of Days, p. 206. See also the similar opinions of Thomas Inskip, minister for the co-ordination of defence, quoted in Jones, op.cit., p. 407; and Eric Phipps, British ambassador in Paris, in Hugh Dalton, Memoirs vol. II, The Fateful Years, 1931-1945 (London 1957), /hereafter: Dalton, vol. II/, p. 190; Entry of Sept. 23, 1939, Dalton Diary. This aspect is also stressed by F.T.A. Ashton-Gwatkin, counsellor in the foreign office at the time, in his contribution on the USSR, in R.G.D. Laffan, et.al., Survey of International Affairs /hereafter: S.I.A./, 1938, vol. III (London 1953), pp. 391-415. For recent estimates of the effects of these purges, see John Erickson, The Soviet High Command (London 1962), pp. 504-509; Robert Conquest, The Great Terror (London 1968), pp. 201-235, 459-463, 484-492.

information and estimates forwarded from the British embassy in Moscow,[1] and was the considered opinion commonly held among foreign military and diplomatic observers in Moscow.[2]

When confronted with the reaction of other European countries to Soviet internal events Litvinov merely observed that Stalin was "thereby preserving the Soviet Union strong as a bulwark against the Nazi threat."[3] Maisky, in conversation with Dalton, refused to contemplate the possibility that the purges may have seriously weakened the Red army.[4]

The problem open to speculation, of course, is whether in fact these pessimistic evaluations of the Soviet forces were merely repeated to buttress already existing political considerations. As Laurence Collier, head of the foreign office northern department, observed: "... Chamberlain and

1. See below, pp. 105-108, 123.
2. Henderson to Hull, Feb. 18, 1938, F.R.U.S., The Soviet Union, 1933-1939 (Washington, D.C. 1952), /hereafter: F.R.U.S., Soviet Union/, p. 519. While acknowledging the pervasiveness of this view in Moscow, the U.S. ambassador considered it "much exaggerated." Joseph E. Davies, Mission to Moscow (London 1942), p. 263.
3. Ibid., p. 115. A lesser known aspect of the purges is the decimation of the Soviet diplomatic corps. By March 1938 with the exception of Maisky, Boris Stein in Rome and Jacob Suritz in Paris, all Litvinov's appointees as heads of Soviet foreign missions had been replaced. Louis Fischer, Men and Politics (London 1941), pp. 468-469; Conquest, op.cit., pp. 454-457. Litvinov's dismissal in May 1939 was followed by a thorough purge of the narkomindel. Grummon to Hull, July 6, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 770-773.
4. Entry of June 24, 1937, Dalton Diary. See also, Entry of Nov. 4, 1937, ibid.

his friends did not want to consider the possibility of Russian military aid at all."[1] William Seeds, who in 1939 replaced Chilston, agrees that "... few Britons - lay or politicians - have much respect for military opinions", and assumes Chamberlain's Soviet policy was essentially political.[2] Consequently, even glowing military reports on Russia's forces need not have altered political decisions which had already been taken. Strang admitted later, in his typically fair-minded manner, that the British and French general staffs under-estimated the military strength of the Soviet Union, and this had a profound effect on policy.[3] It certainly destroyed any British confidence in Russia's value as a fighting ally.

Besides suspicion of the Soviet Union on the purely military level, in the British view the USSR was, even more important, unreliable politically. This distrust of the Soviets was based on a variety of factors. Hoare stated the historical case thus:

> For more than twenty years, successive British Governments had suffered from Russian plots and intrigues. British party politics had been constantly poisoned by Russian propaganda. Russian secret agents were continuously exploiting any chance of stirring up trouble. Russian money was finding its way into the pockets of British agitators. The Zinoviev Letter

1. Letter from Sir Laurence Collier to Gilbert, Feb. 12, 1968, Gilbert Archives.
2. Letter from Sir William Seeds to Gilbert, Feb. 12, 1968, ibid. For the full text of these two letters, see appendix.
3. Lord Strang, Home and Abroad (London 1956), p. 167.

> that created so resounding a sensation in 1924 was not an isolated instance of Russian interference in our affairs. The attempts to incite mutinies in the fighting services and strikes in the ranks of labour went on unabated during the whole period between the two wars, and the Russian Embassy in London never ceased to be a centre of espionage and agitation.[1]

Two further aspects must also be added to this catalogue. Aside from alleged interference in British domestic affairs, the Soviets were also blamed for the activities of the Comintern in disturbing the peace of the British empire; stirring up nationalism and fomenting revolutionary discontents. Eden alleged it was impossible "to work in confidence with a power which pursued such methods."[2] Secondly, the role of the Soviet Union in the Spanish civil war engendered further British distrust. Russia's open violation of the Non-Intervention agreement of August 1936 reached the point where Eden admitted that

1. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 350. The subject of Maisky's contacts with British political, social and academic circles is one of the most interesting aspects of his career. Upon taking up his appointment to London, Litvinov had instructed him to "break through the icy wall which separates our London Embassy from the Conservatives". Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 17. In spite of wide-ranging contacts, Maisky never succeeded in tapping inner government circles. His activities were variously described as 'mischievous', 'disruptive', 'malicious' and 'fishing in troubled waters'. His stretching of the bounds of the diplomatically permissible, seemed most to alienate him from those contacts he so ardently desired to cultivate. See Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 302; Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London 1961), p. 225. Llewellyn Woodward, British Foreign Policy in the Second World War (London 1962), p. XXV, fn. 2.
2. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 520.

the evidence against the Soviets was more specific than Soviet charges of German and Italian shipments of supplies.[1] That Chamberlain chafed under Russian activity in Spain and that the civil war "accentuated" his distrust of Soviet motives. is clear.[2] What further exacerbated Anglo-Soviet differences over Spain was the disruptive role adopted by Maisky in the proceedings of the Non-Intervention committee. He himself acknowledges his "attacking tactics" were aimed at "tearing apart the diplomatic cobweb of hypocritical 'non-intervention' ... being spun by the capitalist powers". Maisky, too, candidly admits he leaked circumstantial reports of the proceedings to the press.[3] As a result of these activities, Eden claimed that Maisky's "attitude blocked all progress".[4] The British, trying to localize the war, protect their Mediterranean communications, prevent a worsening of Anglo-German relations, and work towards an agreement with Italy, could only see the kremlin's diplomacy and Maisky's tactics as dangerous irritants designed to disguise Soviet military intervention. More important

1. Ibid., p. 411. British intelligence on the supply of arms to both sides was, according to Vansittart, "very good." Entry of June 24, 1937, Dalton Diary.
2. Feiling, op.cit., p. 325.
3. Maisky, Spanish Notebooks, pp. 22, 35. See also, David T. Cattell, Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War (Berkeley 1957), passim.
4. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 439.

was the discredit in British eyes which these activities cast upon Soviet membership in the League and upon Litvinov's periodic pronouncements on the indivisibility of peace. While aware that the "prejudices of the past" need not have influenced policy, Hoare claimed that this record of Russian "duplicity and hostility" had much influence.[1]

Furthermore, the British cabinet shared a widely held view that the real attempt of Soviet diplomacy was to trick Britain and Germany into a military confrontation in western Europe. Out of such a conflict the only victor would be international communism.[2] Chamberlain was convinced in March 1938 that the "Russians (were) stealthily and cunningly pulling all the strings behind the scenes to get us involved in war with Germany (our Secret Service doesn't spend all its time looking out of the window)...."[3] Henderson was equally outspoken: "Moscow's chief aim was to embroil Germany and the Western Powers in a common ruin and to emerge as the tertius gaudens of the conflict between them." To drive Germany back towards the west was in his estimation the "supreme aim" of Stalin's foreign

1. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 350.
2. For a comprehensive catalogue of quotations showing the pervasiveness of this view among European governments and diplomats, see Rothstein, op.cit., pp. 256-258.
3. Feiling, op.cit., p. 347. The reference to the secret service is intriguing, but unfortunately unfathomable.

policy.[1]

In the British view, therefore, the Soviet Union as a potential ally was considered ineffective, unreliable and possibly treacherous. It is against this background of "disbelief in Russian military strength and suspicion of Russian political motives"[2] that the period from March 1938 to August 1939 must be approached. For it is the above considerations - political, diplomatic and military - which explain the actual course of Britain's relations with Soviet Russia. The fact that Stalin probably held similar views on British intentions and capabilities could only have a totally deleterious effect on any prospect of Anglo-Soviet co-operation.

1. Henderson, Failure of a Mission, pp. 251, 259. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 350, likewise mentioned Stalin's "set purpose of exploiting for his own ends the differences between Germany and the West." See also, his "The Lesson of Munich", The Listener, vol. XL, no. 1037, Dec. 9, 1948, [hereafter: Templewood, "Lesson of Munich"], p. 879; and Letter from Templewood to Cadogan, July 6, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12.
2. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 342.

CHAPTER TWO

BRITAIN, THE USSR AND THE CZECHOSLOVAK CRISIS, PART ONE

The union of Germany and Austria declared on March 13, 1938 clearly designated Czechoslovakia as the next probable victim of German pressure. It would appear that the Soviet Union did feel threatened diplomatically and strategically by the implications of this first step in Germany's Drang nach Osten.[1] Unlike any previous German move which concerned them only indirectly, for example, rearmament, the reoccupation of the Rhineland, or the Anschluss itself, a German threat to Czechoslovakia could activate the Soviet-Czech pact of May 1935. The elimination of Czechoslovakia, a central link in Russia's foreign alliance system, could serve in the Soviet view as a step towards their isolation. Furthermore, the Anschluss gave Hitler "une place d'arme stratégique" to threaten Czechoslovakia and for an offensive sweep into south-east Europe.[2] The Soviet press condemned the seizure of Austria. On March 14 Izvestia described the background to the Anschluss and blamed Chamberlain's appeasement diplomacy. The article emphasized that

1. This is emphasized in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 344-345, 352; and "Great Patriotic War", part II, p. 104.
2. V. Potiemkine, ed., Histoire de la Diplomatie, vol. III, 1919-1939 (Paris 1947), [hereafter: Potiemkine, vol. III], p. 633.

Hitler's action presented a "direct threat for a number of European governments".[1] Official Soviet reaction to Hitler's latest move was almost immediate and was the occasion for the narkomindel to once again publicize its theories on how best to counter German aggression.

Litvinov expounded his views on these developments in conversation with foreign ambassadors. As early as March 3 he told Davies that Chamberlain "would be required to make good before his public by effecting some sort of arrangement" with the dictators.[2] In a subsequent interview Litvinov categorically stated that "responsibility for Austria rested on the Chamberlain Government as a result of the Halifax and similar conversations indicating English acquiescence...." Czechoslovakia, he asserted, was temporarily secure with probable French support and with England "compelled to come in and support France."[3] On March 15, in a conversation with Chilston, the foreign commissar predicted that Czechoslovakia would be the next object of Germany's attention. In the event of a military attack France was under a direct obligation to render

1. Quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 347.
2. Davies to Hull, Mar. 4, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, p. 531.
3. Davies to Hull, Mar. 14, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 446. The reference to Halifax is to his talks with Hitler in November 1937. See below, p. 69.

assistance to Czechoslovakia. "As to the Soviet pact with the latter", Litvinov continued, "it was dependent upon that of France."[1] This observation that Soviet aid was dependent upon France's prior implementation of her Czech treaty, (a condition of the Soviet-Czech pact of May 16, 1935, inserted on Prague's insistence), was repeatedly emphasized. To the Czech minister in Moscow, Zdenek Fierlinger, Potemkin voiced his suspicions of Chamberlain's position on the Czechoslovak question, and reiterated the assurance that the Soviet Union intended to fulfil all treaty obligations. He also stated that Britain would be forced to follow France's lead, if the latter responded effectively to German aggression.[2]

Remarks to the foreign press in Moscow were also used by Litvinov to clarify the Soviet position. In an interview with journalists at a diplomatic reception on March 15, he stated the USSR would intervene in defence of Czechoslovakia if France did. When pressed to indicate how this would be arranged in the absence of a common frontier, he appears to have replied: "'means would be found'." As to the suggestion that this might involve "'creation of a

1. Chilston to Halifax, Mar. 15, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 85, p. 54. Davies, op.cit., p. 191, claimed Chilston was on March 14 "very seriously upset; and openly and vigorously condemned German aggression."
2. Record of a Conversation, Mar. 15, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 2, pp. 19-20. Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 16, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 87, p. 170, reported an assurance of readiness to act, given by Suritz to the French foreign ministry.

Corridor'", it seems Litvinov assented.[1]

The official Soviet response to the Anschluss was elaborated on March 17 during an interview given by Litvinov to press representatives in Moscow. The foreign commissar prefaced his remarks with references to Soviet efforts for collective security and readiness to continue organizing resistance to aggression. While previous hostilities were either remote from Europe or limited in effect, the Anschluss "perpetrated in the centre of Europe" was a menace "not only to the eleven countries now adjacent to the aggressor, but to all European countries...." Aware of a possible threat even to Russia,[2] Litvinov hinted that these developments created "a prerequisite for pressure and even for attack also upon big Powers." The Soviet Union was therefore

> prepared to participate in collective actions which would be decided upon jointly with it, and which would aim at checking the further development of aggression and at eliminating the increased danger of a new world massacre. The Soviet Government is prepared to commence immediately with

1. Chilston to Halifax, Mar. 17, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 92, p. 65. Accounts of this meeting differ and are sometimes confused with Litvinov's replies to journalists' questions on March 17, especially on practical possibilities of Soviet aid. Cf. Fierlinger to Krofta, Mar. 16, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 3, p. 21; Davies, op.cit., p. 191; E.H. Carr, "From Munich to Moscow", Soviet Studies, vol. I, no. 1, June 1949, p. 6. The article is concluded, ibid., no. 2, Oct. 1949, pp. 93-105, /hereafter: Carr, parts I-II/.
2. In a letter on Mar. 17, 1938, Davies, op.cit., p. 188, described Russia as "extremely war conscious", like the rest of Europe.

> other States in the League of Nations or outside of it the discussion of practical measures called for by the present circumstances.[1]

Afterwards, Litvinov made two additional points in response to questions from the press. He reiterated the Soviet Union's pledge to stand by her treaty with Czechoslovakia if France did likewise. The question then, too, arose of the practical possibilities of this aid. Again reports were contradictory, but the impression he gave was that transit difficulties could be solved.[2] The German chargé d'affaires in Moscow, Werner von Tippelskirch, claimed Litvinov was evasive when asked whether the Soviet government considered independent action.[3] However, Davies noted the "implication generally accepted" was that Moscow was warning Poland and Rumania that she would violate territorial boundaries if necessary in order to aid Czechoslovakia.[4] The difficulty over passage for Soviet assistance was to reappear frequently in the following months.

On instructions from Moscow, Maisky handed the text of Litvinov's statement to Alexander Cadogan, permanent

1. A report was published in Izvestia, Mar. 18, 1938. Text in Maisky to Halifax, Mar. 17, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 90, Enclosure, pp. 62-64.
2. Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, vol. II, 1936-1941 (London 1949), /hereafter: Beloff, vol. II/, pp. 122-123.
3. Tippelskirch to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 17, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 92, p. 177.
4. Davies, op.cit., p. 191.

under-secretary of state for foreign affairs. The accompanying note stated that it represented the official view of the Soviet government. The same procedure was carried out by the Soviet ambassadors in Paris, Washington and Prague. With this move, Maisky has argued, the USSR "publicly proclaimed its readiness to take energetic measures against aggression".[1] It has since been further asserted that "Only the Soviet Union came out in defence of the independence of Austria. It was the only great power not to recognize the seizure of Austria...."[2]

Several events, however, may have vitiated the effect of the Soviet response. On March 2, 1938 another purge trial of prominent Russian officials opened in Moscow. Their sentencing on March 13 once more brought the Soviet Union's capacity for effective action into question at a moment of European crisis.[3] At the same time the USSR was simultaneously faced with a challenge from the Poles. A Polish-Lithuanian border incident led to a Polish ultimatum being presented to Lithuania on March 17,

1. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 75.
2. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 349.
3. Cf. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, May 16, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 623, p. 918. For an interesting description of this trial by the third secretary of the British embassy, see Fitzroy Maclean, Eastern Approaches (London 1949), pp. 81-121.

demanding the immediate re-establishment of diplomatic relations broken in 1920. Soviet reaction to this move, including a diplomatic note of protest to Warsaw, was often cited by Soviet diplomats (and later by historians) as proof of Moscow's stiff methods of dealing with threats of aggression.[1] Nevertheless, the fact that in March the Soviets might have been compelled to go to war with Poland, according to one observer the "general conviction" in Moscow,[2] could only have cast doubt on prospective Soviet involvement, further afield in Europe.

There were also minor difficulties bedevilling Anglo-Soviet relations at this point. On January 11, 1938 Chilston was informed of the intention of the Soviet government to invoke the principle of consular parity, thereby requiring the closure of the British consulate-general in Leningrad. The result of this action was to open up a visa war in March between the two countries, forcing private citizens to obtain visas in neutral capitals.[3] Furthermore, in his capacity as acting dean of the Moscow diplomatic corps, Chilston spearheaded a

1. Potiemkine, vol. III, pp. 643-644. For an exposition interpreting Soviet action as a typical example of appeasement, see Bohdan B. Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations, 1932-1939 (New York 1963), pp. 109-114.
2. Davies, op.cit., p. 191.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 332, Feb. 21, 1938, cols. 16-17; Coates, vol. I, pp. 583-584; Georges Bilainkin, Maisky, Ten Years Ambassador (London 1944), p. 202.

move to present a démarche to the narkomindel, protesting at certain inconveniences being imposed on foreign diplomats. The démarche, on which the Soviets had full private information, was never presented.[1] Finally, additional problems were facing Britain as a result of the declaration by Molotov in January 1938 that the USSR intended to create a new powerful war-fleet. Although an Anglo-Soviet naval agreement had been signed in July 1937, the policy of naval expansion embarked upon by the USSR presented considerable difficulties to the British government.[2]

Both the timing and character of Litvinov's March 17 proposals are also of some significance. It has been suggested that during the period 1935 to early 1938, contrary to usual interpretation and to official Soviet foreign policy declarations, the USSR was actively considering either a re-opening of the Rapallo policy of collaboration with Germany, or a possible retreat into isolation. Those who maintain this view point to various signs which could confirm the picture of the Soviet espousal of collective security as being only one of several responses Stalin was manipulating to meet the Nazi

1. Davies to Hull, Mar. 28, Apr. 30, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 644-645, 655-656; Davies, op.cit., pp. 208-210, 397-403.
2. See details in Erickson, op.cit., pp. 474-477; Davies, op.cit., p. 81; and the documents on negotiations for a voluntary limitation of capital ships, in D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, appendix VI, pp. 628-637.

threat.[1] The British foreign office apparently had in late 1935 and early 1936 "abundant evidence" indicating that in German-Soviet military and commercial circles there was a strong desire for mutual co-operation. If Hitler "were to beckon to the Russian Government," Vansittart noted, "there is a strong possibility that they might step forward".[2] As late as February 18, 1938, the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Moscow, Loy W. Henderson, pointed to an "impressive array of evidence" to substantiate the opinion that the Soviets might be moving from a policy of collective security and League of Nations collaboration.[3] The sudden public reassertion by Litvinov on March 17 of a position urging anti-German action thus assumes critical

1. G. Hilger and A.C. Meyer, The Incompatible Allies, A Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations, 1918-1941 (New York 1953), pp. 269-270; Davies, op.cit., pp. 58, 62-63, 64, 68, 79, citing a variety of supporting opinions of foreign diplomats in Moscow; and ibid., p. 163, for a warning from Litvinov in 1937; W.G. Krivitsky, I was Stalin's Agent (London 1939), pp. 37-39; Robert Coulondre, De Stalin à Hitler: Souvenirs de Deux Ambassades, 1936-1939 (Paris 1950), pp. 42, 45, 125; and the additional documentary evidence on German-Soviet contacts in Lionel Kochan, "Russia and Germany, 1935-1937: A Note", Slavonic and East European Review, vol. XL, no. 95, June 1962, pp. 518-520; Erickson, op.cit., pp. 432, 453, 458; and Vladimir Petrov, "June 22, 1941", Soviet Historians and the German Invasion (Columbia, S.C. 1968), pp. 310-311. See also, the discussion in Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, ed., Les Relations Germano-Soviétiques de 1933 à 1939 (Paris 1954), pp. 43-101; and Adam B. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence (New York 1968), pp. 226-227.
2. Minute by Vansittart, Jan. 17, 1936; Memorandum by Vansittart, Jan. 22, 1936, Vansittart Papers. In a Minute on Feb. 13, 1935, Vansittart observed: "We must help Litvinov to the utmost of our power." Ibid.
3. Henderson to Hull, Feb. 18, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 514-518.

importance. It indicated the re-emergence of the Litvinov view of European affairs. As Tippelskirch observed, the "Statement demonstrates intention of Soviet Government to take hand in European politics once more."[1]

The crucial ideological characteristic of Litvinov's position had been his division of European states into fascist and democratic. Collaboration with the latter was permissible in order to fight fascist aggression. The alternative view, associated with Molotov's public utterances, described all western countries as imperialist and capitalist: not distinguishing between the two camps.[2] Of further importance was Litvinov's suggestion on March 17, 1938 that action against aggression would be approved by the USSR, even if constituted outside the League. Therefore, the almost indifferent reaction his proposals were to receive could only have had a deleterious effect. The chances of ensuring possible future co-operation with the USSR lessened considerably. Davies, reflecting on his interviews during March with Litvinov, observed that the kremlin was "rapidly being driven into a complete

1. Tippelskirch to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 17, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 92, p. 176.
2. Cf. the League of Nations speech by Litvinov on March 17, 1936, and the interview given by Molotov, March 19, 1936, quoted in Jane Degras, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, vol. III, 1933-1941 (London 1953), /hereafter: Degras, vol. III/, pp. 173-174, 184. See also, the Open Letter by Stalin, Izvestia, Feb. 12, 1938, quoted ibid., pp. 273-275; Ivan Maisky, Progress Within the USSR and the Present International Situation (London 1937), p. 11.

isolation" where a future accommodation with Germany was "quite within the range of possibilities."[1]

The character of the March 17 proposals is itself important. That the Soviet government had a decided penchant for conference diplomacy or other form of great power consultation seems clear. Litvinov believed that the discussion of problems and adoption of resolutions at the international level were an inevitable first step. The very fact that a meeting was held represented a "definite action with a certain moral value."[2] Thus he approved the summoning of the conferences of Montreux (June-July 1936) and Nyon (September 1937), because from the Soviet view they embodied the basic ideas of support for collective security and the League covenant. He had therefore concluded that useful international collaboration to strengthen security could only be achieved using similar techniques.[3] Hence the March 17 call for a concerted response to the Anschluss. Hence, too, the demands on several subsequent occasions during 1938 and 1939 for a conference or other form of great power consultation to resist aggression.

The Soviet proposals of March 17 represent, as well,

1. Davies, op.cit., p. 194.
2. Quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 263.
3. Ibid., pp. 255, 257.

Russia's desire to participate as an equal power in European diplomacy. Their long period of isolation having ended in 1934, the Soviets were quick to seize any initiative to bring their influence to bear on events; a status either a conference or an alliance could readily confer. Indeed, this quest for diplomatic equality became one of the major stumbling blocks, from the Soviet point of view, which hindered agreement with Britain in the spring of 1939.

Inherent in this attitude and approach is the traditional Soviet fear of seeing the problems of Europe settled without them and possibly at their expense. For example, throughout 1937 the Soviet press accused Britain, France, Germany and Italy of trying to conclude a four power pact;[1] a move feared since 1933. From London Maisky continually warned the kremlin of this possibility, especially after his first interview on July 29, 1937 with Chamberlain as prime minister.[2] The supposedly anti-Soviet nature of Chamberlain's foreign policy was further confirmed for Maisky after various conversations he had with such sources as Vernon Bartlett, the journalist, Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., Lloyd George and Vansittart.[3] Upon the latter two

1. See the evidence in Duroselle, op.cit., pp. 48-60.
2. See above, p. 29.
3. Records of Conversations from the Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 333, 336-337, 339-340.

Maisky relied very heavily for his information. Furthermore, important changes in the British foreign office appear also to have confirmed the ambassador's reports and caused anxiety in Moscow. Vansittart's promotion from permanent under-secretary of state for foreign affairs to chief diplomatic adviser on January 1, 1938, and Eden's replacement by Halifax as foreign secretary in February were interpreted by Maisky as further evidence of Chamberlain's determination to press ahead with his programme of German appeasement and isolating the USSR. Both Eden and Vansittart, although not considered Russophil, were thought to understand the "vital necessity for Britain to conclude an alliance with the USSR".[1] On the other hand, Halifax had had talks with Hitler in November 1937, and Maisky's information was that the mission had been inspired at Cliveden, with the aim of concluding an Anglo-German alliance. It was furthermore intended to hint at British acquiescence in an eventual Anschluss.[2] Against this

1. Ibid., p. 340. Cf. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 70-71. As a result of Eden's visit to Moscow in 1935, considered there as a total success, he was regarded as something of a favourite in the kremlin. After speaking to Maisky, Harold Nicolson noted the ambassador "minds very much the resignation of Eden who was working up to a London-Paris-Moscow triangle." Entry of Mar. 7, 1938, Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives (Oxford).
2. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 73; Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 336-338. In light of later Soviet historiography it seems clear the kremlin was also anxious about President Roosevelt's, January 1938 proposal for a conference - "un plan d'entente antisoviétique" - G. Deborine, La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale (Moscow 1963), p. 21; and Hitler's February 1938 purge of his generals, known to favour closer collaboration with the USSR. Potiemkine, vol. III, p.631.

background of developments Litvinov made his March 17 proposals.

Reaction to the Soviet move was distinctly cool. The French government, allied to both Czechoslovakia and Russia, held the key to the situation. Unfortunately, two changes of government within a month made some weakness in French policy inevitable. Faced with the prospect of possibly having to fulfil treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, certain elements of French political opinion lost their enthusiasm.[1] The lack of faith in collective security on the part of France's east European allies, the preponderence of German power in central Europe, and French military weakness[2] argued in favour of joint action with Britain to bring about a peaceful settlement. The overt French response to the threat to Czechoslovakia was to confidently reaffirm her treaty commitments both in public statements and in a series of interviews between French officials and foreign

1. See the descriptions in Osusky to Krofta, Mar. 4, 1938, Documents and Materials, vol. I, pp. 69-80; Bräuer to German Foreign Ministry, Apr. 14, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 736, pp. 1070-1073; Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, Apr. 8, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 120, pp. 220-223; and Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 51, fn. 2.
2. Cf. Biddle to Hull, Jan. 8, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, pp. 3-5.

ambassadors.[1]

The Anschluss, however, inevitably cast doubt on the practical ability of France to come to Czechoslovakia's help. The crucial examination of France's limited military means was debated on March 15, during a meeting of the comité permanent de la défense nationale. Joseph Paul-Boncour, foreign minister in the Léon Blum government constituted two days earlier, asserted that his object in calling the meeting was "l'exécution de notre traité et l'assistance à la Tchécoslovaquie".[2] The meeting, attended by Blum, Gamelin, Daladier and Paul-Boncour among others, was immediately told by Daladier, the defence minister, that France could not initially render any direct aid to Czechoslovakia. Blum declared that Russia would intervene, but Gamelin doubted whether she could offer effective aid. Soviet mobilization might in itself cause Poland and Rumania to act precipitously, and transit via Rumania would be difficult. General Vuillemin added that even Soviet air aid was problematical in view of the paucity of adequate landing fields in Czechoslovakia and the difficulty of over-flying Poland and Rumania. Summing

1. See J. Paul-Boncour, Entre Deux Guerres, vol. III, Sur les Chemins de la Défaite, 1935-1940 (Paris 1946), /hereafter: Paul-Boncour, vol. III/, pp. 83, 93-94; Phipps to Halifax, Mar. 15, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 84, pp. 53-54. Weizsäcker attributed this publicity to fears in Paris and London of Germany taking France's former role as Soviet ally. Weizsäcker to Several Missions Abroad, Feb. 28, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 64, pp. 150-151.
2. Paul-Boncour, vol. III, p. 87. The minutes of the meeting are reproduced in Gamelin, vol. II, pp. 332-328.

up, Blum stated that everything was conditional on the attitude of Rumania. Having examined the practical problems involved, the meeting concluded that France could not prevent an attack on Czechoslovakia, but only help indirectly.[1]

Three days later Suritz handed in the official text of Litvinov's proposals. While no doubt Blum and Paul-Boncour would have been sympathetic on general grounds, the conclusions of the above meeting and the pressure of events to define a practical policy towards Czechoslovakia tended to erode a firm French response.[2]

The British were somewhat caught off balance by Litvinov's proposals. Foreign policy was still in a period of definition and elaboration. Collective security and the League of Nations were declared of little value during the February 22, house of commons debate,[3] while efforts to negotiate a settlement with Italy were still continuing. In these circumstances Britain was being

1. Borisov, op.cit., p. 374, describes the results of this meeting thus: "French government officials decided in fact to abandon their ally to the mercy of fate, and to renounce collaboration with the Soviet government, thereby annulling the 1935 pact."
2. Paul Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight (London 1955), p. 181, claims that Litvinov's proposals "passed unperceived by the French Foreign Office. Léon Blum ... stated that the Soviet proposal had not been brought to his knowledge nor to that of Paul-Boncour...." The latter does not mention it in his memoirs. German Embassy in France to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 19, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 398, p. 611, asserts the Blum government agreed in principle.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 332, Feb. 22, 1938, cols. 226-228.

unwillingly challenged to action in central Europe.

The German seizure of Austria helped to hasten a clarification of the situation and Britain's attitude towards Czechoslovakia. On March 12 in an interview with the French ambassador, Charles Corbin, Halifax insisted that while aware of the "deterrent value ... of a publicly declared intention of action in advance" London could not undertake such prior commitments. He then asked how the French proposed to help Czechoslovakia. It was agreed to leave a solution to this problem to some future Anglo-French discussion.[1] In Paris Paul-Boncour similarly pressed Phipps to urge the British government to state openly that, if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia and France helped, Britain would stand by France.[2]

Pressure from the French was not the only source urging a definition of British policy. Nevile Henderson and Basil Newton, from Berlin and Prague respectively, were forwarding reports stressing the dangers of the central European situation. On March 15, Newton predicted that Czechoslovakia would be the next likely focus of German attention. He urged that London either declare it was ready to support Czechoslovakia by force, or else intervene with France to persuade Czechoslovakia to

1. Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 12, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 62, p. 35.
2. Phipps to Halifax, Mar. 15, 1938, ibid., no. 81, p. 50.

readjust her relations with Germany.[1] Henderson cabled his complete agreement. He emphasized repeatedly that the "broadest moral grounds" justified the right of the Sudetensto self-determination. "The situation", he argued, "afforded the Western Powers an opportunity to prove that they would not oppose peaceful evolution, any more than they would condone forcible expansion."[2]

Chamberlain's thinking, however, was developing along quite different lines. Discussing international events on March 14 in the Commons, he maintained that the object of British policy was "to assist in the establishment of a sense of greater security and confidence in Europe" which "must inevitably be helped or hindered by events in Central Europe." Germany's action could only have a damaging influence on general confidence. However, nothing could have stopped the Anschluss unless Britain and her allies "had been prepared to use force to prevent it."[3] And that Britain was in no position to attempt.

1. Newton to Halifax, Mar. 15, 1938, ibid., no. 86, pp. 55-56.
2. Ibid., p. 56, fn. 2; Henderson, Failure of a Mission, pp. 130-132.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 333, Mar. 14, 1938, cols. 45-52. This public warning about central Europe reiterated similar comments Halifax had made to Ribbentrop on March 10. Halifax to Henderson, Mar. 10, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 8, p. 5. When recapitulating this and other interviews in a memorandum for Hitler, Ribbentrop curiously noted: "It looks as if Chamberlain and Halifax want to try to reach a peaceful understanding among the Four Great Powers of Europe without the Soviet Union." Ribbentrop to Hitler, Mar. 10, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 146, p. 262.

Twice during his speech the prime minister refuted rumours "put about in many quarters" that Britain had given Germany either assent or encouragement to absorb Austria.[1] This assertion, coupled with his public declaration of British interest in central Europe, seems to have masked some cabinet disagreement on the subject. Leslie Hore-Belisha, secretary of state for war, commented after the cabinet meeting on the 14th that some members had been "remarking what a poor lot of allies we would have if it came to an open fight."[2] He asked B.H. Liddell Hart for notes on the military situation relating to Czechoslovakia, because he "wanted to meet the argument of some in the Cabinet that we could safely let Germany have her own way in Central Europe."[3] In the Commons, however, Chamberlain was no more explicit on Britain's attitude to Czechoslovakia, except to reiterate with obvious approval the assurance given to the Czechs[4]

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 333, Mar. 14, 1938, cols. 50, 51. Among those being referred to must have been Maisky. The ambassador had little faith in the assurance Halifax gave him on March 1, 1938, that "'Britain considers herself involved in this part of Europe but cannot make any advance commitments. Everything will depend on circumstances.'" Diary Entry of Mar. 1, 1939, Maisky, "Munich Drama", part II, p. 24.
2. Diary Entry of Mar. 14, 1938, Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 106.
3. Ibid.
4. See Halifax to Henderson, Mar. 13, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 71, pp. 40-41; Eisenlohr to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 13, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 74, Enclosure, pp. 158-159.

that Germany considered herself bound by the German-Czechoslovak arbitration convention of October 1925.

The debate that followed the prime minister's remarks was especially notable. Churchill delivered his speech calling for a "grand alliance". He urged the affirmation of British adherence to the League convenant as the "moral basis" for its foreign policy and called for a renewed effort at collective security; understood in the sense of a "practical and realistic" union of several powers "assembled around Great Britain and France for mutual defence against aggression". With this statement Churchill gave a positive form to the various, and sometimes, vague schemes of collective security and League of Nations policy urged by many in the Labour and Liberal parties. Where some M.P.s were more specific than Churchill was their overt suggestion during the debate that the Soviet Union must not be excluded. R.A. Butler, parliamentary under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, replied for the government, specifically on the problem of "making collective security a reality." He repeated the government's support for the League ideal in principle, but unfortunately made no specific reference to Churchill's proposals.[1] Butler's speech clearly

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 333, Mar. 14, 1938, cols. 98-100; Churchill, vol. I, p. 247, comments on his speech that the "certainty that the crossing of the Bohemian frontier line would have involved a general European war might well even at that date have deterred or delayed Hitler's next assault."

exhibited the gulf of interpretation separating government and opposition views on the definition of collective security.

The proximity of Churchill's parliamentary speech on March 14 to Litvinov's proposal three days later forced the British government to make a careful assessment of these suggestions and also of the policy still to be pursued towards Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain noted that the Churchill scheme had occurred to him previously:

> I talked about it to Halifax, and we submitted it to the chiefs of the Staff and the F.O. experts. It is a very attractive idea; indeed, there is almost everything to be said for it until you come to examine its practicability. From that moment its attraction vanishes.[1]

The foreign office rejection was based, however, on the consideration that there was "no time for the long negotiations" necessary to conclude a grand alliance.[2] The reply of the chiefs of staff on March 21 was categorical. They stated that Britain was absolutely unprepared for war, that

> no military pressure that we can exert by sea or land or in the air can prevent Germany from invading and over-running Bohemia or inflicting a decisive defeat on the Czechoslovak Army.... In short we can do nothing to prevent the dog

1. Diary Entry of Mar. 20, 1938, quoted in Feiling, op.cit., p. 347.
2. Notes by Hoare on 1937-1939, Foreign Policy Committee, Templewood Papers, X:5.

> getting the bone, and we have no means of making him give it up, except by killing him by a slow process of attrition and starvation.[1]

It is this analysis which more than any single factor explains Britain's policy towards the USSR. Chamberlain was in effect being warned that war, a possible result of an alliance policy, was to be avoided until his rearmament program could back any diplomatic action with means to enforce it. As a result, it seems to have been generally assumed by the cabinet that adequate defence preparations would require at least another year.[2] Hence, a more active foreign policy on the continent was temporarily out of the question.

The strategic objections to Litvinov's proposal for closer consultations to concert action were the same, from the government's point of view, as those which applied to the 'grand alliance'. These were buttressed, in Chamberlain's case, by "more compelling ... private and unspoken suspicions of Soviet capacity and motive."[3]

1. Quoted ibid. P.K. Kemp, Victory at Sea, 1939-1945 (London 1957), p. 26. Keith Eubank, Munich, (Norman, Oklahoma 1963), p. 36, gives the date of this report as March 28. Whatever the case, this suggests the reply from the military merely confirmed opinions the prime minister already held.
2. This is further confirmed in John W. Wheeler-Bennett, John Anderson, Viscount Waverly (London 1962), p. 199; Macleod, op.cit., p. 233; Diary Entry of Mar. 29, 1938, Nigel Nicolson, ed., Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters, vol. I, 1930-1939 (London 1966) /hereafter: Nicolson, vol. I/, p. 333, quoting the opinion of Malcolm MacDonald, secretary of state for the dominions.
3. Macleod, op.cit., p. 225.

Cadogan also expressed to the Czech minister, Jan Masaryk, "deep distrust of Russia and doubt whether she could effectively intervene outside her borders."[1] These opinions were no doubt influenced and adequately sustained by the rather pessimistic nature of Chilston's despatches from Moscow. This information confirmed that the Red army, as a result of the purges, was in no condition to undertake offensive military operations. The Moscow embassy also considered it most unlikely that the USSR would go to war to fulfil its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia.[2]

A cabinet meeting on March 22 decided to reject the Soviet proposal. The following day, when discussing the March 17 note with Corbin, Halifax stated "quite frankly" that the British government "did not think that it had any great value" and considered that the Soviet government "did not themselves feel that, in making it, they were making any great contribution to European peace."[3] The official rejection followed on March 24. Halifax explained to Maisky that "circumstances" made any meeting unlikely. A conference, without full participation, designed to organize concerted action and not to settle

1. Masaryk to Krofta, Apr. 5, 1938, Documents and Materials, vol. I, no. 9, p. 103.
2. For details of these reports, see below, pp.105-108, 123.
3. Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 23, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 109, p. 90.

outstanding problems "would not necessarily ... have such a favourable effect upon the prospects of European peace." However grateful for the Soviets efforts, Britain could not accept.[1]

The same cabinet meeting also discussed a note to the French government and a parliamentary statement. "The note was a cold refusal to give any support to France if she went to war on account of Czecho-Slovakia and the parliamentary statement read like a declaration of isolation." Under pressure from Duff Cooper "a more friendly gesture to France" was accepted.[2] In fact, a meeting of the foreign policy committee of the cabinet on March 21 had been advised by Halifax to "dissuade France from undertaking a futile act of military assistance."[3]

On the morning of March 24 Phipps gave Paul-Boncour the cabinet's views set out in the form of an aide-mémoire prepared by the foreign office. Essentially it argued that Britain could not enlarge on already existing

1. Halifax to Maisky, Mar. 24, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 116, p. 101. The U.S. government considered that Litvinov's proposal was not such as to require a definite response. Cordell Hull, Memoirs, vol. I (London 1948), pp. 658-659. In any case, the under-secretary of state, Sumner Welles, did not feel a conference could achieve any practical results. Memorandum by Welles, Mar. 23, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, p. 541.
2. Diary Entry of Mar. 22, 1938, Duff Cooper, op.cit., p. 218.
3. Quoted in Notes by Hoare on 1937-1939, Foreign Policy Committee, Templewood Papers, X:5.

commitments. Her obligations to aid France could not be extended beyond those provisions covered by the Locarno treaty. If war broke out, however, the pressure of events might well find Britain involved. As for Czechoslovakia, the British government felt that all efforts should be made to remove the causes of friction between it and Germany. In a further despatch Halifax added that threats to Berlin were useless. "The moment is unfavourable," he noted, "and our plans, both for offence and defence, are not sufficiently advanced."[1]

One of the major reasons for pursuing a political rather than a military solution in central Europe was the changed strategic position of Czechoslovakia as a result of the Anschluss. However well protected Czechoslovakia was by treaties, the occupation of Austria had turned Czechoslovakia's powerful western fortifications on the southern flank. This fact made a military defence of Czechoslovakia, at least in the opinion of the chiefs of

1. Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 22, 23, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, nos. 106-107, pp. 82-88.

staff, utterly untenable.[1] "You have only to look at the map", Chamberlain observed, "to see that nothing that France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans, if they wanted to do it." Nor in his opinion could Russia bring to bear effective aid.[2] This view that none of Prague's allies could prevent a German military occupation was an axiom of foreign policy which British ministers expressed continuously in the coming months.

What in retrospect seems especially significant as

1. Simon, op.cit., p. 241; Ismay, op.cit., p. 88; Maugham, Munich, p. 12; Earl of Swinton, Sixty Years of Power (London 1966), p. 116; Ivone Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle (London 1955), p. 110; all adduce this point in their defence of British policy. Its validity has been contested. Ripka, op.cit., p. 67, argued that Britain "exaggerated the disadvantages of her [Czechoslovakia's] strategical position and the weakness and deficiencies of her defences." British politicians had not made a "careful or detailed analysis" of Czechoslovakia's military problems. Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 139, challenged the prevailing view of Czechoslovakia's position in discussions with the 1922 committee and before the Staff College. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 29, claims that the Czech ministry of defence neither neglected nor ignored so obvious a possibility as an Anschluss and its strategic implications. However, Benes, Memoirs, p. 29, admitted that the strengthening of Czechoslovakia's southern defences was unfinished. Cf. E.M. Robertson, Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans, 1933-1939 (London 1963), p. 122.
2. Diary Entry of Mar. 20, 1938, quoted in Feiling, op.cit., pp. 347-348. Similar opinions are expressed in Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 22, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 106, Enclosure, p. 85; and in a confidential interview given by Hore-Belisha, reported in Masaryk to Krofta, Apr. 28, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 10, p. 33.

regards British policy is that the Sudeten problem received less consideration than Czechoslovakia's foreign relations. This does suggest that Britain's real concern was not the internal dispute, but rather the difficulties Prague's foreign policy might pose for an Anglo-German settlement.[1] As early as March 15 Newton claimed that Czechoslovakia's political position was "not permanently tenable" and that it would be "no kindness in the long run to try to maintain her in it." Germany would never rest content with a potentially hostile Czechoslovakia on her flank. In a subsequent despatch he argued that the minority problem was subsidiary to the larger issue of Czech foreign policy. Germany expected Prague to abandon its Soviet and French alliances. Britain should therefore press the Czechs to accept neutralization. The only exception to the case for Czechoslovakia to abandon its Russian alliance was if "Germany itself one day makes friends with Russia, when an altogether new situation would arise." Nor was he reluctant to face the arguments of those who would see any British espousal of a neutralized

1. The importance of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy as a disputed issue was publicly aired by the leader of the Sudeten German party, Konrad Henlein, in a speech at Carlsbad on April 24, 1938. His famous 'eight points' were prefaced with the demand that it was not the task of the Czechs to form a Slav bulwark against the German Drang nach Osten. He urged a change specifically in Czechoslovakia's extended alliance system. See text in D.I.A., 1938, vol. II, pp. 130-138.

Czechoslovakia as condoning a German Drang nach Osten. He recognized the force of this contention, but added that the government was powerful enough to face the loss of prestige involved, Britain

> would lose more prestige if she had later to abandon to force what could perhaps now be gained by agreement, and ... she is the champion of peaceful evolution. If the 'Drang nach Osten' has to be resisted, a glance at the map suggests that the least favourable place to make that resistance is in Czechoslovakia....[1]

While the concluding military argument has since been a subject of controversy, it seems clear that the general attitude found wide acceptance.

Henderson, for example, totally agreed. In September 1937 Neurath told him that the Sudeten problem could be settled amicably, if the Czechs left the Russian orbit.[2] By March 24, 1938 Henderson had come to the conclusion that Germany must be recognized as dominant east of the Rhine. Central and eastern Europe, he wrote, will "in general have to dance as Hitler pipes." Only "the abandonment ... of Czechoslovakia's alliance with Russia can ever afford any prospect of a definite and peaceful solution."[3]

1. Newton to Halifax, Mar. 15, Apr. 11, 12, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, nos. 86, 134, 140, pp. 56, 139, 152-154.
2. Henderson, Failure of a Mission, p. 72.
3. Henderson to Halifax, Mar. 24, Apr. 1, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, nos. 115, 121, pp. 100, 110. See also, Henderson to Halifax, Apr. 5, May 5, 1938, ibid., nos. 125, 181, pp. 115, 255.

Similar ideas were being considered by Chamberlain and Halifax. On March 21 Geoffrey Dawson, editor of The Times, discussed with the prime minister a memorandum proposing "the internationally guaranteed neutralisation of Czechoslovakia, which in return would give up its Soviet and French alliances and grant federal status to its minorities...." Chamberlain "thought it not impossible".[1] Meanwhile, Halifax had advised the Czechs on March 23, that while they had British sympathy and goodwill no further obligations other than those derived from common League membership could be undertaken.[2] Instead, he proposed joint Anglo-French pressure on the Czechs for a solution of the Sudeten question satisfactory to Germany. The onus for "drastic concessions" was being placed on the Czechs, who were also firmly warned by Halifax against giving too broad an interpretation to Chamberlain's March 24 statement.[3]

Given, therefore, Czechoslovakia's strategic weakness, and the lack of faith in French and Russian ability to help effectively, Chamberlain "abandoned any ideas of

1. The History of The Times, The 150th Anniversary and Beyond, 1912-1948, vol. IV, part II (London 1952), /hereafter: History of The Times, vol. IV, part II/, p. 919.
2. Halifax to Newton, Mar. 23, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 110, p. 91.
3. Halifax to Phipps, Apr. 11, 1938, ibid., no. 135, p. 141; Halifax to Newton, Apr. 12, 1938, ibid., no. 139, pp. 150-151.

giving guarantees to Czechoslovakia, or the French in connection with her obligations to that country."[1] He believed that a negotiated settlement of the Sudeten-Czechoslovak dispute was imperative, possible and in itself highly desirable. To give Czechoslovakia a guarantee would prejudice a peaceful settlement. It would further run the risk of tempting her into an uncompromising position, thereby enhancing the danger of her French and Soviet pacts being invoked. It was this possibility, of an ever-widening circle of involvement, which the prime minister set out to avoid.

The definitive statement on the future conduct of Britain's foreign relations was made on March 24 in the house of commons. Chamberlain defined those cases which would involve Britain in war: fulfilment of certain treaty obligations; threats to such vital interests as British territories and communications; and any threat to British liberty. On how best to achieve these ends, he reiterated that the League, as constituted in March 1938, was no longer capable of maintaining peace.

Having rejected collective security, as understood within a League of Nations context, Chamberlain then tackled the 'grand alliance' version. He admitted that

1. Diary Entry of Mar. 20, 1938, quoted in Feiling, op.cit., p. 348. Dawson also noted that Chamberlain "had come clean around from Winston's idea of a Grand Alliance to a policy of diplomatic action". Diary Entry of Mar. 21, 1938, quoted in Wrench, op.cit., p. 369.

"from the practical point of view there is much to be said for a proposition of that kind."[1] Yet it had been rejected by the government on two accounts. First, even if such a proposal were approved by the League, it did "not differ from the old alliances of pre-war days, which we thought we had abandoned in favour of something better." Second, the value of these alliances "as a deterrent to possible aggression, must obviously depend upon their military efficiency...." In veiled terms the prime minister hinted that Britain was not adequately armed to implement obligations or guarantees she might contract.

From these general observations, he then turned to the question of a British commitment to defend Czechoslovakia. He reiterated Britain's existing pledges deriving from the League covenant and the treaty of Locarno. But he also emphasized that this involved "no automatic obligation to take military action"; especially in an area where British vital interests might not be involved. Consequently, he had decided neither to give an assurance to France of military help should the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty be invoked against Germany; nor, alternatively, any immediate declaration to aid Czechoslovakia in case of aggression, "and invite any other nations, which might so desire, to associate themselves with us in such a

1. This is contrary to what he had written in his Diary on Mar. 20, 1938. See above, p. 77.

declaration." Britain could not be involved in war in consequence of decisions taken beyond its control. The prior guarantee could not be given. But Chamberlain did add the important proviso that in the case of two countries so closely associated as Britain and France, the pressure of events might find Britain involved in a conflict of ever-widening proportions. Although this declaration still left all options open to his government, it was nonetheless a significant, if hesitant, step towards a possible involvement east of Germany.

Implicit in these views was a rejection of the Soviet proposal of March 17. Turning to it, Chamberlain at once observed that a conference, as envisaged by Russia, would not include all European nations.

> Their proposal would appear to involve less a consultation with a view to settlement than a concerting of action against an eventuality that has not yet arisen. Its object would appear to be to negotiate such mutual undertakings 'in advance to resist aggression... which... His Majesty's Government for their part are unwilling to accept. Apart from this ... the indirect, but none the less inevitable, consequence of such action as is proposed by the Soviet Government would be to aggravate the tendency towards the establishment of exclusive groups of nations, which must, in the view of His Majesty's Government, be inimical to the prospects of European peace.

Chamberlain concluded with an exhortation "to employ ... the methods of reason and diplomacy rather than those of menace and of force."[1]

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 333, Mar. 24, 1938, cols. 1401-1413.

Having dealt only briefly with the Soviet Union in this statement, Chamberlain seemed compelled to return to the problem for further amplification. During a parliamentary debate on a Labour party censure motion on his foreign policy, the prime minister chided the opposition for trying to exploit foreign difficulties for party purposes. His policy, he claimed, had gained "the general approval of the whole country" and "practically the whole world, with the possible exception of Russia." Under no circumstances could he accept Labour party proposals which were "nothing less than ... an offensive and defensive alliance between France, Russia and ourselves against some other Power or group of Powers." Such an alternative was "futile and dangerous", would inevitably lead to a general war, and would destroy any chance for successful negotiations.[1] Finally, in a speech at Birmingham on April 9, he again decisively rejected the "stupid" policy of armed alliances.[2]

By early April the Chamberlain government had expounded, elucidated and reiterated a definite policy based on various considerations. These encompassed a rejection of exclusive alliances, any anti-German combination, or precise definitions of predetermined guarantees on the continent. Above

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 334, Apr. 4, 1938, cols. 53-62. Chamberlain's remarks were aimed at the manifesto issued by the national council of labour. Text in Report of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Conference of the Labour Party (London 1939), p. 372.
2. Chamberlain, op.cit., pp. 169-177.

all, closer co-operation with the USSR was emphatically rejected. This formulation represented the policy Chamberlain strictly pursued until September 1938. It was instrumental in explaining the ultimate exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich conference.

Simultaneously with these developments in British thinking, the Soviet government was reacting to the rejection of its proposals and evolving further its policy towards Czechoslovakia. While waiting for the official British reply, Litvinov unburdened himself to Davies on March 23 with a series of gloomy predictions and comments. The coming summer, he declared, would decide the issue between war or a complete fascist domination of Europe. Czechoslovakia would succumb because of a general lack of confidence. "'France has no confidence in the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union has no confidence in France.'" As for British policy, Litvinov believed that "the only thing that would prevent complete Fascist domination of Europe was a change of government or policy in Great Britain."[1]

1. Davies, op.cit., pp. 189-190; Davies to Hull, Mar. 24, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, pp. 41-42. See also, Jungert-Arnoti to Kanya, Mar. 26, 1938, Adám Magda, Juhász Gyula and Kerekes Lajos, eds., Magyarország és a Második Világháború, Titkos Diplomáciai Okmányok a Háború Előzményeihez és Történetéhez (Budapest 1959); Russian Translation: Vengriya i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina, Sekretnye Diplomaticheskie Dokymenty iz Istorii Kanuna i Perioda Voiny (Hungary and the Second World War, Secret Diplomatic Documents from the History of the Eve and Period of the War, Moscow 1962), /hereafter: Vengriya i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina/, no. 20, pp. 74-75.

Britain's March 24 rejection of the Soviet proposals, subsequently termed a "perfect specimen of British pre-war diplomatic duplicity",[1] produced the expected press reactions. Pravda noted that an "abrupt change" was taking place in British foreign policy with Chamberlain abandoning collective security and pursuing an agreement with the aggressor powers.[2] His references to the League were dismissed in Pravda on March 26 as a sop to domestic opinion. "Chamberlain opposes the proposal of the U.S.S.R.", Pravda continued, "because it is directed against aggression.... He has already assumed some obligations in relation towards the aggressors."[3]

Rebuffed in its efforts at collective action, the Soviet government publicly maintained an attitude of stiff correctness and reserve. Davies observed that Soviet foreign policy was increasingly being forced into isolationism because of Anglo-French policies.[4] However, the Soviet government privately gave assurances that it intended to fulfil treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. On March 28 a Soviet military mission, headed by Marshal Kulik, was received by the chief of the general staff of the Czechoslovak army, General Krejči. In reply to

1. "Great Patriotic War", part II, p. 103.
2. Pravda, Mar. 25, 1938, quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 345-346.
3. Quoted in V.G. Polyakov, Angliya i Myunkhensky sgovor, Mart-Sentyabr 1938g. (Britain and the Munich Agreement, March-September 1938, Moscow 1960), p. 110.
4. Davies, op.cit., pp. 194, 196, 206, 208.

Krejči's question on whether Russia would help should the Germans attack, Kulik assured him that "'assistance would be given'." The Czechs announced their willingness to show the Soviet delegation the latest of military dispositions.[1] A conference of military representatives, however, was postponed by Czechoslovakia "on the pretext that France's attitude had to be made clear."[2]

A memorandum by H.C.T. Stronge, British military attaché in Prague, described Czech confidence that with French, Russian and possibly British support Czechoslovakia would prevail. "I have been surprised", he wrote, "to find little or no evidence that the assurances of these two countries, recently renewed, are seriously doubted in Military circles." Stronge was himself sceptical whether France would honour her obligations. His information on Russia was that she would be "unlikely" to intervene effectively.[3]

However, further Soviet reassurance came on April 23.

1. Record of a Talk between Kulik and Krejči, Mar. 28, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 6, p. 26.
2. "Great Patriotic War", part II, p. 108. There was nonetheless a report by Newton "from a secret but entirely reliable source" that a Soviet general and colonel had arrived in Prague for discussions with the Czech general staff. Newton to Halifax, Apr. 23, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 155, p. 181.
3. Newton to Halifax, Mar. 29, 1938, ibid., no. 120, Enclosure, pp. 104-108. See also, Stronge's article on the military approach to Munich in The Times, Sept. 29, 1967. In a Letter to the Editor, The Times, Oct. 23, 1967, he added that the Czech general staff counted "with confidence on substantial air support from the U.S.S.R."

A conference was held in the kremlin attended by Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Litvinov and Kaganovich. Sergei Alexandrovsky, Soviet minister in Prague, submitted a report on the Czech political situation. Thereupon the decision was taken that the USSR in agreement with France and Czechoslovakia was ready, if requested, to take "all necessary measures" to ensure Czech security. Russia "disposes of all necessary means for doing this. The state of the Army and Air Force allows of this. Voroshilov is very optimistic." Alexandrovsky was empowered to convey this assurance to Benes.[1] In an interview with Potemkin, Fierlinger confirmed that Prague had been informed and mentioned that Robert Coulondre, the French ambassador in Moscow, regarded the Soviet position as of great significance.[2] Coulondre has also related that Litvinov personally told him that in the case of a Sudeten-Czech deadlock instigated by Berlin "'M. Bénès sait aussi que nous tiendrions nos engagements.'"[3] Finally, M.I. Kalinin, chairman of the presidium of the supreme soviet, added his assurances. Reviewing the

1. Fierlinger to Krofta, Apr. 23, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 7, p. 27. William V. Wallace, "New Documents on the History of Munich", International Affairs, vol. XXXV, no. 4, Oct. 1959, [hereafter: Wallace, "New Documents"], p. 452, reproduces the remainder of document no. 7. This proves that the kremlin conference was precipitated by a French enquiry. Cf. Newton to Halifax, Apr. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 163, p. 197; Vereker to Halifax, May 16, 1938, ibid., no. 222, p. 305.
2. Record of a talk between Potemkin and Fierlinger, Apr. 27, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 9, p. 30.
3. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 139.

international situation at a meeting in Moscow, he reiterated the dependence of the Soviet-Czech pact on France fulfilling her obligations. He added: "It goes without saying that the Pact does not forbid either party going to the help of the other without waiting for France. . . ."[1] This seems to have been the first hint that the kremlin threw out on the possibility of unilateral aid. Nonetheless, having essentially defined its position, the Soviet Union waited upon further European developments.

1. Speech by Kalinin, Apr. 26, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 8, p. 28.

CHAPTER THREE

BRITAIN, THE USSR AND THE CZECHOSLOVAK CRISIS, PART TWO

On April 28 and 29 an Anglo-French conference was held in London. This was the first opportunity for Chamberlain and Halifax to confer with the newly constituted Daladier-Bonnet government. That the two allies needed to coordinate their policy seemed obvious. The very fact that Daladier had chosen Bonnet over Paul-Boncour as foreign minister was significant. During its short period in office the Blum government had reaffirmed France's traditional interest in eastern Europe. When questioned by Daladier on April 10, Paul-Boncour insisted on justifying a continued French adherence to her eastern obligations. He was uncompromising on the necessity of supporting Czechoslovakia. As a result he was promptly replaced by Bonnet.[1] For Britain this signified the need to exchange views with a government whose general complexion was potentially more akin to its own. Furthermore, the differences in Anglo-French views on the central European crisis were still substantial. Since the Anschluss both powers had been evolving parallel policies.

1. Paul-Boncour, vol. III, pp. 97-103. The significance of the change in the French foreign ministry was commented upon in Pravda, Apr. 13, 1938. Polyakov, op.cit., p. 102.

In the face of increasing Czech-German tension, the recrudescence of Henlein's activities and the Czech rejection of the Carlsbad programme, there was a pressing need for policy coordination.[1] The March 24 statement had hinted at a possible British involvement in war resulting from France's obligations. To lessen this indirect threat and press on with European appeasement, Chamberlain had to convince the French ministers of the correctness of British views and align the policies of the two countries.

In a series of four intensive meetings, the conference dealt both with military matters and the Czechoslovak problem.[2] Chamberlain described the weakness in British armaments and received a similar admission of French deficiencies. He refused, despite Daladier's persistent efforts, to enlarge the size and scope of Britain's military

1. A further dangerous complication, unknown to either Paris or London, was the directive, given on April 21, 1938 to General Keitel, chief of the supreme command of the Wehrmacht, for the military campaign against Czechoslovakia. See Memorandum on Operation "Green", Apr. 22, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 133, pp. 239-240.

2. Record of Anglo-French conversations, Apr. 28-29, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 164, pp. 198-233. Daladier's version of the talks is in Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats de l'Assemblée Nationale Constituante, Séance du 18 Juillet 1946, /hereafter: Daladier, Débats, July 18, 1946/, pp. 2678-2679; and in Les Evénements Survenus en France de 1933 à 1945, Témoignages et Documents Recueillis par la Commission d'Enquête Parlementaire (Paris 1947-1951), /hereafter: Les Evénements/, vol. V, pp. 28-31. Georges Bonnet, Défence de la Paix, vol. I, De Washington au Quai d'Orsay (Geneva 1946), /hereafter: Bonnet, vol. I/, pp. 112-117, 351-355, contains the foreign minister's description.

commitment on the continent. Halifax then stressed the disquiet with which Britain regarded the military situation. Czechoslovakia was "exceedingly weak". The strength of Anglo-French forces was not encouraging.

> As regards Russia, recent events, such as the execution of many members of the Higher Command of the army, and the general state of internal unrest in that country, made it extremely doubtful whether Russia could be counted upon to make any great contribution, if, indeed, she could make any contribution at all, to the protection of Czechoslovakia if that country were attacked by Germany.[1]

The possibility of Polish help was uncertain. As a result, the government had concluded that German aggression against Czechoslovakia could not be prevented, and any political commitment was out of the question.

In response to these comments, Daladier retorted with an aggressive attack on the general British position, and a critique of the European situation. He argued that Germany was the guilty party, intent on pursuing an expansionist policy. But she was not as militarily preponderant as had been made out. The only way to prevent war was for Great Britain, France and "any other countries which were ready to join" to make quite clear their determination to preserve European peace. The French prime

1. Dalton's impression, after discussing Russia with Vansittart in April, was that the government "really do not know much." Vansittart was anxious, however, that Britain should not cold-shoulder the USSR. Entry of Apr. 12, 1938, Dalton Diary.

minister then objected to Britain's pessimistic evaluation of Czechoslovakia's military position; countering various criticisms of her army, southern defences, and strategic preparedness. He agreed with Halifax, however, that the purges must have affected the Red army. On the other hand, Russia "still possessed the strongest air force in Europe", some 5,000 airplanes. Her potential war resources were "extremely great" and could be exploited.

The essence of the French position was the belief that "the military situation was really determined by the political situation, and could be decided by the determination shown by statesmen."[1] Only a firm Anglo-French policy would buttress Czechoslovakia and enable Poland, Rumania and Yugoslavia to reaffirm their old treaty allegiances. (Britain was in effect being asked to support France's weakened east European security system).

1. This emphasis by Daladier disguised an underlying anxiety about the military situation. It was especially understandable in light of information previously brought back from Prague by Léon Noël which emphasized the internal divisions in the country, its strategic weakness, and concluded that France could offer no immediate military assistance to Czechoslovakia. Léon Noël, L'Agression Allemande Contre la Pologne (Paris 1946), pp. 198-202. A report prepared by Gamelin on April 27 at Daladier's request, buttressed this contention: "L'efficacité de l'aide qui sera fournie à la Tchécoslovaquie dépendra également du secours que pourraient éventuellement apporter les deux autres puissances de la Petite Entente ... l'U.R.S.S., la Pologne et l'Empire britannique." Quoted in Gamelin, vol. II, pp. 318-319.

A solution, in the French view, lay in a combined programme of pressure on Benes with a declaration of support for Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain agreed to concert with France to obtain the maximum concessions from Benes, but the Czech president must not be encouraged to count on British support. Britain and France - Daladier's "sentimental considerations" aside - were not sufficiently powerful to preserve Czechoslovakia. This was not the point where "the moment had come to call a halt" to German expansion. Furthermore, Daladier's policy of confronting Hitler with a united front of Britain, France, Czechoslovakia "and such assistance as might be obtainable from outside sources", Chamberlain considered "bluff." He even criticized Daladier's conception of German aims and ambitions, and doubted whether Hitler really desired to destroy Czechoslovakia. Supposed German intrigues in eastern Europe, so worrisome to France, represented a natural German reaction against possible encirclement. Nor was it possible to keep the states of central Europe and the Balkans out of the German orbit. War was always a possibility, Chamberlain declared, but "only dire necessity would ever persuade him to wage a preventive war." The French suggestion for a declaration had to be rejected.

Daladier firmly repudiated Chamberlain's, rather

unfair interpretation of his remarks as a proposition for a preventive war; an idea he regarded as "criminal." He argued that if Anglo-French policy were "inspired by firmness, and this were generally known and appreciated", war might be avoided. German policy he considered a bluff and her fears of encirclement, groundless. Once in possession of the resources of central and eastern Europe, Germany would be invincible. Finally in studied, moderate terms Halifax voiced his appreciation of Daladier's arguments, but emphasized that Britain could not go beyond the March 24 declaration. The conference agreed on a joint Anglo-French approach to Czechoslovakia, with the aim of encouraging a peaceful settlement.

In a straight confrontation between Chamberlain's policy of appeasement and Daladier's arguments for a united front, the British view prevailed. The French ministers failed in their attempt to elicit an extension of British obligations on the continent. However, as Daladier later observed, "England no longer held aloof from Czechoslovakia, and ... accepted joint action, though solely on a diplomatic level."[1] This was in fact something of an improvement, from the French point of view, over the very reserved attitude taken by the British government during

1. Le Nouveau Candide, Sept. 1961, quoted in Henri Noguères, Munich, or The Phoney Peace (London 1965), p. 55.

their previous conference in November 1937.[1] The effect of Chamberlain's concession in April was to elevate the British role in the Czech crisis from passive observer to active adviser. He could now pursue a diplomatic offensive which would give him control over allied policy. This strategy led directly to the Munich conference five months later.

The implication of the talks for Anglo-Soviet relations was crucial. The treaties binding France, Czechoslovakia and the USSR were military agreements designed essentially to counter German aggression. By discouraging France from adopting a 'policy of threat', Chamberlain was opting for a diplomatic as opposed to a military solution. French concurrence assured him that his ally would not run ahead of Britain.[2] Thus, he defused the indirect threat of British involvement posed by the existence of France's eastern treaties. Reports which circulated after the conference that Britain had suggested the French government withdraw from the Franco-Soviet pact, or that a four power pact was

1. Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 516-517; Feiling, op.cit., pp. 333-334; Johnson to Hull, Dec. 3, 1937, F.R.U.S., 1937, vol. I (Washington 1954), pp. 184-185; Memorandum from German Foreign Ministry, Dec. 18, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 33, Enclosure, pp. 73-74.
2. Cf. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 135.

discussed[1] appear to be unfounded.

Only Chamberlain's acquiescence to Daladier's suggestions could have altered the future course of Anglo-Soviet relations. For the logic of Daladier's arguments, coinciding with Churchill's 'grand alliance' and similar Soviet notions, would have led to some form of Anglo-French-Soviet military collaboration. The preponderence of British views during the April 28-29 talks virtually dictated the exclusion of the Soviet Union from a negotiated resolution of the Czech crisis.

Nonetheless, this did not prevent Halifax from including Maisky among those ambassadors who were informed about the discussions. From the point of view of those urging closer Anglo-Soviet relations, such contacts were an essential safeguard for Britain's increasing diplomatic involvement in continental affairs. But knowledge of this talk would have provided little encouragement. On May 5 Halifax called the Soviet ambassador to the foreign office. He apologized for the delay and informed Maisky of the general tenor of the Anglo-French conversations. Halifax

1. Kordt to German Foreign Ministry, Apr. 30, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 140, p. 249; Wilson to Hull, May 3, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 49; Kennedy to Hull, May 5, 1938, ibid., p. 51. Behind the scenes French ministers contradicted the declared policy of loyalty to France's treaties. Strang, Home and Abroad, pp. 134-135; Kordt to German Foreign Ministry, Apr. 30, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 143, Enclosure, pp. 252-253; Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, May 6, 1938, ibid., no. 147, Enclosure, pp. 257-260.

emphasized that no new obligations had been undertaken, but mentioned the démarche decided upon with the French. While Britain was anxious to lend her "best offices", she accepted no responsibility for any forthcoming proposals.[1]

Maisky was thus informed in a business-like manner of relevant diplomatic developments. The record of the conversation contains no suggestion, from either side, to widen the scope of Anglo-Soviet contacts. If anything, they were to be restricted. Chamberlain, Halifax and British diplomats abroad made a point of underlining the ineffectiveness of British, French or Soviet military assistance being brought to bear against potential German aggression.

This was especially noticeable when the démarche agreed upon in London was being presented. On May 2 Halifax briefed Masaryk on the conversations with the French. The foreign secretary explained that Czechoslovakia was in a disturbing military position. "Russia's support was of uncertain value," Poland was unfriendly, and "it was a physical impossibility for any of Czechoslovakia's friends to prevent the country being overrun by Germany ...."[2] Similar points were reiterated and doubts about

1. Halifax to Vereker, May 5, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 182, p. 256. The next Halifax-Maisky interview did not take place until August 17, 1938.
2. Halifax to Newton, May 2, 1938, ibid.,no. 166, p. 236.

Soviet aid emphasized on May 7, when Newton formally presented the Anglo-French démarche to Krofta. Newton told Halifax that he had deliberately countered observations by Czechs, such as Benes and Krejči, that Germany would never go to war if she knew beforehand that France, Britain and the USSR would come to Czechoslovakia's aid.[1]

These arguments seem to have closely reflected Chamberlain's views. His observations during March on the Soviet Union's inability to aid Czechoslovakia have already been indicated. He apparently developed these ideas during an 'off the record' conversation with Canadian and American journalists at a luncheon on May 10 given by Lady Astor. The report, carried by several North American newspapers, was "broadly, if not in detail, correct."[2] Chamberlain was reported to have stated that Britain did not expect to fight for Czechoslovakia, nor did they anticipate France or Russia doing so. Czechoslovakia could not continue to exist in its present form, but a smaller state would be guaranteed by the four

1. Newton to Halifax, May 8, 9, 1938, ibid., nos. 192, 195, pp. 263-264, 265-271. When reporting the Anglo-French talks to Stefan Osusky, the Czech minister in Paris, Bonnet likewise made "no attempt to disguise the mediocre military situation." Georges Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay (Isle of Man 1965), pp. 169-170.
2. Macleod, op.cit., p. 231. Feiling does not mention this incident. Extracts from the article in the New York Herald Tribune are quoted in R.G.D. Laffan, S.I.A., 1938, vol. II (London 1951), /hereafter: S.I.A., 1938, vol. II/, p. 113.

powers, the Soviet Union excluded.[1] Although in the Commons Chamberlain refused to either confirm or deny the newspaper reports,[2] the details resemble his general policy as it was evolving in the post-Anschluss period, and specifically government attitudes towards the USSR. Reports of the interview created suspicion in Moscow.[3]

One of the major factors contributing to the persistence of the above appreciation of the USSR were the reports emanating from the British embassy in Moscow. This information was consistently pessimistic in its assessment of Soviet military strength, and hence, her ability and willingness to aid Czechoslovakia. The embassy staff believed that the purges had had a disastrous effect both on military morale and the efficiency of the Red army. Soviet production, distribution and transport were considered totally disorganized. While adequate for a defensive war, the Red army could sustain no tenable offensive. R.C.W.G.

1. The Times, May 16, 1938, argued the same case. A contemporary biographer of the prime minister warmly approved of his efforts to secure European peace by a four power bloc "living peacefully alongside a self-contained Russia." Duncan Keith-Shaw, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (London 1939), p. 83.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 337, June 20, 21, 1938, cols. 856-857, 957.
3. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 52. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 353; and Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 134-136, both emphasize the alleged four power pact implications of Chamberlain's remarks.

Firebrace, the military attaché, therefore voiced "considerable doubt" as to whether the Soviet Union was capable of fulfilling its obligations under the pacts with Czechoslovakia and France. The embassy considered it most likely that only a war wherein vital Russian interests were involved would see them taking an active part. The occupation of the Sudetenland by Germany would not, in Firebrace's opinion, constitute such a threat. Gordon Vereker, the embassy counsellor, noted the reluctance of the Soviet government to accept even indirect responsibility for too categorical declarations of their readiness to fulfil treaty obligations. Chilston's rather gloomy conclusion was that "the Soviet Union must ... for the time being, be counted out of European politics in so far as the exercise of a decisive influence one way or the other is concerned...."[1] Such assessments no doubt perfectly confirmed Chamberlain in the wisdom of the policy decided upon in the post-Anschluss period.

1. Chilston to Halifax, Apr. 19, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 148 and Enclosure, pp. 161-165; Vereker to Halifax, May 10, 1938, ibid., no. 202, p. 281. Adamov and Kutakov, op.cit., p. 168, consider the former report typical of British falsification. B.E. Shtein, Burzhuaznie Falsifikatory Istorii, 1919-1939 (Bourgeois Falsifiers of History, 1919-1939, Moscow 1951), pp. 88-89, points out disapprovingly the effects such "slanderous" reports had on Halifax on the eve of the Anglo-French conference.

On May 16 both Vereker[1] and Firebrace consulted with Coulondre, who was about to return to Paris, and further expounded their views. The French ambassador believed that the Soviet government was now prepared to react more forcibly in a military sense to German aggression than some months ago. This was mainly as a result of an improvement in the far eastern situation. He was generally "optimistic of possible Russian intervention on the side of Czechoslovakia". Vereker replied with "extreme caution", and disagreed with Coulondre's "facile optimism". The difficulties of gathering information in Moscow, the lack of reliable evidence and the purges made only tentative observations possible. But most of the military attachés agreed on the deleterious effects of the purges. Firebrace then estimated the strength and weakness of the Red army. His emphasis was on its disorganization, the decimation of officers, and the weakened transport system. Superiority in numbers and material were the strengths. He considered that "the present moment was the worst possible one in which the Soviet Army would have to fight." Vereker then concluded by observing that the Russians were "Asiatics

1. Chilston was on leave from April 29 to June 16, 1938. He had an interview, while in London, with Halifax on May 6 and with Chamberlain on May 10. Information given in Letter from Viscount Chilston to the writer, Aug. 6, 1968.

... and that with the present Byzantine regime in the Kremlin anything might happen." Even "a partial military adventure or demonstration on their part was improbable."[1]

There can be no doubt that the unlikelihood of a Soviet military commitment was subsequently emphasized in despatches from London, in order to impress particularly the Czechs with the necessity for maximum concessions to the Sudetens, and to forestall Benes from contemplating recourse to his French and Soviet pacts.[2] The irony of this particular form of British pressure was that Benes had independently concluded that Czechoslovakia would not go it alone with Russia. Until early May 1938, he had managed to interest Britain and France in the affairs of Czechoslovakia: "as much an attempt to stiffen their policy for the sake of peace as to secure their support

1. Vereker to Halifax, May 16, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 222, pp. 303-307. In retrospect Firebrace observed that his military reports were based on "no firm information." The restrictions on his movements imposed by the Russians made reliable on the spot assessments an impossible task. Instead information was pooled among the military attachés. Brigadier Firebrace to the writer. Personal Interview.

2. In June 1938 a conference of military attachés from Europe was held at the war office in London. They were addressed by Halifax, Vansittart and Lord Gort, chief of the imperial general staff. Firebrace repeated his assessments, but was "astonished" to find that Vansittart's remarks were completely at variance with these reports. Brigadier Firebrace to the writer. Personal Interview. Stronge "reported that the Czech General Staff felt certain of Soviet support, if attacked, and that in spite of the physical obstacles to be overcome. Initially it would consist mainly of air support." Letter from Brigadier Stronge to the writer, Apr. 13, 1969.

in the event of war."[1] He reasoned that Britain herself would be menaced should Germany dominate central Europe. However, because his entire political orientation was western, as he frequently explained, relations with Moscow were dependent on the attitude of Paris and London. Should the two western allies disinterest themselves in the Soviet Union, the Czechs would concur. As Benes explained, his government "would always follow and be bound to Western Europe and never to Eastern Europe."[2]

The nature of Czechoslovakia's military relations with Russia confirms Benes' description. In 1936 and 1937 some forms of Czech-Soviet military collaboration had been agreed upon and implemented. These concerned mainly supplies of Czech military equipment for Russia, and provisional agreements on Soviet air assistance. Temporary military missions were exchanged in 1937 to examine defence preparations. It was agreed by the Czechs and the Soviets that air assistance was the most profitable form of help, in view of troop transit difficulties through Poland and Rumania. An extension of Czech airfields was also decided

1. William V. Wallace, "The Foreign Policy of President Benes in the Approach to Munich" [hereafter: Wallace, "Foreign Policy of Benes"], Slavonic and East European Review, vol. XXXIX, no. 92, Dec. 1960, p. 135.
2. Newton to Halifax, May 18, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 229, p. 314.

upon, but at the time of Munich was not yet complete.[1] However, the Czechs refused to initiate staff talks with the Russians when it was suggested by the Blum government. They claimed that it was always a "principle in the relationship Prague-Paris-Moscow that Prague will not take the initiative and that, especially about military matters, it would not conduct negotiations alone."[2] Benes admitted to Noël in April 1938 that no preliminary arrangements existed which could allow the Soviet Union "d'apporter une aide matérielle aux Tchèques." In any case, Benes declared he would not consider military arrangements with Russia which did not have Anglo-French approval.[3]

In spite of this overall concurrence, Benes' attitude to the Soviet Union differed from Britain's on two fundamental points. He claimed, firstly, to take an "objective

1. Benes, Memoirs, pp. 40-42. See also, Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 136-137; Erickson, op.cit., p. 489. Faucher considered the Czech aerodromes were "exceptionally well-situated from a strategic point of view". L'Epoque, Dec. 24, 1938, quoted in Ripka, op.cit., pp. 296-297.
2. Czechoslovak Archives, quoted in Wallace, "Foreign Policy of Benes", p. 134. Apparently there were Czech officers doing a period of attachment to Red army units in 1938. Vereker to Halifax, May 31, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 355, Enclosure, p. 420.
3. Noël, op.cit., pp. 200-201. Faucher, in testimony cited in Les Evénements, vol. V, p. 1199, asserted that Benes did in fact desire some sort of military convention, but only with French consent. Benes approached the French in the summer of 1938 to sound out Russia on the help she could give Czechoslovakia in case of war. Phipps to Halifax, July 16, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 502, p. 578.

view of the value of Russia."[1] Indeed his information from Moscow conflicted sharply with British estimates. Fierlinger was generally optimistic in his evaluation of Soviet intentions and capabilities.[2] The Czech military attaché, F. Dastich, considered by Firebrace to be "very well informed", was sure the USSR would fulfil its foreign obligations to the point of declaring war on Poland should Warsaw refuse to permit the passage of aid to Czechoslovakia.[3] Secondly, Benes thought that Britain "might be inclined to underrate the importance of Russia." He

> did not wish to exclude Russia from Europe where she might be a useful make-weight against German pressure. Similarly he believed that France and England needed Russia as a balancing factor. An attempt to exclude Russia completely from Europe would ... be disastrous and would only force her to make an agreement with Germany against the rest of Europe.[4]

1. Newton to Halifax, May 18, 1938, ibid., no. 229, p. 314.
2. Wallace, "Foreign Policy of President Benes", p. 134. In his, "New Documents", pp. 451-453, Wallace slightly qualifies this view of Fierlinger. Schulenburg in fact criticized the Czech ambassador for his excessive optimism. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, May 30, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 222, p. 363. See also, Jungert-Arnoti to Kanya, June 5-6, 1938, Vengriya i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina, no. 32, pp. 97-98. Fierlinger was actually on good terms with the Red army chief of general staff, B.M. Shaposhnikov. Zdenek Fierlinger, "Heroic Record", New Times, no. 43, Oct. 25, 1967, p. 6.
3. Chilston to Halifax, Apr. 19, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, nos. 148, 151, Enclosures, pp. 165, 172.
4. Newton to Halifax, May 18, 1938, ibid., no. 229, pp. 314-315.

However, these particular considerations did not prevent Benes from aligning his policy completely with Anglo-French interests, to their profound relief.

The Anglo-French talks in London had left French foreign policy, particularly in relation to the eastern alliances, in an unsettled state. Despite British distrust of these commitments, the problem was then only indirectly discussed. Instead, Britain reserved to the French, until September 23, 1938, the position of intermediary and interpreter of Soviet policy as it affected the Czech crisis. This allowed the British government to pursue its advisory role on Czechoslovakia without any direct reference to the Soviet Union.

Having agreed to a policy of pacification in central Europe, France was forced to reconsider and re-evaluate these pacts. Open repudiation was impracticable. Rather, from May to August 1938 Daladier and Bonnet pursued a dual policy: joint efforts with Britain for appeasement and simultaneous exploration of the eastern alliances for possible resistance.

This latter course was pursued with a good deal of hesitation. Bonnet realized that an actual Franco-Russian rapprochement would not have been a particularly welcome development in London. Nor did he personally favour such a move. He described the Franco-Soviet pact as "vague", and told the Polish ambassador in Paris, Juliusz

Lukasiewicz, that he personally was no adherent of collaboration with communism.[1] He also admitted to William Bullitt, the U.S. ambassador, that his policy was to strengthen France's relations not with the USSR, but with Poland and Rumania.[2] Having to choose between continuance of the treaty with Poland or with Russia, French sympathies were clearly with the former. As Coulondre observed: "Le bois polonais leur a masqué la forêt russe."[3]

Bonnet's first opportunity to discuss the question of Soviet assistance to Czechoslovakia occurred during the meeting of the League council at Geneva beginning on May 9. In an informal conversation, Litvinov assured him that the USSR would fulfil its treaty obligations to assist Czechoslovakia, if France did so. When questioned as to the practical possibilities, Litvinov said that the Red army would not force a passage through to Czechoslovakia. He urged France, allied to both Poland and Rumania, to secure transit rights for Soviet troops. Litvinov considered Rumania the more likely corridor. Bonnet, however, "sighed and said that Poland and Rumania are emphatically opposing the transit of ... /Russia's/ troops".[4] Talks

1. Lukasiewicz to Beck, May 27, 1938, Documents and Materials, vol. I, no. 11, p. 113.
2. Bullitt to Hull, July 26, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 58.
3. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 147.
4. Letter from Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 14, p. 40. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 125, asserts that Litvinov made Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia conditional on prior Polish-Rumanian agreement to the passage of troops and aircraft. Cf. Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay, p. 170.

between the French, Soviet and Czech general staffs on the problem of technical requirements, including the passage of Soviet troops, were also apparently proposed by Litvinov.[1] Bonnet does not mention this suggestion in any of his published versions of the talks. But he did tell Coulondre on May 20 that Litvinov, in reply to his question as to what the USSR intended to do, stated: "... seules les autorités militaires soviétiques pourraient répondre à cette question."[2]

As a result of their conversation, both Litvinov and Bonnet consulted Nicolas Petresco Comnène, the Rumanian foreign minister. To the Soviet foreign commissar, Comnène expressed the wish to develop better relations but avoided concrete subjects.[3] Litvinov did not press the issue; and in this was considerable consistency. The Soviet government never articulated publicly the exact manner of their intended help. The official press treated the whole Czech question with great reserve and ignored the question of passage.[4] The government also refused to

1. Letter from Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 14, p. 40. Rothstein, op.cit., p. 174, who was then Tass correspondent in Geneva, explains that "false reports" of the meeting were leaked to the French press. Because of this Robert Dell was informed of the details and published them in the Manchester Guardian, May 18, 1938. Being a trusted journalist, Dell was several times used in a similar manner by Litvinov. Andrew Rothstein to the writer. Personal interview.
2. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 142.
3. Letter from Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 14, p. 41.
4. Duroselle, op.cit., p. 68; Tippelskirch to Welck, Apr. 4, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 127, p. 232.

negotiate directly with Poland and Rumania on this issue. The object of a brief visit Alexandrovsky paid to Bucharest on April 13 is unclear. It may have been intended to deal with the vacancy in the Soviet embassy created by the recall of the last minister.[1] But Alexandrovsky may have discussed the problem of transit.[2] Litvinov was very concerned at the time with reputed Polish-Rumanian plans to bar the way west for Soviet troops. On May 30 Alexandrovsky discussed these reports with Kamil Krofta, the Czech foreign minister, who was equally apprehensive, but remained convinced of Bucharest's ultimate intentions to co-operate.[3] Litvinov then asked Coulondre, on June 10, to re-examine the problem of passage via Rumania.[4] It seems doubtful, however, whether the Soviet government would have forced its way across Poland or Rumania without prior League sanction.

Bonnet sounded out both Warsaw and Bucharest. Of the

1. Fabricius to German Foreign Ministry, Apr. 30, 1938, ibid., nos. 141-142, pp. 249-251.
2. As is implied in A.A. Yazkova, "Malaya Antanta i Myunkhen" (The Little Entente and Munich), Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya, no. 4, July-Aug. 1967, p. 64; and Borisov, op.cit., p. 414. Cf. Eisenlohr to German Foreign Ministry, June 23, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 263, p. 428.
3. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 29, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 15, p. 43; Alexandrovsky to Litvinov, May 30, 1938, ibid., no. 16, pp. 44-46. Cf. Entry of July 26, 1938, Jean Szembek, Journal, 1938-39 (Paris 1952), pp. 325-326.
4. Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 152-153; Bonnet, vol. I, p. 163. The Soviet press at this point was also very critical of Beck's policy of trying to create a neutral bloc from the Baltic to the Black Sea, as well as Polish treatment of Soviet nationals in Poland. See excerpts from Pravda, in Duroselle, op.cit., pp. 73-74; and Beloff, vol. II p. 139, fn. 4.

two governments the Poles were the more obdurate. They retained an openly hostile attitude to Czechoslovakia and Benes' policy towards the Sudetens; aside from having their own revisionist aims in Teschen. Interviews by Noël, joint démarches with the British ambassador, Howard Kennard, and conversations in Paris between Bonnet and Lukasiewicz were fruitless. The Poles refused to abandon their hostile attitude to Czechoslovakia, declined any collaboration within the scope of the Franco-Soviet pact, and warned that they would resist a Russian attempt to force a passage through Poland.[1] French pressure on the Poles, even if feasible, was not considered.

If the Polish attitude was rigid and dogmatic, the Rumanian approach was ambiguous and vacillating. Weaker than the Poles and open to intimidation, the Rumanians were never categorical. Paul-Boncour and Gamelin claimed that King Carol, in strictest confidence, assured them he would allow the Soviets to cross through northern Rumania.[2] In March and April 1938 Krofta publicized increasing signs of improvements in Soviet-Rumanian relations.[3] To the Germans, Comnène denied Rumania was

1. Details in S.I.A., 1938, vol. II, pp. 132-134.
2. Gamelin, vol. II, p. 279; Paul-Boncour, vol. III, p. 61. The new Rumanian constitution of February 1938 prohibited passage of armed foreign troops without specific legislation.
3. Shaprov to Litvinov, Mar. 17, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 5, p. 25; Newton to Halifax, Apr. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 163, p. 197.

negotiating with the Russians.[1]

Bonnet had thoroughly discussed the problem of Soviet aid with Comnène at Geneva. His answer "though hardly encouraging appears less absolutely negative than in Bonnet's account."[2] The most plausible report, however, arises from a meeting between Comnène and the Czech representative in Geneva, Arnost Heidrich. Comnène explained that because of the uneasy European situation, Rumania "could not undertake any direct obligations to permit the passage of the Red Army under any conditions." He also suggested the question should be left open "in consideration of the possible necessity for practical settlements" which might enable the Soviet Union to aid Czechoslovakia. The Czech minister in Bucharest was told that in view of the delicate nature of the question it could not be decided in advance. Krofta accepted that internal and external considerations prevented the Rumanians from being more precise and, therefore, was satisfied with Comnène's reply.[3] Likewise Adrien Thierry, the French minister in Bucharest, informed Bonnet that to demand of

1. Fabricius to German Foreign Ministry, Apr. 30, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, nos. 141-142, pp. 249-251.
2. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., The Diplomats, 1919-1939, vol. II, The Thirties (Reprinted, New York 1965), Zhereafter: Craig and Gilbert, vol. II7, p. 565, fn. 4. Comnène quotes his report on the conversation in his Preludi del Grande Dramma (Rome 1947), pp. 37-40. Cf. Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 125-127, 163-165; Les Evénements, vol. IX, p. 2618.
3. Record of a talk between Alexandrovsky and Krofta, May 30, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 16, pp. 44-45.

the Rumanian government a commitment in advance would only ensure a categorical refusal.[1]

The British government, while neither concerned with Bonnet's soundings in east Europe, taken entirely on France's own initiative, nor apparently kept informed, had come up with disappointing results. Firebrace categorically affirmed that Poland would not permit the Soviets to cross. He considered Rumania an ineffective corridor.[2] Henderson agreed with Firebrace on Poland, but commented that Rumania might allow Russian airplanes, though not troops, to pass her territory.[3] The British embassy in Warsaw was informed of deliveries of Soviet bombers to Czechoslovakia; but also of Polish doubts on whether the Soviets were in a position to intervene in Europe. General Stachiewicz, Polish chief of staff, generally confirmed the British Moscow embassy's gloomy reports on the weakness of Soviet military strength.[4]

1. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 165.
2. Chilston to Halifax, Apr. 19, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 151, Enclosure, pp. 172-173. The Czech and French military attachés disagreed with Firebrace's assessment.
3. Henderson to Halifax, May 6, 1938, ibid., no. 184, p. 257.
4. Kennard to Halifax, June 14, 1938, ibid., no. 411 and Enclosure, pp. 481-484.

It would seem unrealistic to have expected Rumania, pressed by the major powers, to irrevocably commit itself on such a delicate issue as passage. The Germans were therefore told no Russo-Rumanian agreement existed. Although Berlin displayed intense concern over possible Soviet transit rights through Rumania, this was directed less at the Red army than at passage for the Soviet air force and overflights of purchased military aircraft to Czechoslovakia.[1] The Rumanians discreetly hedged with the Soviets. The Poles carried on inconclusive discussions to stiffen Rumanian resistance. While the Czechs, for whom the question was crucial, declared themselves satisfied with the attitude of their ally. The Rumanians thus managed to answer all enquiries; preserving an ambiguous attitude during peacetime, while reserving their freedom of manoeuvre in case of war.

It is clear that with such evidence, where opinion, report and rumour conflicted at every turn, Bonnet's exploration of the practical means of Soviet intervention only produced negative results. This was most apparent in Franco-Soviet relations, where the foreign minister used his information to justify a continued estrangement between the two countries.

1. See the catalogue of evidence from D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, quoted in S.I.A., 1938, vol. II, pp. 276, fn. 5, 280-281, fn. 5. Also, Lipski to Beck, June 19, 1938, Waclaw Jedrzejewicz, ed., Diplomat in Berlin, 1933-1939, Papers and Memoirs of Jozef Lipski (New York 1968), /hereafter: Lipski Papers and Memoirs/, pp. 372-373.

Nonetheless, this did not prevent Coulondre from attempting to by-pass the particular aspect of negotiating passage rights and propose instead the opening of direct Franco-Soviet staff talks, thereby adding a military convention to the 1935 pact. Coulondre was convinced that a united front of Britain, France and the USSR could have successfully discouraged Hitler from attacking Czechoslovakia. Sooner or later, he argued, the western powers would have to stand up to Hitler. Czechoslovakia represented the best focus, strategically and politically, for such a policy to be implemented. It was the only country on which Britain, France and Russia could co-ordinate their action. Moreover, dismissing the reservations voiced by most of the Moscow diplomatic corps, he firmly believed that if bound militarily the USSR would have effectively fulfilled her obligations; the defence of Czechoslovakia being in her own interest.[1]

Coulondre returned to Paris and was received by Bonnet on May 20. The foreign minister discussed his recent conversation with Litvinov, and then surprisingly agreed to initiate staff talks with the Soviets. Coulondre was to draft plans for the negotiations. A further meeting, however, saw Bonnet now bring out his arguments on Anglo-

1. Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 137-138, 140-141, 148, 177.

French military weakness, Poland's intransigence, and the ambiguities of Soviet policy; but he finally consented. Coulondre returned to Moscow and immediately informed Potemkin and Litvinov. Potemkin was reserved when told of the projected staff talks. Coulondre suspected the Soviets had received unfavourable news from Paris. On July 1 he learned that the planned Franco-Soviet staff talks were being abandoned. He was shown a report from the Czech minister in Paris. "Le Gouvernement français", Osusky wrote, "ne donne pas suite, pour le moment, aux projets de conversations militaires franco-soviétiques pour ne pas éveiller les susceptibilités des conservateurs anglais."[1]

One of the main reasons for this new hesitation in French policy had been the intervention of a war scare in the latter part of May 1938. This crisis, occasioned by rumours of German troop movements towards the Czech borders, gave rise to considerable diplomatic activity. While the nature of the crisis has since been disputed,[2] - at the

1. Ibid., pp. 142, 145-146, 152-153. Cf. Fischer, op.cit., pp. 539-540.
2. S.I.A., 1938, vol. II, pp. 122-131, 135-140; Gerhard L. Weinberg, "The May Crisis, 1938", Journal of Modern History, vol. XXIX, no. 3, Sept. 1957, pp. 213-225; William V. Wallace, "The Making of the May Crisis of 1938", Slavonic and East European Review, vol. XLI, no. 97, June 1963, pp. 368-390; D.C. Watt, "The May Crisis of 1938: A Rejoinder to Mr. Wallace", and William V. Wallace, "A Reply to Mr. Watt", Slavonic and East European Review, vol. XLIV, no. 103, July 1966, pp. 475-480, 481-486.

time the Berlin embassy considered the alleged military concentrations to be "a myth", though Chamberlain and the foreign office disagreed[1] - the reactions of the powers, the definitions of policy it elicited and the resulting decisions were extremely significant.

The British response was very carefully balanced. Henderson was instructed to firmly reiterate to Ribbentrop the March 24, parliamentary statement on possible British involvement.[2] In a subsequent "personal message" to the Reich foreign minister, Halifax cautioned him with the following reference to the Soviet Union: "Only those will benefit from such a catastrophe who wish to see destruction of European civilisation."[3] The Germans did in fact keep up their anti-Soviet propaganda. Prague was represented as strongly influenced by bolshevik ideas; while the Soviets were accused of endeavouring to create a new

1. Henderson to Halifax, June 30, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 458, p. 533; Letter from Henderson to Strang, June 7, 1938, ibid., no. 380, p. 450, fn. 1; Feiling, op.cit., p. 354. Cf. Krofta to Masaryk and Mastny, June 18, 1938, Koloman Gajan and Robert Kvacek, eds., Germany and Czechoslovakia, 1918-1945 (Prague 1965), pp. 133-134. Soviet contemporary opinion and post-war historiography have never doubted that Hitler was planning an attack. See e.g., Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 722-724; Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 140-151.
2. Halifax to Henderson, May 21, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 250, pp. 331-332.
3. Halifax to Henderson, May 22, 1938, ibid., no. 264, p. 341. Also, Minute by Weizsäcker, May 22, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 189, p. 319. Daladier likewise spoke to the German ambassador of "Cossack and Mongol hordes" pouring into Europe bringing communism in their wake. Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, May 23, 1938, ibid., no. 194, p. 327.

trouble spot in Czechoslovakia.[1]

Halifax's instructions to Phipps were designed to discourage France from resorting to force, thus lessening the dangers to Britain. Both Bonnet and Corbin were warned that while Britain would aid France if attacked, joint action to protect Czechoslovakia could not be assured. The military situation was such, Halifax argued, "that France and England, even with such assistance as might be expected from Russia, would not be in a position to prevent Germany over-running Czechoslovakia."[2] From the Moscow embassy came a report confirming this view. On May 22, the day the notes to Berlin and Paris were despatched, Vereker reiterated Chilston's opinion to the effect that it was "unlikely" the Soviet Union would come to Czechoslovakia's defence. Even if war broke out, Vereker believed the Soviets might remain uncommitted.[3]

Britain's firm warning to Paris had its desired effect. What is more, the reaction of Bonnet and Daladier illustrated the deep misgivings both had about the value of France's eastern treaties. Although an official press statement reiterated French loyalty to these obligations,

1. Henderson to Halifax, May 27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 324, p. 385.
2. Halifax to Phipps, May 22, 1938, ibid., no. 271, p. 347.
3. Vereker to Halifax, May 22, 1938, ibid., no. 270, p. 346.

the Czechs were urged to cancel further military measures. Privately the French ministers were more equivocal. Several times Bonnet threatened to revise the Franco-Czech pact.[1] He desperately feared having to face the alternative of breaking a treaty or beginning a new war. In the latter case, he lamented, France's only allies would be "Negrin [The Spanish Republican premier] and Stalin - a pretty pair."[2]

Despite later protestations of the consistency and firmness of their stand, the reaction of the Soviet government during the crisis was most enigmatic. From May 20 - 25 there appeared in the official press no comment as to what action would be taken.[3] According to Schulenburg, the press had been very reserved on the Sudeten question, and Litvinov, in fact, counselled Fierlinger to urge a compromise settlement in Prague. Krofta believed that the Czech communists had been advised from Moscow to

1. Phipps to Halifax, May 23, 1938, ibid., no. 286, p. 357; Bullitt to Hull, May 24, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 518; Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, May 26, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 210, p. 344.
2. Halifax to Newton, May 16, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 219, p. 299, fn. 2; Bullitt to Hull, May 22, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 514.
3. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 22, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 261, p. 424; Draft Memorandum by Tippelskirch to German Foreign Ministry, July 5, 1938, ibid., no. 280, pp. 467-469; Vereker to Halifax, May 22, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 270, p. 346.

maintain a moderate attitude.[1] Nor was there any suggestion that the Red army would march in the event of an invasion of Czechoslovakia. An alleged Comintern wireless broadcast that thirty thousand Soviet bombers would appear over Berlin in case of war had been vigorously denied.by Tass. Both the British and German embassies remarked on this reluctance to categorically reaffirm Soviet obligations.[2] Nonetheless, the weeks prior to the May crisis did witness several policy statements by Soviet leaders and press. In early May Voroshilov declared that in face of the threatening European situation the Red army would increase its fighting capacity. On May 1 Izvestia accused European "bourgeois governments" of complying with fascist aggression in preparation for a war against the USSR.[3] Firebrace noted, in fact, that a war mentality was being purposely cultivated in the army and among the civilian population.[4] A Czech Labour delegation, visiting Moscow

1. Letter from Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, May 27, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 213, p. 348; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 22, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 261, p. 424; Newton to Halifax, May 25, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 314, pp. 377-378.
2. Vereker to Halifax, May 10, 22, 1938, ibid., nos. 202, 270, pp. 280-281, 346; Letter from Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, May 27, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 213, p. 348. The statement in Fischer, op.cit., p. 466, that Russia advised Czechoslovakia to order a mobilization on May 21 is not taken up by Soviet historiography.
3. See excerpts quoted in Coates, vol. I, pp. 586-587.
4. Vereker to Halifax, May 31, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 355, Enclosure, p. 424.

for the May Day celebrations, received a personal assurance from Kalinin. He declared that the Soviet Union had invariably fulfilled its treaties. It would "if called upon, fulfil to the last letter all its obligations to Czechoslovakia and France." Kalinin observed, however, that if the treaties binding France, Czechoslovakia and the USSR were firmly established, "it would also influence England to follow a different course in her policy...."[1] This statement was given "considerable attention" in the Czech press, and was seen as proof the USSR was not becoming isolationist.[2] However, Vereker also noticed that the anniversary of the Czech-Soviet pact on May 16, in previous years the subject of enthusiastic press comment, had been passed over in silence.[3] Finally, it was later revealed that Stalin gave Klement Gottwald, leader of the Czech Communist party, a personal pledge of Soviet loyalty to the Czech-Soviet pact to be passed on to Benes. Stalin promised military aid to Czechoslovakia "even in the event of Beck's Poland or Boyar Rumania ... refusing passage to Soviet troops."[4]

1. Quoted in D.I.A., 1938, vol. II, p. 139.
2. Newton to Halifax, May 12, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 210, pp. 288-289.
3. Vereker to Halifax, May 22, 1938, ibid., no. 270, p. 346.
4. Pravda, Dec. 28, 1949. The article by Gottwald is quoted in Rothstein, op.cit., p. 175. Stalin's promise is highly debatable. Litvinov in 1938 and Voroshilov in 1939 always maintained the Soviets would not force a passage. Otherwise, military aid via sea and through western Europe, mentioned as a possibility by Potemkin in conversations with the French on February 17, 1937, seems a very time consuming and ineffective procedure. Gamelin, vol. II, p. 285.

The crisis having passed so quickly, however, the Soviet Union, like Britain and France, was not called upon to implement any commitments. The first indication of the official Soviet reaction was the approval voiced on May 25 by Litvinov to Fierlinger of the measures adopted by the Czechoslovak government.[1] On the same day the Soviet ambassador to the USA, Alexander Troyanovsky, elaborated Russia's views:

> ... we cannot wash our hands of the present European situation. We have our principles and we are tied by our treaties. We will be faithful to those principles and those treaties. We are ready with France to defend Czechoslovakia in the event of aggression. We are ready to defend France itself. We shall perhaps be summoned to defend other Great Powers. We do not want to be isolated in international affairs. A firm stand against the aggressors is the fundamental solution of the present international tension.[2]

During the following days the Soviet press published articles in the same sense.[3] On May 26 Izvestia's diplomatic correspondent acknowledged the effectiveness of British and French diplomatic moves. "The fact that nobody doubted the loyalty of the Soviet Union to the obligations undertaken by it naturally played a considerable

1. Letter from Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 14, p. 39. Cf. Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 733.
2. Quoted in D.I.A., 1938, vol. I (London 1942), p. 315.
3. See excerpts in Rothstein, op.cit., p. 175; Beloff, vol. II, p. 133; Duroselle, op.cit., p. 68; Borisov, op.cit., p. 383.

role" in convincing Hitler to postpone his aggressive plans.[1] This analysis argues indirectly that the clarity of Soviet intentions made it unnecessary to repeat its assurances during the crisis. A later article in Pravda set the tone for future debate by declaring the May crisis "showed that an aggressor can only be restrained by collective action".[2] Thus Maisky argues retrospectively: "If in May Hitler backed away as the result of uncoordinated diplomatic démarches by Britain, France and the U.S.S.R., then in face of the three powers united (and of the eventual employment of non-diplomatic means), he certainly would not have risked going ahead.[3] This, in fact, is the view of the crisis taken since by all Soviet historiography.[4]

The opinion of the foreign diplomatic corps in Moscow was more sceptical as to the role the Soviets might play in a European conflict. They generally dismissed what Tippelskirch described as Soviet-Czech attempts "to give

1. Quoted in Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 22, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 261, p. 424. See also, the article by "Politicus" in Moscow News, June 1, 1938.
2. Pravda, Aug. 30, 1938, quoted in Beloff, vol. II, p. 41.
3. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part II, p. 26. Maisky was on leave from mid-May until late July. During his absence, Lloyd George expressed fear as to the possibility of the ambassador being arrested. Fischer, op.cit., p. 504.
4. The Soviet government has not yet published any document proving it took diplomatic action during the crisis. Cf. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 57; Beloff, vol. II, p. 132.

after the event, a new and false interpretation to the course of the Czechoslovak crisis or to the part played in it by the Soviet Union...."[1] The British embassy could not confirm reports that the Kiev military district had actually been strengthened.[2] Schulenburg believed the crisis proved that in the event of a Czech-German war Russia would initially be "unwilling to commit itself or show its hand." The usual reasons of strained internal conditions and fear of a two-front war were adduced.[3] Firebrace likewise concluded that the Soviet Union would "find any pretext to avoid the necessity of having to fulfil its engagements to Czechoslovakia and France."[4]

The Soviet government was not alone in propounding the view that the May crisis was a diplomatic defeat for Hitler. British and French press and public opinion jubilantly argued that Hitler's bluff had been called. "The protagonists of collective security proclaimed the

1. Draft Memorandum by Tippelskirch, July 5, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 280, p. 468.
2. Vereker to Halifax, May 31, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 355, Enclosure, p. 424.
3. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 22, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 261, pp. 425-426. Cf. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, May 30, Aug. 26, 1938, ibid., nos. 222, 396, pp. 363-364, 631.
4. Vereker to Halifax, May 31, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 355, Enclosure, p. 424. This opinion was also shared by the Italian ambassador, Augusto Rosso. Entry of Aug. 29, 1938, Galeazzo Ciano, Diary, 1937-1938 (London 1952), p. 148.

victory of their system."[1] This interpretation unfortunately served to hasten two critical developments.

First, Hitler reacted swiftly to his supposed diplomatic defeat. He now added a definite strategy and timetable to the war of nerves. On May 30 he decided that Czechoslovakia would have to be smashed. The latest date for the attack was October 1. The directive for operation "green" assumed that Russia would probably give Czechoslovakia military support, particularly with her air force.[2] In the general strategic directive drafted for Hitler by the general staff on June 18 and July 7, the likelihood of Soviet intervention was reiterated. It even envisaged a separate naval and air war against Germany.[3] This would suggest that Hitler had a lot more respect for the Soviet Union in a military sense than his diplomatic information warranted.

The second and more important result of the May crisis concerned its reaction on British diplomatic thought

1. Henderson, Failure of a Mission, p. 142. Coulondre op.cit., p. 150, despite his advocacy of united Anglo-French-Soviet action criticized the press for hailing an allied triumph, thereby making Hitler's prestige an issue.
2. Directive for Operation "Green" from Hitler to the Commanders in Chief, May 30, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 221, p. 359.
3. General Strategic Directive, June 18, July 7, 1938, ibid., no. 282, p. 476. The warning on Soviet intervention echoed General Beck's memorandum of May 7, 1938, quoted in Robert J. O'Neill, The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939 (London 1966), pp. 152-154. Cf. Robertson, op.cit., pp. 125-129; Newton to Halifax, Nov. 1, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 286, p. 254.

regarding Czechoslovakia. The démarche in Berlin seemed to enlarge even further Britain's role in the central European crisis. This increased involvement produced a definite inclination towards intensified appeasement. Having found themselves once so close to war with the Soviet Union as a potential ally, Chamberlain and Halifax resolved to discourage any such repetition. The publicity given to what was regarded as a successful exercise in collective security ironically seemed to insure the final defeat of that system. The implication of subsequent developments further edged the Soviet Union towards isolation and produced a definite estrangement in Anglo-Soviet relations. Above all, the anxiety and misgiving over the cluster of Franco-Soviet-Czech treaties, in the British view a major irritant to further pacification, heightened demand for a substantial reform in Czech foreign policy. Although Russia's alliances were to be altered, her opinions were not canvassed nor her diplomats informed.[1]

British reaction was almost immediate. On May 25 Masaryk called on Halifax. The foreign secretary divided

1. In analyzing this phase of Anglo-Soviet relations, Soviet historians interpret British plans to neutralize Czechoslovakia as further evidence of western attempts to isolate the USSR. Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 151-158, 177, discusses this at length.

the Czech situation in two distinct elements: the "internal side" - the Sudeten question; and the "external side of policy" - the treaty structure of the Czech state.[1] For the next three months British diplomacy in central Europe proceeded with suggestions applicable to both elements. As to the Sudeten problem, not the main concern here, policy developed dramatically from June, when London increased pressure on Benes to seek a solution in bilateral talks with the Sudetendeutsche Partei. Steps were then initiated which resulted in a parliamentary statement on July 26, naming Lord Runciman to mediate in the dispute.[2]

The question of Czechoslovakia's relations with France and the USSR pre-occupied the foreign office. It revealed much about their views on the political structure of central Europe and indirectly about the USSR. During the talk with Masaryk, Halifax suggested that Czechoslovakia adopt a policy of neutrality.[3] He admitted Prague could not abandon the French and Soviet pacts "at the naked

1. Halifax to Newton, May 25, 1938, ibid., no. 315, pp. 378-379.
2. Details in S.I.A., 1938, vol. II, pp. 177-187, 192ff.
3. The possible neutralization of Czechoslovakia had been proposed by both Henderson and Newton, and considered by Chamberlain in March 1938. See above, pp. 83-85.

dictation" of Germany. But neutralization would above all get rid of a particular "source of German resentment." In return Czechoslovakia could be guaranteed by its neighbours.[1]

Finally, Halifax turned to the problem of German economic penetration in eastern Europe. This had been mentioned during the Anglo-French talks in April. On May 3 Henderson had suggested Halifax publicly state that Britain had "no intention to hamper Germany's legitimate economic freedom of action in Central or Eastern Europe." Henderson personally was "only too glad to wish that she /Germany/ should look eastwards instead of westwards." Halifax assured Masaryk, as he had replied to Henderson,[2] that Britain would attempt to strengthen Czechoslovakia and other countries in south-east Europe against the threat of German economic domination.

This suggestion fully coincided with Chamberlain's views on the timing of economic versus political appeasement. In November 1937 he wrote to Simon: "I disagree with those who think you can solve political difficulties by removing economic thorns from the flesh. Politics in international affairs governs actions at the expense of

1. Halifax to Newton, May 25, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 315, pp. 378-379.
2. Letter from Henderson to Halifax, May 3, 1938, ibid., appendix 1, pp. 626-627; Letter from Halifax to Henderson, May 12, 1938, ibid., p. 628.

economics...."[1] Chamberlain's policies in 1938 illustrate this conviction that political appeasement would precede economic concessions. Meanwhile Britain would maintain its economic interests in eastern Europe. In June the prime minister was actually convinced that the Germans "have missed the bus and may never again have such a favourable chance of asserting their domination over Central and Eastern Europe."[2] However, the apparent lack of British initiative and the speed of German economic penetration caused concern.[3] Many interpreted this as a sanctioning by Chamberlain of an eventual German political domination in eastern Europe.[4] It was privately intimated to Berlin that the British government was prepared to see it "exercise large-scale policy" in south-east Europe.[5]

1. Quoted in Gilbert, Roots of Appeasement, p. 157. For the background of economic appeasement, see ibid., pp. 151-158; and Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, The Appeasers (London 1963), pp. 189-197.
2. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, June 18, 1938, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
3. See e.g., Letter from Robert Boothby to Oliver Stanley [president of the board of trade], May 17, 1938, Lloyd George Papers, G/3/13/9; H.C. Deb., vol. 337, June 15, 1938, cols. 252-254.
4. This view is, of course, fundamental to Soviet historiography. See also, Gheorghe Zaharia, "Sur la Politique Extérieure de la Roumanie Avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale", Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, vol. XVIII, no. 70, Apr. 1968, pp. 10-11; Viorica Moisuc, "Orientations dans la Politique Extérieure de la Roumanie Après le Pacte de Munich", Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, vol. V, no. 2, 1966, [hereafter: Moisuc, "Roumanie Après Munich"], p. 333, fn. 21.
5. Kordt to Weizsäcker, Aug. 23, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 382, Enclosure, pp. 608-609.

Halifax's remarks to Masaryk became the framework for all subsequent discussions on reforming Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. Newton's response to these ideas was one of extreme caution. The "root problem" of Czech-German relations, he asserted, was the existence of a "Slav State thrust into the heart of Germany" and allied with various foreign powers. A solution to this problem would in fact take "the sting" out of the Sudeten question. However, Newton warned that the German government was using the minority dispute to strengthen its political and military position. The primary aim was to expel the Soviet Union from central Europe. Czechoslovak neutrality would leave Germany dominant in that area, in command of a corridor through Slovakia leading eastwards.[1]

Newton's cautionary note went completely unheeded as Halifax pressed forward. On June 9 the foreign office sent Phipps, Henderson and Newton a memorandum outlining current views on the possibility of neutralizing Czechoslovakia. The objectives of such a policy were: the removal of what Germany considered to be Prague's anti-German treaties; the substitution of an effective guarantee; and freeing France from her dilemma of either

1. Notes by Strang, May 26-27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 349, pp. 403-405.

breaking her pledged word or fighting a war in unfavourable circumstances. The memorandum recognized that Germany would definitely object to Russia being included as a guarantor power.[1]

British suggestions for a reform of Czechoslovakia's external policies had by mid-June run far ahead of French thinking on the subject. The views put to the quai d'orsay differed from the foreign office memorandum in that Halifax suggested the Franco-Czech and Soviet-Czech treaties be so modified, as to relieve Czechoslovakia of her obligations to assist France and the Soviet Union in case of a German attack. Germany would also undertake not to infringe Czechoslovakia's integrity. British participation in any guarantee capacity was conclusively rejected and suggestions to this effect discouraged.[2]

French reaction confirmed that Daladier and Bonnet were not as yet contemplating such drastic action. A neutralized Czechoslovakia would mean a reconstruction of French foreign policy and a shift in the European balance of power. It could only be undertaken as a last resort. Bonnet delayed his reply until August.[3] He then declared

1. Foreign Office Memorandum, ibid., appendix IV, pp. 647-652.
2. Halifax to Phipps, June 17, 1938, ibid., no. 421, pp. 496-498; Halifax to Henderson, June 9, 1938, ibid., no. 387, p. 458. Cf. Phipps to Halifax, June 8, 1938, ibid., no. 381, p. 452; Henderson to Halifax, June 10, 1938, ibid., no. 391, pp. 460-461.
3. Phipps to Halifax, June 18, July 1, 2, 1938, ibid., nos. 429, 462, 466, pp. 503, 536, 539.

that he was "strongly opposed to discussion of the matter" until events had rendered it necessary.[1]

During June and July enthusiastic support for Czechoslovakia's neutralization had continued to come from the Berlin and Paris embassies. Henderson believed that the Soviet-Czech treaty was the "crux of the situation." Benes' claim that Czechoslovakia represented the last bastion against Germany's eastward expansion was dismissed. "There can never be appeasement in Europe", Henderson argued, "so long as Czechoslovakia remains the link with Moscow and hostile to Germany."[2] Phipps, in discussions with Bonnet and in comments to London, expressed his complete agreement with these views. He told Bonnet that, while ambassador in Berlin, the "fact that Czechoslovakia was allied to the Soviets seemed to fill the Nazis with fury".[3]

With such ideas current, it is not surprising that in July Henderson proposed that a four power conference of Britain, France, Germany and Italy be convened.[4] The idea seems to have been generally current during the spring

1. Campbell to Halifax, Aug. 10, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 601, p. 73, See also, Letter from Campbell to Sargent, Aug. 13, 1938, ibid., no. 626, pp. 95-97.
2. Henderson to Halifax, July 1, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 459, p. 535; Letter from Henderson to Cadogan, July 22, 1938, ibid., no. 534, p. 618.
3. Phipps to Halifax, July 2, 1938, ibid., no. 466, p. 539.
4. Henderson to Halifax, July 22, 1938, ibid., no. 532, p. 614; Henderson, Failure of a Mission, p. 144.

and summer.[1] However, on this occasion Henderson's suggestion was flatly turned down by Strang, acting on Halifax's instructions. Strang pointed out that Italian participation would make it difficult to exclude Russia from the conference. It would also "admit the thin end of the German wedge for keeping... [Russia] out of Europe altogether, and this is clearly not an aspect of German policy which we wish to encourage."[2] Rumours during the summer of a possible Nazi-Soviet rapprochement[3] may account for the foreign office's reaction.

Taken at face value this initial rejection is one of the clearest expressions of British attitude towards the USSR during these months. But diplomatic activity continued in general contradiction to this. Henderson, for example, would not take no for an answer. During a crisis there might not be time to invite Russia or Poland; nor were these powers responsible for the creation of Czechoslovakia. By confining a conference only to those original Versailles powers, Henderson argued, the USSR could be excluded.[4] Similarly, British pressure in Paris,

1. See Notes by Strang, May 26-27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 349, pp. 408-409; Diary Entry of June 15, 1938, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 347; Arthur Marwick, Clifford Allen, The Open Conspirator (Edinburgh 1964), pp. 178-187, 202.
2. Henderson to Halifax, July 22, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 532, fn. 3. Vansittart expressed himself even more forcefully against Henderson's views. See Minute of July 25, 1938, Vansittart Papers.
3. See below, pp. 142-143.
4. Letter from Henderson to Strang, Aug. 2, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 568, p. 36; Letter from Henderson to Halifax, Sept. 4, 1938, ibid., no. 771, p. 239.

advocating a neutralized Czechoslovakia and an imposed great power settlement, continued even while Runciman pursued his mediation efforts. And finally, hints and rumours on the convening of a new four power conference persisted abroad among British and foreign diplomats.[1]

On the British side such activity and conversation could not have circulated without some sort of acquiescence from the prime minister. In general terms, such notions as a four power conference and redressing German grievances, given that Benes' Soviet and French treaties irritated Hitler, were approved of by Chamberlain. He assumed that an Anglo-German agreement was the cornerstone of a European settlement.

Herbert von Dirksen reported on the state of Anglo-German relations soon after his appointment as ambassador in London. He considered the Chamberlain government to have displayed the "maximum understanding" of German demands not only on the Sudeten question, but also with respect to "excluding the Soviet Union from the decision of the destinies of Europe, the League of Nations likewise, and the advisability of bilateral negotiations and treaties." The prime minister "agreed in outspoken terms" with his

1. See e.g., Newton to Halifax, Aug. 13, 23, 1938, ibid., nos. 615, 675, pp. 88, 143; Henderson to Halifax, Aug. 27, 1938, ibid., no. 703, p. 172; Moltke to German Foreign Ministry, July 9, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 287, p. 483.

critical exposition of Soviet economic and political weakness. Chamberlain's "dislike of the Soviet Union was unmistakable."[1] In a subsequent despatch Dirksen again referred to Chamberlain's views on the USSR as illustrating the low opinion the government had of Russia. Its attitude towards the Franco-Soviet pact was more critical than before. The British public considered Russia to have "cut herself off from power politics by Stalin's purges." Dirksen felt that Britain would try to exclude Moscow from any discussion of a European settlement.[2]

If the German ambassador was aware of the trend of British thought on Anglo-Soviet relations, the Soviets obviously were no less well informed. Their information led Litvinov, Stalin and Maisky to expressions of suspicion of British motives and tactics, coupled with ominous references to Soviet isolation and freedom of action.

Litvinov met Halifax during the League meetings in May. The Soviet foreign commissar mentioned his March 17 proposals, and "frankly criticised the whole British tactics in respect of Germany." In the Soviet view Hitler was interested solely in strategic and economic conquest in Europe. Halifax replied that he would consider these

1. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, July 10, 1938, Documents and Materials, vol. II, no. 4, p. 34; Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, June 23, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 266, p. 434.
2. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, July 14, 1938, ibid., no. 290, p. 486.

arguments.[1]

On June 5, during a surprise interview with Davies, Stalin declared that the Chamberlain government was determined to strengthen Germany and force France into a position of dependence upon Britain, "with the purpose of ultimately making Germany strong as against Russia." Stalin concluded that Chamberlain would fail and that the Soviet Union was confident it could defend itself.[2] Fierlinger confirmed that in the kremlin disbelief in Anglo-French readiness to defend Czechoslovakia was leading to a reserved attitude.[3] However, on June 9 at a reception for Davies, Litvinov examined with Coulondre and Fierlinger a "number of concrete questions for the organization of Soviet aid" to Czechoslovakia.[4]

Stalin's note of self-sufficient independence was developed further by Litvinov in a speech on June 23. He criticized the diplomacy of the western powers, especially their failure to respond favourably to Russia's post-Anschluss proposals. The Czech-Soviet pact was

1. Letter from Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 14, pp. 40-41. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 171, also heard a description of this conversation from Litvinov. There exists no published British document on the Geneva meeting, although the cabinet was informed on May 18. Halifax to Newton, May 16, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. I, no. 219, p. 299, fn. 2.
2. Davies to Secretary of State, June 9, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, p. 572. Cf. Davies, op.cit., pp. 219-226, 229-233; Entry of June 11, 1938, Szembek, op.cit., p. 318.
3. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 157.
4. Zdenek Fierlinger, Ve Službách ČSR, vol.I (Prague 1947), p. 108, quoted in Borisov, op.cit., pp. 383-384.

singled out as the "most, if not the sole, important factor in relieving the tension around Czechoslovakia." The Soviet government had no intention of giving the Czechs any unsolicited advice, but hoped for a peaceful and honourable settlement. The speech, however, concluded with an ominous warning. While not indifferent to international events, the Soviet Union was not responsible, "asks nothing for itself, [and] does not wish to impose itself on anybody as partner or ally...." Litvinov instructed that his comments on the Czech-Soviet pact should be transmitted to Benes as a "precise definition" of the Soviet Union's attitude to the Czechoslovak-German conflict.[1]

Foreign observers in Moscow found much to comment upon in Litvinov's speech. Alexander Kirk, counsellor in the U.S. embassy, warned the state department that the Soviet government might totally withdraw its efforts at international co-operation.[2] What Schulenburg found most intriguing was the attempt to arrive at an objective attitude towards German-Soviet relations. He traced this to Litvinov's disillusionment over the failure of his policy of collaboration with the democracies and the League. The kremlin would henceforth decide in each case whether its

1. Speech quoted in Degras, vol. III, pp. 282-294. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, June 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 20, pp. 53-54.
2. Kirk to Hull, July 9, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 588-589.

interests required co-operation with Britain and France.[1]

The whole tone and content of Litvinov's speech has sometimes been adduced as evidence of hints for a rapprochement with Nazi Germany.[2] Reference is also made to remarks in the same sense, attributed to Alexei Merekalov, the newly appointed Soviet ambassador to Berlin, and to E.A. Gnedin, chief of the press section of the narkomindel.[3] It is possible, as already indicated, to attempt to predate the Nazi-Soviet rapprochement to various points after 1935. However, to conclude that in June 1938 the USSR had decided upon an isolationist policy is unwarranted. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Hitler at this time considered altering his policy of hostility towards Russia. It does appear that after the rejection of the March 17 conference proposal Litvinov's policy of collaboration with the democracies was under review. In general the mixture in Soviet foreign policy continued during July and August much as before.

British efforts to produce a compromise settlement of the Sudeten question were regarded suspiciously in Moscow.

1. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 27, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 627, pp. 922-924; Memorandum by Schulenburg, June 23, 1938, ibid., no. 630, pp. 928-929. Cf. Letter from Chilston to Collier, Aug. 23, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 673, p. 141, fn. 3.
2. Max Beloff, "Soviet Foreign Policy 1928-1941: Some Notes", Soviet Studies, vol. II, no. 2, Oct. 1950, pp. 128-129.
3. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 18, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. I, no. 624, pp. 918-919; Schulenburg to Weizsäcker, June 23, 1938, ibid., no. 626, pp. 920-921.

Chamberlain's reported comments on Russia to American journalists, western attempts to play down the 'success' of the May crisis, press suggestions for a neutralized Czechoslovakia, and the Weidemann visit to London could not have increased confidence. The Runciman mission, about which the Soviets were neither consulted nor informed, was strenuously criticized. Suritz twice urged Bonnet to oppose Runciman's departure for Prague, claiming his purpose was not to advise but to arbitrate.[1] Alexandrovsky also advised the Czech government against accepting mediation as contrary to the general interest.[2] On the instructions of the narkomindel he had earlier warned Krofta of the "danger of the proposal for the neutralization of Czechoslovakia".[3] The Soviet press declared that Runciman's purpose was to rid Prague of its foreign alliances, thereby reducing it to a state of helplessness.[4] Moreover, the estimate of his capabilities and aims, given by Maisky to the narkomindel, could not have reassured Litvinov as to the mission's outcome.

1. Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 10, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 345, p. 548.
2. Hencke to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 13, 1938, ibid., no. 353, p. 560. Both the Russian warnings are confirmed in Borisov, op.cit., pp. 384-385.
3. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 727.
4. W.P. and Zelda K. Coates, World Affairs and the U.S.S.R. (London 1939), p. XIV; Beloff, vol. II, p. 139. Cf. "Great Patriotic War", part II, p. 105.

Maisky described its purpose as one of "carrying on the Chamberlain line", that is, friendship with Hitler and concessions from Prague.[1]

Such a view expressed precisely the deep suspicion with which the Soviets followed events in central Europe. A British mediator in Prague, intent on pacification and not resistance, seemed to confirm their worst fears. It emphasized, too, the extent of British involvement in the dispute, with a consequent subordination of French policy to British interests. These issues were taken up by Suritz in a despatch to the narkomindel on July 27, 1938. The French government, he wrote,

> least of all in its Czechoslovak policy takes into consideration assistance from the USSR. Not a single decision which so far has been taken on the Czechoslovak question ... was not once discussed with us beforehand and neither was it coordinated, nor brought to our notice (and this not always) except post facto. Despite the presence of the Soviet-French pact, the presence of the parallel pacts with Czechoslovakia, bound mutually between themselves and supplementing each other, the leaders of French foreign policy not once proposed seriously to begin a practical discussion of the question arising from our pact.

According to Suritz, Daladier considered "collaboration with England is the most stable and firmest element in the

1. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 25. Maisky knew Runciman as president of the board of trade during the Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations of 1932-34. He described Runciman as "deaf, ponderous and even somewhat ignorant of where Czechoslovakia was". Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 78. See also, Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 174-199.

entire French foreign policy system of recent time."[1] For the Soviets such a development could only mean a continued erosion of French obligations in eastern Europe, leading to an eventual Anglo-German rapprochement.

In a seemingly final attempt to thwart these developments, the Soviet government embarked in mid-August on a diplomatic offensive, at once confident, critical, and intended "once again to appeal to the common sense" of the French and British.[2] During an interview with Halifax, Maisky discussed the state of Anglo-Soviet relations. He described the disappointment of the Soviet government at what was considered the "undue weakness" of the western democracies. The proper way to deal with Germany had been illustrated during the May crisis. "It was of great importance that an absolutely firm front should be shown to Germany and Italy...." As to future policy, he regretted Britain could not be more precise than the March 24 statement, but added that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia the Soviet government would "'certainly do their bit.'"[3] He elaborated similar views on August 17 to the U.S. chargé d'affaires, Herschel Johnson. The latter remarked

1. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 727-728.
2. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? loc.cit.
3. Halifax to Chilston, Aug. 17, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 637, p. 107. In a conversation with Lloyd George at the Commons, Maisky agreed that neither Britain nor France would effectively defend Czechoslovakia. See Diary Entry of Aug. 20, 1938, Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 25.

on Maisky's presenting a "most curious impression of self-confidence".[1]

Maisky repeated a few days later to Harold Nicolson the assurance of the Soviet Union playing its role. On this occasion he did add the recurrent admonition that if Britain abandoned Czechoslovakia the Soviets would become isolationist. When the conversation was repeated to Lord De La Warr, lord privy seal, Nicolson was asked to make a record of it for transmission to Vansittart.[2]

Parallel with Maisky's efforts, Suritz "pestered" Bonnet to show more firmness on Czechoslovakia and to urge London to do likewise. The Soviet ambassador regretted that France consulted Britain more than his own government.[3] In Moscow Litvinov discussed the same questions with the German ambassador on August 22. Litvinov reiterated Soviet views on the real aims of Hitler in Czechoslovakia, but emphasized that Russia regarded the Sudeten question as an internal Czech affair. If it came to war, France would mobilize and Britain would follow. "The British Government could no longer retreat, even if Chamberlain wanted to do so." The Soviet Union "would keep her word

1. Johnson to Hull, Aug. 17, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 548. See also, Johnson to Hull, Aug. 18, 1938, ibid., pp. 65-68.
2. Diary Entries of Aug. 22, 26, 1938, Nicolson, vol. I, pp. 356-358. The entry of Aug. 26 continued: "The point being that if Maisky can be induced to promise Russian support if we take a strong line over Czechoslovakia, the weak will of the Prime Minister may be strengthened."
3. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 2, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 751, pp. 219-220.

and do her best." As to the practical means of Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia, Litvinov refused to be committed. When pressed again a few days later, he gave the impression that Rumanian fears of Germany might make her more pliable on the question of passage.[1] Reports of these meetings were circulated by the narkomindel, presumably intended as a statement of policy.[2]

There was at this stage no contact between the British Moscow embassy and the narkomindel. However, as communication between the British and German embassies was good, especially among the junior members, Chilston was kept well informed of Litvinov's views. He was told of the latter's discussions with Schulenburg and communicated the substance of that information to London.[3]

It seems clear that with the views put forward by Maisky, Suritz and Litvinov, the Soviets had again restated

1. Schulenburg to Woermann, Aug. 22, 29, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, nos. 380, 403, pp. 601, 654; Memorandum by Schulenburg, Aug. 23, 1938, ibid., no. 381, p. 604; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 26, 27, 1938, ibid., nos. 396-397, pp. 629-631. In the Russian record of the August 22 conversation Litvinov replied the USSR would do "everything in its power". Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 314. Cf. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky and Merekalov, Aug. 22, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 24, p. 59.
2. Note by Ashton-Gwatkin, Aug. 26, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 698, pp. 167-168; Newton to Halifax, Aug. 26, 1938, ibid., no. 693, p. 164.
3. Letter from Chilston to Collier, Aug. 23, 1938, ibid., no. 673, pp. 140-141 and fn. 3; Chilston to Halifax, Aug. 29, 1938, ibid., no. 708, p. 179.

their position. This new assertiveness was partly due to confidence resulting from a military victory over the Japanese in the far east. The Changkufeng incident had produced a flare-up ending in a Soviet victory on August 13.[1] Freed from this threat of war on the eastern border, the Soviet government had turned its attention to European events. The emphasis was then put on trying to stiffen the resistance of the western democracies. Thus Soviet diplomats asserted that Britain and France would definitely respond to an act of German aggression. Previously, an Anglo-French betrayal of Czechoslovakia was the usual prediction. On August 30 Pravda confidently declared that only collective action would be effective.[2] Private diplomatic assurances on Soviet fidelity to all treaty obligations were coupled with vague warnings as to a possible retreat into isolationism. The British response to these declarations, however, was totally influenced by the new turn of events on the continent.

1. Erickson, op.cit., pp. 494-497.
2. Beloff, vol. II, p. 141.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEPTEMBER 1938

During August the crisis in central Europe worsened considerably. The Runciman mission, overwhelmed by the complexity of its task and bogged down in detail, exhibited only slow progress. The Sudetendeutsche Partei pressed for full implementation of the Carlsbad programme, including the neutralization of Czechoslovakia.[1] It was widely assumed that Hitler would eventually declare the mission futile and intensify the propaganda campaign against Czechoslovakia - the prelude to direct action. Concurrently, the foreign office received disturbing information on developments in Germany. Secret sources reported to London details of German plans for a partial mobilization in September and emphasized the seriousness of Hitler's military preparations.[2] It was widely suggested that Britain must again renew its warning to Germany.

As Chamberlain later explained, these reports invited two contradictory interpretations. Private information tended to "declare positively that Herr Hitler has made up

1. A Memorandum by Ashton-Gwatkin, Aug. 24, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, appendix II, pp. 660-661, envisaged both neutralization and a great power conference as future possibilities.
2. See e.g., Unofficial German Approaches, Aug.-Sept. 1938, ibid., appendix IV, pp. 683-692; Letter from Boothby to Chamberlain, Aug. 28, 1938, Lloyd George Papers, G/3/13/9; Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office (London 1965), pp. 216-236.

his mind to attack Czecho-Slovakia and then to proceed further East." On the other hand, Henderson steadily maintained that Hitler had not yet decided but would press for a solution by the end of September, preferably by peaceful means.[1] In face of such contradictory evidence and the general urgency of the situation the cabinet needed to act. Any step that was contemplated derived from two alternative suppositions. If Hitler was determined on war, defence preparations must be speeded up and a declaration publicized that an invasion of Czechoslovakia would mean war with Britain. However, were Hitler undecided the government "could continue to keep him guessing."[2] Chamberlain opted for what he termed the "more optimistic forecast"[3] of Hitler's intentions, that is, Henderson's view and the policy of keeping Hitler guessing. This decision effectively ensured the continued political isolation of the USSR from European developments.

The exact form to be given to any warning to Germany was then sought. During his August 17 interview with Maisky, Halifax disdained warning Germany along the lines of the May 21 démarche. Writing to the foreign secretary

1. Letter from Chamberlain to King George VI, Sept. 13, 1938, quoted in John W. Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI: His Life and Reign (London 1958), [hereafter: Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI], pp. 346-347.
2. Duff Cooper, op.cit., p. 224.
3. Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI, p. 347.

two days later, Chamberlain reiterated his doubts as to whether Hitler had yet made up his mind. Vansittart's suggestion that a declaration be made "'more explicit' than on May 21", he rejected.[1] Instead, by August 24 he had decided to remind Germany "again, and more sharply" of the consequences of a resort to force.[2] This was accomplished in a major speech by Simon, delivered on August 27 at Lanark.[3] However consistent with Chamberlain's policy, declared first on March 24, 1938, of not committing Britain in advance, the speech had little effect.[4]

As the crisis worsened, it is clear that government debate on the nature of Hitler's intentions and the action needed to counter them did not abate. The tension between the two suppositions before cabinet ministers outlined above increased throughout September and divided the cabinet. Much of the disagreement eventually affected Halifax. He seemed to partly share the misgivings besetting several other ministers as to the correctness of Chamberlain's policies. He questioned whether Germany's real objective was Sudeten self-determination, or whether Hitler aimed at

1. Letter from Chamberlain to Halifax, Aug. 19, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, appendix IV, p. 686; Colvin, op.cit., pp. 221-222.
2. Robert Boothby, I Fight to Live (London 1947), /hereafter: Boothby, Fight to Live/, pp. 155-156. Cf. Lord Boothby, My Yesterday, Your Tomorrow (London 1962), pp. 126-127.
3. Text in D.I.A., 1938, vol. I, pp. 89-91.
4. Henderson to Halifax, Sept. 2, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 745, p. 214.

the destruction of Czechoslovakia.[1] And finally, Halifax was mainly responsible for the only direct overture Britain made to the USSR throughout the crisis.[2]

From the Soviet point of view doubts about Germany always prevailed. Chamberlain's actions had not gained their approval, nor his views of Hitler's intentions, their agreement. They had decided opinions and plans, which Litvinov had specifically proposed since March, on the necessary measures to counter Hitler's activities. Russian reaction to Simon's speech was predictable. Pravda on August 30 declared that it did not advance matters and contained "no word about collective resistance to an aggressor."[3] Such a step was in fact discussed unofficially by Churchill and Maisky on September 1. According to the latter, Churchill suggested that in case of a deadlock Britain, France and the USSR should send Hitler a collective note. "This move ... would frighten Hitler and inaugurate the London-Paris-Moscow 'Axis' which could alone

1. Halifax to Lindsay, Sept. 2, 1938, ibid., no. 741, p. 210. For the development of Halifax's views in September and the relationship between him and Chamberlain, see Halifax, Fulness of Days, p. 183; and a review of that book by Lord Templewood, "Destroying the Myths", The Spectator, vol. CXCVIII, no. 6726, May 24, 1957, p. 673; Birkenhead, op.cit., pp. 391-405, 419-426; Macleod, op. cit., p. 220; Letter from Halifax to Cecil, Sept. 22, 1938, Cecil Papers, 51084, pp. 165-166. At the time, Eden remarked that "six months' experience at the Foreign Office had quite disillusioned Halifax as to Nazi diplomacy." Diary Entry of Sept. 12, 1938, Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 163. Even Maisky was made aware of this. Diary Entry of Aug. 16, 1938, Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 25.
2. See below, pp. 191-194.
3. Quoted in Beloff, vol. II, p. 141.

save the world...." Maisky replied that the plan was good. But he "could not see Chamberlain agreeing to joint action with the U.S.S.R. against Germany."[1] On August 31 Churchill had in fact written Halifax a letter, which the former had been discussing with Boothby and Nicolson, and which suggested sending an Anglo-French-Soviet joint note to Germany.[2] Chamberlain was opposed, however, "largely because it would be bluff if it went beyond Lanark."[3]

Although September was a period of intense diplomatic activity, Anglo-Soviet relations bear only a peripheral relevance to events. Between August 17 and September 29 the foreign office and the Soviet embassy were only once in contact. Maisky was in Geneva from September 9-28. Chilston and Potemkin briefly exchanged views on September 8. This was symptomatic of the previous negligible role the Soviets had played in appeasement diplomacy during 1938. It was evident from developments since March that central European pacification, in the British view, had to exclude Russia.[4]

Furthermore, information on Soviet intentions and

1. Diary Entry of Sept. 1, 1938, Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 26.
2. Churchill, vol. I, pp. 262-263; Entries of Sept. 3, 4, 1938, Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives.
3. Thomas Inskip Diary (Churchill College, Cambridge), File I, Aug. 26 - Sept. 19, 1938. Inskip described Churchill as "very busy with his favourite plan".
4. Chilston would undoubtedly have agreed with these remarks by Coulondre, op.cit., p. 154; "Nous sommes tenus dans une ignorance totale du développement de la crise. Il semble que pour Londres et Paris, Moscou ne soit plus en Europe."

reactions during September, as previously, was funnelled to London via the French and Ambassador Phipps. As Hoare later explained: "We were content to let the French Government take the lead in consulting with the Russian Government, whose position was analogous to theirs."[1] Chamberlain himself "considered that it was better to leave the Soviets alone."[2] Thus contact between London and Moscow was restricted. It was renewed by Halifax on September 23, significantly when British policy seemed to turn from conciliation to resistance.

The complication in this arrangement was that French views and information on the USSR tended to be distorted when communicated to London. The fluctuations of French policy - whether to resist or comply with Hitler's demands - coloured their reports on Soviet intentions. The most blatant example of this process was the Litvinov-Payart conversation in Moscow early in September.

Daladier and Bonnet were, in fact, still not completely willing to officially abandon the Soviet pact. But their enquiries in Moscow seemed to be based more on a sense of obligation than a search for a viable alternative policy.

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 3, 1938, col. 152.
2. Record of a conversation between King George VI and Chamberlain, Oct. 19, 1938, quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI, p. 358. Maugham, At the End of the Day, pp. 376-379, gives an interesting justification of Chamberlain's rejection of Russia - "a broken reed" - as a possible ally.

Bonnet let Halifax know that a resolution of the Czech crisis rested in British hands. France would be willing to support any arbitral solution proposed by Britain, even if unacceptable in Prague.[1]

On August 26 Bonnet again questioned Suritz on Soviet intentions. In view of continued Rumanian and Polish refusal to sanction the passage of aid to Czechoslovakia, Bonnet enquired whether the Soviets intended to disregard this or, if not, to explain practically how they envisaged helping the Czechs.[2] Meanwhile, Jean Payart, the French chargé d'affaires in Moscow, was also asked on August 31 to press Litvinov to state "dans quelles conditions Prague pourrait compter sur l'appui soviétiques étant données les difficultés pratiques...."[3] Bonnet added that technical discussions, although possible, were unnecessary as the French enquiry was political. This last proviso seems to provide the key. Bonnet was making the required gesture to Moscow, but excluded the only possibility which could have put teeth into any Franco-Soviet effort to aid Czechoslovakia.

Litvinov received Payart on September 2. The French and Soviet versions of this conversation differ substantially.

1. Campbell to Halifax, Aug. 31, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 725, p. 194.
2. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 197.
3. Quoted ibid., pp. 197-198. Coulondre was then on leave in Paris.

According to the former,[1] Litvinov firstly reiterated prior Soviet declarations of loyalty to its treaties. He then asked for a description of the measures France envisaged. As for the Soviet Union, they had no intention of forcing a passage without a League decision. Therefore, it was necessary to alert the council to be ready to act in case of aggression.

The Soviet version is very different. Litvinov told Payart that with the proviso that France aided Czechoslovakia the Soviet Union was determined to fulfil all its obligations under the Soviet-Czech pact, "using all available means to this end."[2] Three measures (as later formulated) were specifically envisaged:

1. Appeal to the League of Nations, as provided by Article XI of the Covenant, to draw the attention of the more influential member countries of the League to the threat of German aggression and to bring the necessary influence to bear on the position of the countries that support France, Britain and the U.S.S.R.
2. A conference of the U.S.S.R., France and Britain with a view to publishing a declaration which may serve to prevent an attack by Germany on Czechoslovakia.
3. Consultations between representatives of the General Staffs of the U.S.S.R., France and Czechoslovakia.[3]

1. Ibid., p. 199, quotes Payart's telegram describing Litvinov's reply. Daladier also discusses it in Débats, July 18, 1946, p. 2679.
2. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, Sept. 2, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 26, p. 62.
3. Record of a Talk between Potemkin and Coulondre, Sept. 11, 1938, ibid., no. 30, p. 72.

The first proposal Litvinov offered as a means to "facilitate" Soviet action, as well as for its "moral effect". This was in fact a slightly new innovation in Soviet policy, probably arising out of difficulties over transit. Unfortunately it was seized upon by foreign opinion and taken to be the essence, rather than a supporting element, of what he proposed. In view also of the weakness of the League at this point it was not an altogether sound proposal. The second measure, similar to that suggested after the Anschluss, might deter Hitler from resorting to force. Finally, staff talks were the reply to a "definition of concrete help" the French had requested.[1] Thus did Litvinov give "an absolutely clear-cut unambiguous answer".[2] On his instructions, Suritz repeated the substance of the interview to Bonnet.[3]

But misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Litvinov's remarks seemed to grow almost daily. On September 5 Payart again saw Potemkin in order to clarify various points.[4] Coulondre told Fierlinger that Payart's

1. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, Sept. 2, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 26, pp. 62-63.
2. I. Zemskov, "New Documents on the History of Munich", International Affairs (Moscow), no. 10, Oct. 1955, p. 72.
3. Entry of Oct. 11, 1938, Dalton Diary.
4. Record of a Talk Between Potemkin and Payart, Sept. 5, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 27, pp. 64-66.

report, as received in Paris, was understood as implying that the USSR only envisaged diplomatic methods; whereas full military support had actually been offered.[1] Potemkin admitted to Chilston that it was unlikely the Czech-German conflict would be submitted to the League.[2]

On September 11 Coulondre personally saw Potemkin for further clarification. According to the Soviet record, Potemkin asserted that a "definitely prejudiced interpretation" had been placed on the Soviet reply. Coulondre agreed that Payart "had failed to bring out sufficiently clearly the positive points" of the Soviet proposals.[3] The French ambassador's description makes no mention of this, but emphasizes Potemkin's complete restraint in face of criticism.[4]

The effect in France of Bonnet's enquiries was predictable in light of the above complications. The error or misinterpretation might have been Payart's in transmitting his immediate report of the conversation; the need for clarification on September 5 suggests some confusion in his mind. More probably Bonnet was guilty of deliberate

1. Fierlinger to Krofta, Sept. 10, 1938, ibid., no. 29, p. 69. For further details on Fierlinger at this time which were deleted from N.D.H.M., see Wallace, "New Documents", pp. 452-454; F. Vnuk, "Munich and the Soviet Union", Journal of Central European Affairs, vol. XXI, no. 3, Oct. 1961, pp. 290-291.
2. Chilston to Halifax, Sept. 8, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 802, p. 266.
3. Record of Talk Between Potemkin and Coulondre, Sept. 11, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 30, pp. 70-73. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 27, claims that as of September 8 Corbin had not yet even been informed of the Litvinov-Payart talk.
4. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 157.

suppression. He used Litvinov's reply to the fullest in justifying a continued policy of appeasement and discounting the possibility of Soviet help.

On September 2, while still awaiting news from Moscow, Bonnet told Phipps "that Russia's one wish is to stir up general war in the troubled waters of which she will fish." He described the Soviet reply thus:

> Russia will, according to the terms of the Russo-Czechoslovak Pact, wait until France has begun to fulfil the obligations incumbent on her according to her own pact with Czechoslovakia. Russia will then bring the matter before Geneva.... Great Britain, France and Russia should meet in conference and afterwards issue a joint declaration of their firm intention to keep the peace, if necessary by forcible action in the last resort.[1]

To the question of staff talks, as in May when it was also apparently proposed, Bonnet made no reference and never responded. He was on the whole sceptical and obviously placed little reliance on these proposals. In his opinion Soviet policy had not changed since May.[2] Daladier told Coulondre that France was acting in concert with Britain. He therefore had to consider "des préventions anglaises contre la Russie bolshevique."[3] The effect on information

1. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 2, 6, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, nos. 751, 791, pp. 220, 255-256.
2. Bonnet, vol.I, pp. 199, 303-304. Although Bonnet never publicized the Soviet proposals for staff talks, he did in fact mention it to Coulondre who was then in Paris. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 156.
3. Ibid., pp. 156-157.

being passed to London is thus obvious.

The general attitude of coolness was indeed shared by Britain. Chilston reported Payart as having claimed that Litvinov had given no indication of how Russia intended to help Czechoslovakia. "Personally, I do not attach very much importance to the somewhat half-hearted assurances which my Czech and French colleagues from time to time extract from M. Litvinov," Chilston observed, "nor do I share the optimism of Czechoslovak Minister who seems to believe in effective Soviet intervention in the case of trouble in Central Europe."[1] Furthermore, according to Chilston's information the Soviets had taken no special security measures. He did express his surprise to Coulondre that no Franco-Soviet military conversations had taken place. The French ambassador suggested he mention this fact to London, as opposition to any such plan had come from there.[2] As for Litvinov's conference proposal, Phipps, for example, considered it "likely to infuriate Hitler".[3]

These opinions were supported by reaction in London itself. There was no official communication between the two countries on this latest Soviet proposal. When

1. Chilston to Halifax, Sept. 4, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 761, pp. 229-230.
2. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 158.
3. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 6, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 791, p. 256.

Chilston finally managed to see Potemkin on September 8, Litvinov was not available, no mention was made of it.[1] Nonetheless, the foreign office was clued in both diplomatically, from Chilston and Phipps, and also indirectly.

Having been immediately informed of the Litvinov-Payart interview, Maisky set to work giving it unofficial circulation in London. On September 3 he journeyed to Chartwell to brief Churchill. The ambassador's approach in this context may not have been altogether propitious. The similarity in Churchill's and the Soviets' remedies for the crisis made him an obvious, but not a suitable, choice. He doubted whether Britain would as yet consider any of the suggestions. But inasmuch as this information fully coincided with his own ideas, Churchill immediately informed Halifax. The foreign secretary replied in a "guarded manner" that putting the Czech question before the League would not be "helpful, but that he would keep it in his mind." The other points concerning a declaration and a conference seem to have passed without comment. Halifax did indicate that Britain must wait on continuing developments in Czechoslovakia.[2]

1. Chilston to Halifax, Sept. 8, 1938, ibid., no. 802, p. 266.
2. Letter from Churchill to Halifax, Sept. 3, 1938, quoted in Churchill, vol. I, pp. 263-266. Churchill's explanation of why the Soviet ambassador chose him - to avoid a possible foreign office "rebuff" - differs from the reasons advanced by Maisky. Ibid., p. 263.

At the same time Maisky also informed Lloyd George and Arthur Greenwood, the deputy Labour leader, of the Litvinov-Payart conversation. The ambassador's motive in these lobbying activities, which increased in the coming months, was to give the Soviet proposals the maximum publicity in order to counter a "whispering campaign" by the "Cliveden set", which pointed to Soviet reticence as proof of a desire to avoid its obligations. Thereby political circles in London would know Russia's attitude. Furthermore, Maisky pointed out, if there were "slanderous talks in Parliament about the 'passivity' of the U.S.S.R. on the Czechoslovak question there could be a reply from the Opposition restoring the true facts."[1] The awareness that this view circulated abroad was a prime factor in prompting several policy statements from the Soviets.

Maisky's activities could not have escaped government notice and indeed aroused intense annoyance. Hoare later severely criticized the ambassador for being

> very active behind the scenes, stimulating criticism against the Government, and implying that it was only our hesitations and the cold-shouldering of Russia

1. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 79-80. See also, his "Munich Drama", part III, pp. 26-27. Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 167, writes that Maisky had "sought the views and advice of people who were known to be critical of the appeasement policy, including myself. While not inclined to trust Soviet representatives, I became convinced that Maisky, and Litvinov, were genuinely anxious to establish a common front against Hitler's aggressive aims. So did Churchill, Lloyd George and Dalton, among the more prominent people whom Maisky approached on the matter."

> that was endangering peace. The critics of the Government were quick in rising to Maisky's fly. His story that the Soviet was only waiting for our invitation to help, was no more than the stock Communist propaganda for making mischief.... The troubled waters were giving the Ambassador the best possible fishing conditions.[1]

It seems clear that, while Maisky may have remedied the lack of closer contact between London and Moscow, the results of his activities only further alienated government members.[2]

On September 8 Halifax finally invited Maisky for an interview, mainly to express his inability to attend the League meetings in Geneva. During the discussion which followed, the Soviet ambassador criticized The Times leader of September 7 advocating secession of the Sudetenland. The "general Soviet view about aggressors and aggression" was once again developed. Only finally did he broach the subject of Litvinov's latest proposals, mentioning specifically the plan for a joint note to Berlin. Halifax thanked Maisky for information already familiar to the British government.[3] The curtness of the reply suggested

1. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 302.
2. Nicolson described a conversation with Oliver Stanley, wherein "any reference to Russian assistance makes him [Stanley] wince". Walter Elliot, minister of health, claimed that the "Russians never promised really to help". Diary Entries of Sept. 11, 19, 1938, Nicolson, vol. I, pp. 359, 361. In a Letter to the writer, Sept. 25, 1968, Lord Butler writes: the government "certainly got to know about ... [Maisky's] many activities through a variety of sources."
3. Halifax to Chilston, Sept. 8, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 808, pp. 271-272.

that London was far from considering such overt action in conjunction with the USSR.

Maisky's version of this conversation differs slightly. He claims Halifax questioned him "in detail" about the Litvinov-Payart talk. "Apparently Churchill's letter had made some impression", Maisky writes, and Halifax "wanted to verify the information with me."[1] S.B. Kagan, the Soviet embassy counsellor, later told Dalton that, when asked by Maisky what Britain would do, Halifax had been "'very vague'."[2]

The whole focus for the discussion of alternatives to appeasement shifted once again to Geneva. Maisky, Litvinov and Bonnet all journeyed there.[3] With Halifax detained in London, the British delegation was headed by Butler and De La Warr.[4] But it was the French who still continued the dialogue with Russia.

Bonnet's meetings in Geneva with Litvinov and Comnène centred again, as during the previous May, on enquiries as to Soviet intentions, and discussions on the practical

1. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 27.
2. Entry of Sept. 21, 1938, Dalton Diary.
3. Even while at Geneva Maisky was able to keep remarkably well informed on developments in London - especially on meetings between Chamberlain and Labour leaders. See e.g., his Diary extracts in "Munich Drama", part IV, pp. 28-29; and ibid., part V, p. 19.
4. Henry Channon, Butler's parliamentary private secretary, gives a highly personal view of events and personalities at Geneva, in Diary Entries of Sept. 9, 10, 13, 19, 1938, Robert Rhodes James, ed., Chips, The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon (London 1967), Zhereafter: Henry Channon Diaries7, pp. 163-165, 167.

feasibility of aid via Rumania. On September 11 Litvinov repeated to Bonnet personally the essence of his remarks to Payart. According to Bonnet, the Soviet foreign minister suggested an appeal to the League council, on whose recommendation Rumania could then act on the question of passage. Soviet troops would not force their way through to Czechoslovakia and would require formal permission for transit.[1] Henceforth, Bonnet let it be understood diplomatically that instead of action all that could be expected from the USSR was an appeal to the League. France, he concluded, "could not count on Russia".[2] In light of all previous Soviet statements this would seem to be a misrepresentation by Bonnet. Moreover, the version of the conversation circulated by Litvinov himself among journalists at Geneva, accorded totally with the Soviet record of proposals to Payart.[3]

Turning to Rumania and the practical aspects of transit, the situation had developed very slightly since May. Throughout the summer Rumania continued to vary its

1. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 200; Les Evénements, vol. IX, pp. 2624-2625. Noël, op.cit., p. 225, accepts Bonnet's version. Paul-Boncour, vol. III, pp. 112-114; and in his testimony in Les Evénements, vol. III, p. 805, takes a more optimistic view of Soviet intentions. He headed the French delegation at Geneva.
2. Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay, p. 180.
3. Robert Dell, The Geneva Racket, 1920-1939 (London 1941), p. 272, describes these proposals and his conversation with Litvinov. According to Dell, Litvinov also asked for the French reply to the suggestion for staff talks. Rothstein, op.cit., p. 180, fn. 32, personally witnessed the Litvinov-Dell conversation. On Sept. 12, 1938, Pravda referred to a meeting between the French and Soviet foreign ministers but gave no details. Beloff, vol. II, p. 148, fn. 1.

response depending on who asked the questions. The most searching inquisitor continued to be the German foreign office. It was finally told that overflights of Soviet aircraft to Czechoslovakia could not be prevented.[1] German information tended to dismiss the possibility of Rumania permitting the passage of troops, as distinct from aircraft. When Comnène and Bonnet met again at Geneva on September 11, the former was no more forthcoming than previously. Nor did he admit that a League decision would in any way affect Rumania's attitude. He pointed out the geographic and technical difficulties involved in the passage of Soviet troops. However, Rumania was prepared to turn a blind eye to the overflight of aircraft.[2] In actual fact this hinted at a considerable concession,[3] which Comnène

1. Fabricius to German Foreign Ministry, Sept. 27, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 650, p. 981.
2. Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 201-202; vol. II, pp. 409-410; and his Quai d'Orsay, pp. 179-180. See also, Comnène, op.cit., pp. 83-86, 90, 136; Letters to the Editor, Le Monde, Nov. 18, Dec. 11, 17, 1947, from Thierry, Comnène and Bonnet respectively.
3. Recent Rumanian historiography stresses that Rumania acted throughout the crisis as a loyal ally of Czechoslovakia, and was prepared to help facilitate the passage of Soviet aid. The evidence cited to support this latter contention is generally of a non-Rumanian origin. See e.g., Zaharia, op.cit., pp. 11-12; Viorica Moisuc, "Actions Diplomatiques de la Roumanie au Secours de la Tchécoslovaquie à la Veille du Pacte de Munich", Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, vol. VI, no. 3, 1967, pp. 418-431. Soviet historians, e.g., Yazkova, op.cit., pp. 61-71; and N.I. Lebedev, "Zheleznaya Gvardiya", Karol II i Gitler ("The Iron Guard", Carol II and Hitler, Moscow 1968), pp. 185-204, now deny Rumania's good intentions.

then elaborated personally to the British delegation at Geneva.

On September 15 De La Warr saw Comnène, who stated

> there was no definite agreement between Russia and Roumania but that, in case of war, supplies would probably pass through Roumania to Czechoslovakia and he thought there would be no difficulty in such a case in allowing transit, especially for aeroplanes. He stressed immense geographical difficulties which stood in the way of easy transit of men and materials across Northern Roumania.

De La Warr observed that Rumania, while well disposed towards Britain, was afraid of Germany and reserved towards Russia.[1] Yet their attitude had shown some positive developments which could have been exploited.

There is, however, no indication that, despite contacts Comnène claims he had with Litvinov at Geneva, the question of passage was ever raised.[2] Nor did Litvinov, before his departure from Moscow, discuss it with the Rumanian minister,

1. U.K. Delegation (Geneva) to Halifax, Sept. 15, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 898, pp. 354-355. Cf. Chilston to Halifax, Sept. 4, 1938, ibid., no. 761, p. 229. The assertion in Ripka, op.cit., pp. 338-339; Fischer, op.cit., p. 528; and Dell, op.cit., p. 276, that agreement was reached on troop transit seems unfounded. Cf. Beloff, vol. II, p. 146, fn. 3; Carr, part I, p. 9.
2. Comnène, op.cit., p. 79; Fabricius to German Foreign Ministry, Sept. 27, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 650, p. 981. Rothstein notes: "As regards a meeting at Geneva between Soviet and Roumanian delegations: I recall none, and have no notes of any." Letter from Andrew Rothstein to the writer, Oct. 12, 1968.

N. Dianou.[1] As to his own attitude, he is reported to have stated on September 16 that the Rumanians "'will probably let us pass.'" But their railroads were poor and road communications difficult. Although the USSR could help Czechoslovakia in the air, such discussion was "'unrealistic'". Britain and France had "'already sold Czechoslovakia down the river.'"[2]

Nonetheless, it was French information and interpretations which were passed to the British. Most important Bonnet's version of his talks with Litvinov circulated diplomatically. In this it was emphasized that only an appeal to the League to influence Rumania could be expected from the Soviet Union. Thus, in conversation with Butler, Bonnet put "great emphasis on the obvious disadvantages" of bringing the Czech question to Geneva. Butler "warmly agreed."[3] The Czech chargé d'affaires in Berlin was told by the British embassy on the basis of Bonnet's information that "to rely on Soviet help would be a tragic error."[4]

1. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 158. Borisov, op.cit., pp. 414-415, claims that during September there were behind the scenes talks on the passage of the Red army.
2. Fischer, op.cit., p. 529. Rothstein, op.cit., p. 186, fn. 44, quotes similar remarks by Litvinov on a Czech 'sell-out'.
3. U.K. Delegation (Geneva) to Halifax, Sept. 11, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 835, p. 294.
4. Czechoslovak Archives, quoted in Vnuk, op.cit., p. 291.

Returning to Paris from Geneva, Bonnet's reaction to the intensification of the European crisis was one of panic. He was desperately anxious to avoid war and France's obligations to fight. Soviet support, from what he allegedly adduced from Litvinov, made her an unreliable ally. Russia "would not act directly" in defence of Czechoslovakia. This "new factor", claimed Bonnet, made it impossible for France to fight alone and on three fronts simultaneously.[1] Peace had therefore to be preserved "at any price". Neither France nor Britain were prepared for war. Finding Bonnet's "collapse ... so sudden and so extraordinary", Phipps immediately sought out Daladier who displayed an obvious lack of enthusiasm to fight for Czechoslovakia. However, the latter maintained his belief in spite of the Lindbergh report that Russia had 5,000 airplanes, and was generally optimistic of efficacious Soviet support.[2]

The French collapse in mid-September followed upon a deterioration of the Czech situation. On September 5 Benes

1. Letter from Halifax to Phipps, Sept. 12, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 834, p. 303, fn. 1; Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 13, 14, 1938, ibid., nos. 848, 852, 874, pp. 305-306, 309, 323.
2. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 8, 13, 1938, ibid., nos. 807, 855, 857, pp. 270, 310-311, 311-312. Charles Lindbergh had just returned to Paris from reviewing the Soviet and German airforces. His widely circulated views on the demoralization of the former and the overwhelming superiority of the latter tended to confirm the strength of Hitler's position.

had drawn up the 'fourth plan' which conceded all the points of the Carlsbad programme except the provision for foreign policy reform. Disturbances at Mährisch-Ostrau on the 8th abruptly brought direct Czech-Sudeten negotiations to a halt, and stimulated yet further debate in London on the exact form of Britain's response to events.

Since early September tension between the alternative policies of resistance and appeasement was evident in government circles. However, the policy pursued by Chamberlain continued in a more or less undeviating line of conciliation and the refusal of watertight commitments. The general consideration, as before, was that no degree of Anglo-French-Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia could prevent a German attack. This was again restated quite emphatically in a report submitted by the chiefs of staff to Inskip on September 14.[1] The report assumed that in the event of war the USSR would not help Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it was "unsafe" to count on Moscow fulfilling its obligations. Furthermore, an appreciation of the situation circulated by the foreign office repeated the chiefs of staff opinion on the Soviet Union, and stated that Moscow was in no condition to wage war effectively and would try to avoid hostilities.[2] Thus it was not

1. Inskip Diary, File I, Aug. 26 - Sept. 19, 1938.
2. Notes by Hoare on 1937-1939, Foreign Policy Committee, Templewood Papers, X:5.

surprising that Halifax rejected on three occasions Corbin's suggestions that Britain should restate its position more forcefully. While willing to support France, if herself threatened, Britain could not be committed to a conflict arising solely from French obligations. She would not fight Germany in case of her aggression against Czechoslovakia.[1]

The national council of labour published a declaration urging full support for Czechoslovakia backed by a united front of Britain, France and the Soviet Union. The Liberal party addressed a letter to Chamberlain in the same sense.[2] Halifax had in fact just abandoned a project to publicly warn Hitler.[3] Similarly, a suggestion by Joseph Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador, that the USSR might concentrate planes near its frontier, and a plea from Churchill demanding an immediate ultimatum to Hitler were both rejected.[4] The same fate overtook another plan to again impress Germany. On September 9 Henderson was instructed to transmit to Ribbentrop a message emphasizing the gravity of the

1. Halifax to Phipps, Sept. 5, 7, 9, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, nos. 782, 798, 814, pp. 246-248, 262-264, 275-277. See also, Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 214-217.
2. Statement by the National Council of Labour, quoted in The Daily Herald, Sept. 9, 1938. Viscount Samuel, Memoirs (London 1945), pp. 276-277.
3. Halifax to Henderson, Sept. 6, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 792, p. 256.
4. Halifax to Lindsay, Sept. 10, 1938, ibid., no. 824, pp. 284-285; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 301-302; who also argued that British information did not confirm that Russia and France were prepared for an offensive against Germany, rather contrary to Churchill's information.

situation, hopes for an agreed settlement in Czechoslovakia, and the possibility of British intervention. The message also quoted from the Labour movement declaration calling on the British government to state "'that they will unite with the French and Soviet Governments to resist any attack upon Czechoslovakia.'"[1] Henderson recommended the message should not be acted upon.[2] The inner cabinet on September 10 discussed the warning, and, finding the arguments for and against "about equal", agreed.[3] Nonetheless, as an indication of fluctuations in the foreign office, and coming as it did a day after Halifax's conversation with Maisky,[4] the proposed warning was significant.

The same meeting of September 10 also decided that the prime minister should go ahead with his plan for a personal visit to Hitler. Such a move had been one of two alternative projects designed to meet a serious deterioration in the situation. The other was the suggestion for a four-power conference. On September 4 the summoning of a

1. Halifax to Kirkpatrick, Sept. 9, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 815, pp. 277-278. The telegram lacked the authorizing signature of Halifax. Birkenhead op.cit., p. 391. But according to Colvin, op.cit., p. 238, it was the result of inner cabinet deliberations on September 9.
2. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, Sept. 10, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 819, p. 280; Letter from Henderson to Wilson, Sept. 9, 10, 1938, ibid., appendix I, pp. 647, 650.
3. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 301. See also, Duff Cooper, op.cit., p. 226; and Inskip Diary, File I, Aug. 26 - Sept. 19, 1938.
4. See above, pp. 164-165.

conference of Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Czechoslovakia was proposed by Henderson. "The advantage of the proposal would be that it would exclude Russia, as not being a signatory of Versailles."[1] Support for this idea, and with the same aim of excluding Russia, came on September 11 from Alexis Léger, secretary-general of the quai d'orsay. He expected Bonnet to agree immediately, while Daladier, although fearing opposition from the left, could be persuaded.[2] On September 12, at Bonnet's request, Halifax defined the exact position. As previously it was made quite clear that, while Britain was interested in French security, they could not be more precise as to future action in unforeseeable circumstances.[3] A day later both Daladier and Bonnet agreed to the summoning of a great power conference.[4]

In London very strong opposition to such a conference came from Vansittart. On September 13 he argued astutely

1. Letter from Henderson to Halifax, Sept. 4, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 771, p. 239.
2. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 11, 1938, ibid., no. 833, p. 292.
3. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 10, 1938, ibid., no. 822, p. 282; Letter from Halifax to Phipps, Sept. 12, 1938, ibid., no. 843, p. 303, and fn. 1; Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 217-220. The letter to Phipps was approved by Chamberlain and the cabinet. Letter from Halifax to Churchill, July 24, 1947, Hickleton Papers, A4.410.19.3.
4. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 13, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, nos. 856, 858, 861, pp. 311, 312, 314. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 232, included the USSR as a participating power.

and prophetically that such a move

> would be the thin edge of the wedge for driving Russia out of Europe, and would be completely playing the German game at every point.... It would surely be an unpardonable folly to assist Germany in driving off the map an associate whose weight we may need. It is precisely for this reason that Germany is trying to exclude Russia. If we lend ourselves to the beginning of this process, the future is fairly obvious - in two stages. In the first Russia will be evicted and retire into sulky isolation. In the second she will be penetrated by Germany, and Bismarck's traditional policy of close Russo-German relations will follow.[1]

However, Vansittart was not especially optimistic as to the actual material aid the USSR could offer Czechoslovakia.[2]

Impressed by the desperation in Paris, Chamberlain decided instead on direct action in Berlin. As he explained to King George, he intended to visit Hitler and convince him of the possibility of achieving an Anglo-German understanding. "After sketching out the prospect of Germany and England as the two pillars of European peace and buttresses against communism," Chamberlain candidly wrote, "I should suggest that the essential

1. Minute by Vansittart, Sept. 13, 1938, Vansittart Papers; Colvin, op.cit., pp. 248-249. Cf. Lord Vansittart, "A Morally Indefensible Agreement", The Listener, vol. XL, no. 1032, Nov. 4, 1948, [hereafter: Vansittart, "Morally Indefensible Agreement"], pp. 676-677.
2. Entry of Sept. 9, 1938, Dalton Diary.

preliminary was the peaceful solution of our present trouble."[1] On September 14 Hitler agreed to a meeting at Berchtesgaden.

It was in fact the particulars of the Sudeten claims rather than any grandiose scheme of European pacification which Hitler pressed for and obtained. He denounced Czechoslovakia as a "spearhead in the side of Germany", and urged the abolition of the Soviet-Czech treaty. Chamberlain interpreted this as a suggestion for modification "so that Czechoslovakia were no longer bound to go to the assistance of Russia if Russia were attacked, and on the other hand Czechoslovakia were debarred from giving asylum to Russian forces in her aerodromes or elsewhere...."[2] Hitler replied that a genuinely Czech state shorn of its minorities would not concern him. The neutralization of Czechoslovakia, advocated since June by British diplomacy, was thus basically agreed upon. Finally, Chamberlain agreed in principle, subject to cabinet approval, to the separation of the Sudetenlands.[3]

1. Letter from Chamberlain to King George VI, Sept. 13, 1938, quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI, p. 347.
2. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 354, critically notes that Chamberlain made no mention of the Franco-Czech pact. Popov therefore concludes: "Focusing attention on the question of the liquidation of the Soviet-Czech pact, Chamberlain in this manner indicated to Hitler that England would not prevent a German attack against the USSR." Ibid., p. 355.
3. Notes by Chamberlain, Sept. 15, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 895, pp. 338-341. See also, Feiling, op. cit., p. 367; Memorandum on a Conversation, Sept. 15, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 487, pp. 786-798.

The Soviet Union, totally isolated from events, watched developments from the sidelines. When questioned directly, as on September 2 in Moscow and September 11 in Geneva, Litvinov elaborated his proposals. On September 15 Potemkin again assured Fierlinger of Russia's "one hundred per-cent desire to carry out her obligations by all means."[1] Otherwise no independent initiative was undertaken. The impression given by the press was that the crisis did not concern the USSR directly. Foreign speeches or declarations urging a united front against Germany were reported. Germany's violent anti-bolshevik propaganda depicting the Czech government as a Soviet puppet continued unabated, but was ignored in Moscow.[2]

The meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain, however, deeply impressed the kremlin. It confirmed all their worst fears and suspicions of Chamberlain's anti-Soviet intentions. On September 17 Pravda directed a scathing attack on the "dramatic gesture". It accused Chamberlain of seeking a deal with Hitler and working towards a great power conference: "... the famous 'four-Power pact' project, which Chamberlain will in no way be able to carry out, is again being taken from the archives." Britain had ignored the lessons of the May crisis which alone could save

1. Quoted in Borisov, op.cit., p. 389.
2. Beloff, vol. II, pp. 144-145, 147.

Czechoslovakia. The result of Chamberlain's efforts, Pravda predicted, would be a fascist hegemony over central and south-east Europe. Significantly, this was seen not as a threat to Russia but rather to France.[1]

The full cabinet summoned to discuss the Berchtesgaden visit met twice on September 17. The members agreed with some hesitation and much discussion to accept the principle of self-determination.[2] The only alternative seemed to be war. Chamberlain was convinced Hitler was not bluffing.[3] Discussion was then adjourned to await the arrival of the French ministers.

Meanwhile Chamberlain, Halifax and Wilson received a deputation (Dalton, Walter Citrine and Herbert Morrison) on behalf of the national council of labour. Just prior to this meeting Vansittart saw Dalton and informed him of French and Soviet developments. Vansittart considered France "weak" and "attached enormous importance to Russia being kept in, but it was clear he feared our Government would take a different line." As to Soviet intentions,

1. Quoted ibid., pp. 148-149.
2. R.J. Minney, ed., The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha (London 1960), /hereafter: Hore-Belisha Papers/, pp. 140-142; Duff Cooper, op.cit., pp. 229-230; Colvin, op.cit., pp. 253-254; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 303-304. Chamberlain had reported to the inner cabinet on the 16th.
3. Feiling, op.cit., p. 368.

"their declarations were clear, repeated and recent, but general."[1]

The Labour deputation was briefed on the Berchtesgaden meeting. Turning then to the general situation, the prime minister described in detail the political and military weakness of France, the recent collapse of Bonnet, and the general inability to protect Czechoslovakia. Inevitably he was questioned on the attitude of the Soviet Union, and described the Litvinov-Bonnet meeting at Geneva. The latter had done his work well. Chamberlain claimed that Russia would merely "'raise the whole question of German aggression at Geneva'." Therefore, Bonnet doubted whether Russia really meant to do anything. Dalton immediately retorted that Chamberlain's version was quite contrary to "more than one good source",[2] and inconsistent with Soviet pronouncements. Apparently unperturbed, the prime minister referred to the geographical difficulties involved. The British general staff "did not think the Red army could do much. In the air, of course, the Russians could do a

1. Entry of Sept. 17, 1938, Dalton Diary. At this meeting Dalton was cautioned against revealing to Chamberlain the extent of his knowledge of foreign office telegrams. Two days later Vansittart said his position in the government was becoming more difficult and that they should no longer meet at the foreign office. Entries of Sept. 17, 19, 1938, ibid. As Dalton frequently met Maisky and was persona grata at the Soviet embassy, Vansittart's caution is understandable.
2. A reference to Vansittart, and W.P. Coates of the Anglo-Russian parliamentary committee.

great deal, but what would they do?"

Chamberlain gave the deputation permission to repeat only the part of the conversation relating to France and Russia. Dalton considered it a "grave matter that Bonnet should have lied to British ministers about Russian intentions, that Chamberlain should have ... repeated them ... and asked us [the deputation] to repeat them to our colleagues."[1] Dalton was further confirmed in his view that Bonnet had misrepresented Litvinov from information gathered during later discussions with Blum in Paris, and with J. Necas, the Czech Socialist minister for social welfare, Maisky and Kagan in London.[2]

The above opinions would seem to represent an accurate picture of how Chamberlain viewed Soviet intentions and his total scepticism, almost indifference, concerning any Soviet role in the crisis. He was content to categorically discuss their intentions solely on the basis of indirect diplomatic reports.

Further discussion of Soviet policy took place during the Anglo-French talks in London on September 18. After describing his meeting with Hitler, Chamberlain said the issue was simply one of accepting the principle of self-determination for the Sudetens. Hitler had declared

1. Dalton, vol. II, pp. 176-183; and Entry of Sept. 17, 1938, Dalton Diary. Cf. Lord Citrine, Men and Work, An Autobiography (London 1964), pp. 361-366.
2. Dalton, vol. II, pp. 183-185; Entries of Sept. 18, 21, and Oct. 11, 1938, Dalton Diary.

personally he wanted nothing more in central or south-eastern Europe. As during the discussions the previous April, the French again raised all the arguments against concessions to Hitler and for resistance; except this time with less persistence and conviction. These were all answered with by now well-worn retorts. Halifax emphasized the "practical realities of the situation." Britain, France and the Soviet Union could not protect Czechoslovakia. Finally admitting the possibility of territorial adjustments, Daladier suggested the Czechs might then ask for guarantees. Chamberlain was unenthusiastic. "Some sort of international guarantee" was a "very grave departure" for British policy. Its value could only be "purely deterrent".

Taking this particular problem further, Halifax reminded the French of Britain's previous efforts to discuss the neutralization of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain was "puzzled" by Daladier's view that the Czech alliance was vital to French security. Rather he considered it a "liability". The original Franco-Czech-Soviet triangle was formed "at a time when conditions in the U.S.S.R. were very different." A British guarantee, Daladier persisted, "would ... help France in the sense that it would help to stop the German march to the East." As a <u>quid pro quo</u> for French acceptance of secession, Chamberlain at last

conceded.[1] The eventual dismal fate of the guarantee directly reflected its origin as a hasty concession in an outright bargain.

Ever since a neutralized Czechoslovakia had been mooted in the spring, Britain had studiously avoided any hint of participation. When Amery suggested a guarantee on September 16, Halifax "rather boggled" at the idea.[2] Hore-Belisha noted that most cabinet ministers disliked it; himself pointing out the impossibility of implementing any guarantee.[3] However, Runciman's report, which may have been drawn up to include subsequent developments, recommended this.[4] Chamberlain's agreement marked the first step towards a new British policy in eastern Europe. It was followed six months later by guarantees to Poland, Rumania and Greece, negotiations for an alliance with the USSR, and ultimately war.

Although the proposed guarantee as drawn up by the inner cabinet was described as "international", the British record of the discussions with the French contains nothing

1. Record of Anglo-French Conversations, Sept. 18, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 928, pp. 373-400. Cf. Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 234-242; Les Evénements, vol. I, pp. 33-34.
2. Diary Entry of Sept. 16, 1938, Amery, vol. III, p. 271.
3. Hore-Belisha Papers, p. 142.
4. Letter from Runciman to Benes, Sept. 21, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, appendix II, pp. 678-679.

about Soviet participation.[1] On September 17 Hoare mentioned this as a possibility in conversation with Robert Barrington-Ward, assistant editor of The Times.[2] Several days later Vansittart again objected to a policy which was tending more and more towards the exclusion of the Soviets. A guarantee which did not include them, he pointed out, would be "grossly unfair to the Czechs who would then only be getting a British guarantee in place of a Russian one...."[3] However, the guarantee per se was such a major departure for British policy, that little time seems to have been spent considering the role of the Soviet Union.

This was vividly illustrated during a meeting between Halifax and another Labour delegation. The foreign secretary reiterated Chilston's pessimistic evaluation of the Red army and air force. Dalton then asked: "'Did Ambassador approach Soviet Government?' Halifax not sure. I asked, 'Did you not think it worth while to give him instructions?' Halifax said no." He also could not confirm or deny Dalton's assertion that Bonnet had lied about

1. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 239, asserts that he and Daladier asked for a British guarantee to Czechoslovakia along with France and Russia. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 355, describes the guarantee agreed upon as merely an Anglo-French one, which "liquidated the close relation between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, which in its turn would break the whole French system of alliances and to a considerable degree depreciate the Soviet pact with France."
2. History of The Times, vol. IV, part II, p. 938.
3. Minute by Vansittart, Sept. 20, 1938, Vansittart Papers.

his interview with Litvinov.[1]

The French cabinet on September 19 accepted the situation as had the British. To the argument that France should resist with Soviet help, Bonnet replied that even if she could, Russia did not want to commit herself.[2] The Anglo-French proposals on secession, neutralization and a guarantee were then presented to the Czechs on the 19th. They were asked to agree to the "substitution of a general guarantee against unprovoked aggression" in place of existing treaties.[3] An early reply was requested.

A negotiated settlement now rested with Benes. The same day he made his first formal enquiry as to what action the Soviet government contemplated. He told Alexandrovsky that the Anglo-French proposals were unacceptable, and then posed two questions. The first, implying that France might yet stand by Czechoslovakia, asked whether in that case the Soviets in accordance with the Czech-Soviet pact would "render immediate effective assistance." The second, envisaging France's defection, enquired whether the USSR would help as a member of the League if Czechoslovakia appealed under articles 16 and 17. Benes three

1. Entry of Sept. 21, 1938, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, pp. 188-189.
2. Anatole de Monzie, Ci-Devant (Paris 1941), pp. 31-32.
3. Halifax to Newton, Sept. 19, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 937, pp. 404-406. The joint Anglo-French communication was made at 2 p.m. on the 19th.

times asked for an immediate reply.[1] Early that evening the Czechs rejected the Anglo-French proposals, arguing inter alia that the central European balance of power would be upset, and that German domination would follow.[2]

The Soviet reply, dated September 20 and telephoned to Benes the same day, was affirmative to both questions.[3] In the early hours of the 21st further Anglo-French pressure was put on Benes to agree. The Czech president denied that he was being influenced or urged to resist by the Soviets. "Bolshevik participation had not and did not

1. Alexandrovsky to Litvinov, Sept. 19, 1939. N.D.H.M., no. 36, pp. 86-88. The second question is differently formulated by Benes himself in his Mnichovske Dny (London 1958), p. 86; as is the account of his two interviews with Alexandrovsky on the 21st. For a discussion of this and other anomalies of these diplomatic exchanges, see the review of N.D.H.M., by Anna M. Cienciala, in The Slavonic and East European Review, vol. XXXVIII, no. 91, June 1960, /hereafter: Cienciala, "Review of New Documents"/, pp. 586-587; Otakar Odlozilik, "Edvard Benes on Munich Days", Journal of Central European Affairs, vol. XVI, no. 4, Jan. 1957, pp. 388-389. Benes has since been accused of being "very eager to find some hint of uncertainty in the Soviet position in order to justify his own defeatist line." "Great Patriotic War", part II, p. 108.
2. Newton to Halifax, Sept. 20, 21, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, nos. 978, 986, pp. 424-425, 431-434.
3. Potemkin to Alexandrovsky, Sept. 20, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 38, p. 90, fn. 1 and 2; Fierlinger to Krofta, Sept. 20, 1938, ibid., no. 39, p. 91. The French and Litvinov were advised at once. This incident was also known to journalists in Prague at the time. See G.E.R. Gedye, Fallen Bastions (London 1939), pp. 425-426; Claud Cockburn, In Time of Trouble (London 1956), pp. 261-263; Patricia Cockburn, The Years of 'The Week' (London 1968), pp. 257-262.

exist".[1] He does not appear to have mentioned his approach to Alexandrovsky.

The same day Benes saw Alexandrovsky twice. In the morning the reply was communicated by the Soviet minister in person. Further elucidation was asked for by Benes and obtained in the afternoon.[2] By then he had already acceded to Anglo-French pressure.[3] A copy of the note of acceptance was given to Potemkin. At the same time Fierlinger notified him that the Czech-Soviet treaty should be considered as still in force, even though the Anglo-French proposals envisaged its renunciation.[4]

The motive which prompted Benes' enquiry to Moscow remains somewhat unclear. It appears as a gesture derived

1. Newton to Halifax, Sept. 21, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1007, p. 450. In a letter quoted in L.B. Namier, Europe in Decay (London 1950), p. 284, Benes stated that "in spite of the insistence of Moscow I did not provoke war with Germany in 1938."
2. Odlozilik, op.cit., p. 389; Cienciala, "Review of New Documents", pp. 388-389. Edward Taborsky, "Benes and the Soviets", Foreign Affairs, vol. XXVII, no. 2, Jan. 1949, pp. 304-305, considers the Soviet reply of September 21 as "quite correct behaviour; but for practical purposes ... worthless."
3. Newton to Halifax, Sept. 21, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1004, p. 447.
4. Fierlinger to Krofta, Sept. 22, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 47, p. 109. According to Potemkin's record of this conversation, he replied in the affirmative to Fierlinger's question as to "whether the government of the USSR, in case of a German attack on Czechoslovakia, would render aid to the latter, without awaiting the decision of the League council". Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 737; Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 316.

from the severity of Anglo-French demands, and one which could only have estranged these two governments. Furthermore, even the most cast-iron assurances from Moscow need not have resulted in a Czech decision to fight Germany. As has already been indicated, Benes' policy was totally western orientated. His relations with Moscow were completely dependent on developments with his French ally and British interests. In September 1938 he refused to face hostilities with only Soviet support, even though he believed it would be available.[1] To have done so would have been dangerous both internally and externally. Many members of his government were actively opposed to fighting in concert with the USSR.[2] More important, an overt display of Czech-Soviet solidarity would have played dangerously into the hands of German anti-bolshevik propaganda. Czechoslovakia would have been denounced as a bulwark of communism in central Europe and transformed into another Spain. The results of such a conflict could not

1. Benes, Memoirs, pp. 42, 131; Ripka, op.cit., pp. 146, 153, 300-301; Record of a Conversation with Benes, Sept. 22, 1939, Dalton Papers. In comments Benes made later to the executive of the League of Nations union, he stated Russia was prepared to support Czechoslovakia, "though would give no firm assurance as to the extent or continuance of her help." Memorandum by Gilbert Murray, Apr. 18, 1940, Gilbert Murray Papers (Bodleian Library, Oxford).
2. Benes, Memoirs, p. 273; Compton MacKenzie, Dr. Benes (London 1946), p. 213; Gamelin, vol. II, p. 341; Ripka, op.cit., pp. 71, 83; Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, pp. 81-82, 128, 175; Gedye, op.cit., pp. 462-463.

be predicted.[1] Finally, to have gone to war in such circumstances would have been a gamble Benes personally was not prepared to take.[2]

Benes has often been criticized by the Soviet Union and others for not having fought in September 1938. The Russian argument is buttressed by the assertion that the Czech government was offered unconditional unilateral aid in May[3] and again on September 20, when Gottwald suggested to Benes that Russia should be approached directly on the matter.[4] But the Czechs never asked for help independently

1. Benes, Mnichovske Dny, pp. 88-93, quoted in Odlozilik, op.cit., p. 389, and Cienciala, "Review of New Documents", p. 587; Ripka, op.cit., pp. 82-83, 146, 437.
2. Edward Taborsky, "The Triumph and Disaster of Eduard Benes", Foreign Affairs, vol. XXXVI, no. 4, July 1958, p. 672.
3. See above, p. 126.
4. Alexandrovsky to Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Sept. 20, 1938, N.D.H.M, no. 37, p. 89. The whole volume New Documents on the History of Munich is dedicated inter alia to proving this point. It is central to any subsequent Soviet work on this period. This is a later development as two basic earlier works, Falsifiers of History, p. 28; and Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 654, make no mention of it. Examinations of the Soviet claim by western historians have generally agreed that the evidence is not conclusive. See e.g., Cienciala, "Review of New Documents", p. 589; Wallace, "New Documents", pp. 450-451; Otto Pick, "Who Pulled the Trigger?: Soviet Historians and the Origins of World War II", Problems of Communism, vol. IX, no. 5, Sept.-Oct. 1960, p. 65; Vnuk, op.cit., p. 290. Czech communist historians repeat the Soviet argument. See e.g., Eisler, op.cit., pp. 36-37, 41; Jiri Hajek, "Le Drame de Munich Evoqué du Point de Vue Tchécoslovaque", L'Année Politique et Economique, vol. XXXII, no. 147, Jan.-Feb. 1959, pp. 1-11; Milos Hajek and Josef Novotny, "Munich: Politique et Armée Tchécoslovaques", Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, vol. XIII, no. 52, Oct. 1963, pp. 1-20.

of France. The Soviet view, however, has the benefit of simultaneously illustrating Moscow's loyalty to its ally and accusing Benes of unnecessarily capitulating. The fact remains that Benes would not fight in the circumstances of September 1938. The problem of conflicting evidence on what the Soviets offered him and what he estimated as Czechoslovakia's chances of resisting successfully, make an evaluation of that factor in his decision to capitulate very difficult.[1]

After this approach by Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union proceeded to give their reply maximum publicity. This was intended to counter descriptions abroad of Soviet "passivity" and rumours that she had deserted Czechoslovakia. Maisky also adds that this publicity was particularly aimed at correcting the distorted impression of Soviet policy circulating in Geneva, caused by Bonnet's suppression of the Litvinov-Payart conversation.[2] In Prague Alexandrovsky protested at attempts to make the USSR responsible for the Czech capitulation.[3] Pravda objected to reports in the

1. The 30th anniversary of the Munich agreement gave the Soviet government an opportunity to reiterate its views. See e.g., the article in Pravda, Sept. 28, 1968, by V. Khvostov and Leo Stern, "Thirty Years After the Munich Betrayal", reprinted in Soviet News, Oct. 1, 1968, pp. 1-2; I.P. Blishchenko, et.al., "Munich: History and the Present", International Affairs (Moscow), no. 11, Nov. 1968, pp. 63-74.
2. Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 737; Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 27. In London, however, Kagan admitted to Dalton that he had not been instructed by Moscow to make any contact with the foreign office. Entry of Sept. 21, 1938, Dalton Diary.
3. Note on a Conversation Between Jina and Alexandrovsky, Sept. 21, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 45, p. 103.

Czech press allegedly trying to compromise the Soviet position.[1] Litvinov addressed the League on September 21 and revealed the details of recent Soviet diplomatic moves. He recalled his post-Anschluss proposal for a conference which "did not receive its just appreciation." The Soviet Union had subsequently not interfered in Czech affairs either to urge resistance or concessions. Litvinov then described his conversation with Payart and the September 19 enquiries addressed to Alexandrovsky, but only referred to the first question then posed by Benes. The Soviet Union, he concluded, had no part in the Czech capitulation.[2] The same day Pravda severely criticized Anglo-French policy and warned that it saw "no difference between German and English robbers."[3] Such a categorization implied a possible Soviet retreat from the quarrels of Europe and all that involved. But on the 26th Pravda stated there was still time for Britain to mend its ways.[4]

In possession of the Czechoslovak agreement to the Anglo-French proposals, Chamberlain met Hitler and was prepared to discuss the procedure for implementing the principle of self-determination. He reiterated Britain's willingness to participate in a guarantee. Hitler then

1. Beloff, vol. II, pp. 155-156.
2. Speech at the Plenary Meeting of the League, Sept. 21, 1938, quoted in Degras, vol. III, pp. 299-304.
3. Quoted in Carr, part I, pp. 7-8.
4. Duroselle, op.cit., p. 82.

demanded an immediate cession and occupation of territory. He cited parallel Polish and Hungarian claims against Czechoslovakia and argued that a bolshevik take-over was imminent. Germany would only participate in a guarantee if all of Czechoslovakia's neighbours and the great powers did. As a concession, Hitler deferred the deadline for an occupation to October 1. The proceedings were deadlocked. A memorandum outlining German proposals was taken away by Chamberlain to be transmitted to Prague.[1]

Meanwhile developments away from Godesberg moved very quickly. Halifax telephoned to the British delegation there, asking for authority to begin certain defence preparations.[2] The Czechs were given permission to mobilize and France called up reservists. The political situation was rapidly turning from concession to resistance.

One of the surest indications of this new turn was a major policy initiative taken by the British foreign office towards the Soviet Union. On September 23 the first direct diplomatic approach was made. With Chamberlain still at Godesberg, Halifax displayed a resourcefulness and firmness,

1. Notes of Conversations, Sept. 22, 23-24, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, nos. 1033, 1073, pp. 463-473, 499-508. See also, Minutes and Memorandum by Schmidt, Sept. 22, 23, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, nos. 562, 583, pp. 870-879, 898-908. According to Paul Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter (London 1951), p. 102, in a private conversation Hitler asked Chamberlain for a free hand in central and eastern Europe. Chamberlain's answer is not known.
2. Halifax to Henderson, Sept. 23, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1050, pp. 483-484.

evident in his attitude since late August and now coming forward. In conjunction with the press statement issued three days later,[1] they confirm how close to the surface were in fact the forces of resistance in the British government.

Halifax instructed Butler to see Litvinov and "endeavour to elicit from him anything concerning the views and intentions of his Government." Litvinov was to be informed of British efforts at Godesberg. But should hostilities nonetheless break out, Halifax added, it would be "useful" to obtain from Litvinov "any precise indication of what action Soviet Government would take in event of Czechoslovakia being thus involved in war with Germany, and at what point they would be prepared to take it."[2]

There were various reasons and pressures that precipitated this action. The talks at Godesberg had run into difficulties. British public opinion was hardening against further concessions to Hitler. Alternatives had to be explored. One of the vaguest aspects was the lack of information on the USSR. That this had to be elicited at such a late date, especially after Litvinov had outlined Soviet policy on the 21st at Geneva, would seem to indicate some mistrust of previous French information. In fact,

1. See below, pp. 203-206.
2. Halifax to U.K. Delegation (Geneva), Sept. 23, 1938, ibid., no. 1043, p. 480.

the same instructions were sent to Phipps to ascertain the "extent and manner of [Soviet] assistance" to Czechoslovakia expected in Paris.[1] This information had been consistently pessimistic. Dalton had forcefully challenged its veracity in his conversation with Halifax on September 21. Dalton suggested afterwards that this meeting prompted the enquiry.[2] Finally, Robert Boothby also appears to have been partly responsible. On September 22 he saw Litvinov privately at Geneva. The latter "burst into bitter complaint against the British Government" on the lack of consultation. He mentioned Russia had 1,500 first line airplanes to place at the disposal of Czechoslovakia. Boothby immediately saw De La Warr who wired for instructions to consult Litvinov. Having returned to London the following day, Boothby gave an account of the meeting to Halifax.[3]

> I was not, by that time 'persona grata' in official circles; although ... Halifax listened to what I had to say with great attention and courtesy, and apparent interest. I left the F.O. with the definite impression that it was his intention to make contact with Litvinov by one means or another. This was my objective.[4]

1. Halifax to Phipps, Sept. 23, 1938, ibid., no. 1051, p. 484.
2. Hugh Dalton, Hitler's War, Before and After (London 1940), [hereafter: Dalton, Hitler's War], p. 77.
3. Boothby, Fight to Live, pp. 160-162; Memorandum from Boothby to Churchill, Oct. 1, 1938, Lloyd George Papers, G/3/13/9. See also, Diary Entry of Sept. 23, 1938, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 365.
4. Letter from Lord Boothby to the writer, June 8, 1968.

Litvinov was thus asked to develop his views. He replied that if France came to the assistance of the Czechs Russia "would take action." They might raise the matter at the League, but this would not affect the Czech-Soviet pact from being implemented. Litvinov suggested a meeting, away from Geneva, of Britain, France, Russia and any other "reliable" small power. Then he would be prepared to discuss military and air questions upon which he was not posted, having been away from Moscow for some time. Finally Litvinov described the Soviet warning to Poland. The meeting concluded with hopes being expressed for continued consultations.[1]

For the foreign office in London there must have seemed little in Litvinov's remarks which differed from his previous declarations. The approach nonetheless stands as an indication that certain elements in the British government were anxious to explore the possibilities of a Soviet role. These tentative beginnings were not followed up and no further discussions resulted.

Maisky, who was also present, adds several more details. Litvinov told the British delegates that if Britain and France supported Czechoslovakia, Rumania would

1. U.K. Delegation (Geneva) to Halifax, Sept. 24, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1071, pp. 497-498. Although drafted on the 23rd, the despatch of this telegram was curiously delayed until 10.45 the following morning. On the warning to Poland, see below, pp. 196-197.

follow suit. De La Warr added that "according to his information the Rumanians would not make any difficulties about Soviet troops going through to help Czechoslovakia." London was also mentioned as a possible venue for a conference.[1]

In conversation with Maisky afterwards, Litvinov stated that Soviet troops, which he estimated at 20 or 30 divisions with technical support, had been concentrating on the Rumanian and Polish borders since early September. Poland would refuse them passage, but Rumania "was another matter. We have information", Litvinov continued, "that Rumania will, particularly if the League of Nations pronounces Czechoslovakia a victim of aggression. Not even unanimously, but by a big majority...." If the Czechs fight, "we will fight alongside them", the foreign commissar concluded.[2]

Just prior to this meeting with the British delegates, Litvinov had again elucidated Soviet policy. Speaking to the sixth (political) committee of the League he made a point of indicating the precise legal position of the USSR vis-à-vis its French and Czech treaties. Czechoslovakia, "not only out of formal but also out of practical considerations", had not raised the question of Soviet aid

1. Diary Entry of Sept. 23, 1938, Maisky, "Munich Drama", part III, p. 28.
2. Ibid. Cf. Palairet to Halifax, Sept. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 65, p. 46.

independently of French assistance.[1]

Ironically the sixth committee was then discussing a proposal to make the application of League sanctions voluntary. However, Soviet persistence in mentioning some sort of recourse to the League resulted in instructions to the British delegation to explore this possibility. It was recognized that any action by the League would be likely to infuriate Hitler and could only be a final solution. The reply from the Geneva delegation was extremely pessimistic, emphasizing the impotence of the institution.[2]

Litvinov's speech was also reinforced by a move against Poland. On September 22 Krofta requested the Soviet Union to take diplomatic action in view of Polish troop concentrations against Czechoslovakia.[3] These movements were designed to reinforce Polish claims against Teschen, occupied by Czechoslovakia in 1919. The Polish chargé d'affaires in Moscow was handed a note stating that the Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1932 would be denounced if Poland invaded Czechoslovakia.[4] The Poles defended

1. Quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 305.
2. U.K. Delegation (Geneva) to Halifax, Sept. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1175, pp. 594-595 and fn. 1.
3. Alexandrovsky to Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Sept. 22, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 49, p. 112.
4. Statement to the Polish Government, Sept. 23, 1938, ibid., no. 50, p. 113. It was published in Izvestia, Sept. 26, 1938. Cf. Kennard to Halifax, Sept. 21, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 997, p. 441, and fn. 2. Kennard urged moderation on the Poles as the "Communists would be the sole beneficiaries of a European war". Kennard to Halifax, Sept. 26, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 47, p. 34.

their action in a reply Potemkin described as "excessivement insolent".[1] The Soviet warning, subsequently characterized as typical of Moscow's firm policy during the crisis,[2] was well within the capacity of the Red army to enforce.[3] Czech acquiescence to the Polish demands made it unnecessary for the Soviets to act.

This late but overt intervention was noted in London. Yet reaction could not have been totally favourable. Kennard had warned that any Soviet move would meet with Polish resistance and force the latter to side with Germany.[4] Bonnet was unimpressed by this "late and limited Russian help", and feared the effects on Poland.[5] Furthermore, Litvinov's speeches and his conversation with the British delegation left Chamberlain "sceptical. From the confabulations with Litvinov at Geneva nothing in his view seemed to emerge on which he could build...."[6] In fact, too close association with Russia could have damaged his

1. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 666. Cf. Budurowycz, op.cit., pp. 121-126; Anna M. Cienciala, Poland and the Western Powers, 1938-1939 (London 1968), /hereafter: Cienciala, Poland and the Western Powers/, pp. 128-132; Roman Debicki, Foreign Policy of Poland, 1919-1939 (London 1963), pp. 115-123; Joseph Beck, Dernier Rapport, Politique Polonaise, 1926-1939 (Neuchâtel 1951), pp. 163-164.
2. Potiemkine, loc.cit.
3. Erickson, op.cit., pp. 503-504; Cf. Beck, op.cit., p.175.
4. Kennard to Halifax, Sept. 10, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 829, p. 288.
5. Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 23, 1938, ibid., no. 1056, p. 489.
6. Feiling, op.cit., p. 371.

continuous endeavours for a peaceful settlement.

Chamberlain returned to London on September 24 prepared to recommend that the Czechs accept Hitler's terms. Resistance within the cabinet, evident during the four meetings of September 24-25, complicated the situation. Halifax dramatically explained during the first cabinet on the 25th that there was some divergence between him and the prime minister, and "plumped for refusal of Hitler's terms." Chamberlain, for whom this was a "horrible blow", refused to agree with that policy advocated by some cabinet members of encouraging France and Czechoslovakia to resist and promising British help. He felt that the political and military arguments for avoiding war were still valid.[1] Moreover, as Hoare claimed: "When ... we looked for alternatives ... we could not find them."[2] In actual fact, the alternatives had been rejected long before.

Cabinet discussions were adjourned to await the outcome of the second meeting in September between British and French ministers.[3] These sessions clearly exhibited extensive English reservations about France. Alec Douglas-Home, at the time Chamberlain's parliamentary private

1. Duff Cooper, op.cit., pp. 234-235; Hore-Belisha Papers, p. 145; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 312; Amery, vol. III, pp. 268-269; Birkenhead, op.cit., pp. 400-401.
2. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 312.
3. The Czechs had meanwhile rejected Hitler's Godesberg terms. Note from Masaryk to Halifax, Sept. 25, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1092, pp. 518-519.

secretary, attributes much of the prime minister's policy in September 1938 to the fact that he "deeply distrusted the French. He felt that they were going to the brink of war without really themselves being willing to fight. And he was therefore afraid that we should be left exposed...."[1] Chamberlain did consider France diplomatically unreliable, politically unstable, militarily weak, industrially chaotic, and supported by allies of dubious value.[2]

The French delegation first heard an account of the Godesberg talks.[3] Daladier then proposed a return to the Anglo-French proposals of September 18, otherwise everyone "would have to do his duty." France would declare war on Germany. Chamberlain, with Simon's help (Halifax remained silent), focused cleverly and relentlessly on France's military plans. Daladier was vague and defensive, but firm on the need to resist Hitler's demands.

Chamberlain drew attention to the poor condition of the French air force and asked what assurances France had

1. Sir Alec Douglas-Home, "'I Was There', The Munich Conference", Transcript of BBC Broadcast Talk, Feb. 19, 1968 [hereafter: Douglas-Home, "The Munich Conference"].
2. Feiling, op.cit., pp. 323, 362-363; Templewood, "Lesson of Munich", p. 879; Nevile Henderson, Water Under the Bridges (London 1945), pp. 212, 218; Maugham, Munich, pp. 18-20, 29, 38; Simon, op.cit., p. 253.
3. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, Sept. 25, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1083, pp. 520-535. See also, Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 312-315; Strang, Home and Abroad, pp. 140-142; Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 268-269.

from Russia. "The British Government for their part had received very disturbing news about the probable Russian attitude."[1] Concerning the Soviet Union, Daladier replied, "there was a tendency to exaggeration.... He thought the truth lay somewhere between extremes. He understood Russia had 5,000 airplanes." In Spain they had been effective, and 200 planes had been bought and flown by Czech pilots to Czechoslovakia. As regards air power, "Russia could hold her own with Germany." Hoare acknowledged that the Soviets might possess numerous aircraft, but asked: "was it certain what Russia would do? Would she come in with the full force of her aviation? (M. Daladier ... indicated that she would do so.)" Hoare was to remain unconvinced. He later argued that all of Britain's "evidence pointed against the likelihood of Russian help for the Allies".[2]

The meeting adjourned for a cabinet discussion, and upon resumption it was agreed to ask Gamelin to attend. At the same time Chamberlain decided to make a final appeal

1. This seems to be somewhat an exaggeration. Litvinov's Geneva proclamations and proposals may not have been encouraging to Britain, but certainly not "disturbing". Both at the April 28-29, 1938 and September 18 meetings with France, there came from the British side opinions and information on Russia which obviously served to undermine any confidence the French, although far better informed, may have had in the Soviet Union.
2. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 318.

to Hitler in a personal letter to be conveyed by Horace Wilson. If Hitler was not amenable, Wilson was authorized to warn him that Britain would stand by France in case of war.[1]

On the morning of September 26 Gamelin discussed with Chamberlain and Inskip questions of French, German and Czech military dispositions. Russia was not then mentioned as Gamelin had reached no prior agreement with Daladier on the subject. Later the French general met the service ministers and the problem of Soviet aid was brought up. He said that the "certain opposition" of Poland and the "no less probable opposition" of Rumania made the participation of Soviet land forces unlikely. Rumania would permit overflights of Soviet aircraft. These were "good and numerous", though not comparable to German material.[2] At this point Gamelin passed on information just received from Moscow and telephoned to him from Paris by General Jeannel, his chief of staff. This was to the effect that Russia had thirty infantry divisions on her western frontier, supported by cavalry, reservists, and aviation and tank

1. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, Sept. 26, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1096, pp. 536-537 and fn. 1.
2. Halifax to Phipps, Sept. 27, 1938, ibid., no. 1143, p. 575, fn. 1. See also, Gamelin, vol. II, pp. 351-352.

units.[1] However, as Gamelin noted, "il est évident que l'hypothèse de voir la Russie envahir la Pologne ne sourit guère à nos alliés."[2] Be that as it may, it seems the general impression left by his visit was not especially favourable. Hoare claimed that the French general gave a "very depressing account of the value of Czech resistance." The available British record indicates he mentioned "certainly for a few weeks, but perhaps not for a few months." In forwarding the information to Paris, Halifax spoke of Gamelin's "disturbing estimate".[3]

During the final meeting of the British and French ministers on the 26th Chamberlain bleakly summarized the situation. France intended to honour her obligations and Britain would stand by her commitment to French security. A démarche to Poland urging moderation was also agreed

1. Ibid., pp. 348, 352; Commissariat of Defence of the USSR to Vasilchenko, Sept. 25, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 53, p. 118; Vasilchenko to Commissariat of Defence of the USSR, Sept. 26, 1938, ibid., no. 54, p. 119. Fuller details of Soviet military preparations are given in Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 737; and Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 316. Prasolov and Rezonov, op.cit., pp. 220-225, contains extensive new information quoted from the Ministry of Defence Archives of the USSR. See also, Fierlinger to Krofta, Sept. 29, 1938, N.D.H.M., no. 55, p. 122; Rothstein, op.cit., pp. 201-202. Beck confirmed later that Russia had troops concentrated on the Polish border. Kennard to Halifax, Dec. 9, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 417, p. 419.
2. Gamelin, vol. II, p. 352.
3. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 316; Notes by Hoare on the Munich Crisis, Templewood Papers, X:5; Halifax to Phipps, Sept. 27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1143, p. 575 and fn. 1.

upon.[1]

Meanwhile events in London moved quickly. A state of emergency was declared and the fleet mobilized. Perhaps most indicative of this new mood of resolution and determination was the press communiqué issued on September 26 from Downing Street and published the following day. It stated that if, in spite of Anglo-French efforts at conciliation, Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, "the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France."[2]

The precise origins of this statement, after all the subsequent controversy it aroused, is now clear. Halifax has stated that he met with Churchill and Chamberlain in the cabinet room where they

> spoke together and agreed together in the sense of the Communiqué. But that evening, at the F.O. Rex Leeper, who was then Head of the Press Dept., brought me [i.e., Halifax] in the Communiqué for approval. I approved it without reference to Neville, because I thought it was completely in accord with his thought, and with what I imagined we had all been saying to each other at our meeting. But, greatly to my surprise, Neville was much put out when the Communiqué appeared, and reproved me with not having submitted it to him before publication. I never understood then, and I don't understand now,

1. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, Sept. 26, 1938, ibid., no. 1096, pp. 536-541.
2. Halifax to Henderson, Sept. 26, 1938, ibid., no. 1111, p. 500, fn. 1.

> why he should have been vexed - unless it was that he thought it "provocative" and not fully consistent with his desire to make further conciliatory appeal to Hitler.[1]

The communiqué, Halifax concluded, "said publicly what we had all been saying privately."[2]

The significant inclusion was of course the Soviet Union. This was the first time it had been publicly mentioned in a government communiqué. Presumably the basis for this action was Litvinov's Geneva speeches, his interview with De La Warr, and Maisky's consistent lobbying activities in London. The advantage thereby gained for Britain was the impression it created abroad of a united

1. In a press statement on the 26th and a broadcast the following day, Chamberlain urged further conciliation, still unconvinced that it was "really the great issues ... at stake." Chamberlain, op.cit., pp. 273-276. See also, Vincent Massey, What's Past is Prologue (London 1964), p. 261.
2. Letter from Halifax to Churchill, July 24, 1947, Hickleton Papers, A4.410.19.3. This reply was prompted by a letter from Churchill which inter alia set out his recollections of the origin of the communiqué. See Letter from Churchill to Halifax, July 23, 1947, Hickleton Papers, A4.410.19.2. Cf. Churchill, vol. I, pp. 277-278. Of his own role Leeper has noted: "I remember clearly issuing the communiqué with Halifax's approval. Such a communiqué was never signed by the Secretary of State but I certainly know he approved it." Letter from Sir Reginald Leeper to Laurence Thompson, Sept. 22, 1966. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 318, mentions that there had been "some trouble" over the communiqué, but mistakenly asserts that a repudiation was issued. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 149, considers the communiqué may have been "rather too sweeping". See also, Amery, vol. III, pp. 277-278; Diary Entry of Sept. 26, 1938, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 367; Macmillan, Winds of Change, p. 559; and Bilainkin, op.cit., p. 232.

front. This was in fact Litvinov's opinion.[1] The communiqué also precisely reflected that policy so long advocated as an alternative to appeasement. It acquired for many a sort of mythical importance, and was interpreted as a "proclaimed alliance with France and Russia."[2] Eden later claimed in the Commons that it had helped to avert war.[3] A large section of the press, which had given the communiqué feature coverage, (except for The Times where it was quoted in a small notice at the bottom of an inside page), also criticized Chamberlain for having finally supported collective security only to abandon it after the Munich conference. But should the communiqué have had to be tested the weak foundations on which it rested would have been exposed.

The communiqué was issued without the knowledge or authorization of Moscow.[4] However, the new firmness in British policy did not go unnoticed. On September 23 Pravda quoted with obvious approval an interview Churchill had given to a Reuter's correspondent urging a joint Anglo-French-Soviet front.[5] Several days later a Havas report

1. Rothstein, op.cit., p. 187. This argument is developed at length in Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 259-261.
2. Diary Entry of Sept. 28, 1938, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 371. See also, Letter from Nicolson to Fisher, Sept. 29, 1938, H.A.L. Fisher Papers (Bodleian Library, Oxford).
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 3, 1938, cols. 79-80.
4. Rothstein, op.cit., p. 103, notes that Litvinov personally confirmed this for him.
5. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 656.

from Moscow described Soviet authorities as satisfied that Britain and France had now taken a stand on the side of Czechoslovakia. It was considered that "the requisite conditions exist for the realization of common agreement and for close military collaboration between England, France and Soviet Russia. The Soviet Government is willing to commence forthwith discussions to that end."[1] At the same time the text of the Soviet-Czech treaty was publicized and Russia's obligation to assist Czechoslovakia if attacked was emphasized.[2]

French reaction presented a striking contrast. The statement was belittled, if not completely discredited. Bonnet claims he was totally surprised. It seemed to him to go beyond both Britain's very restricted commitment and the known facts on the limitations of Soviet intervention. He also asserts that Phipps attributed the communiqué to the machinations of Churchill and Vansittart, designed to impress Hitler, but not to be taken as an expression of British policy.[3]

1. Quoted in Ripka, op.cit., pp. 150-151.
2. News Chronicle, Sept. 27, 1938, quoted in Coates, vol. I, p. 592.
3. Bonnet, vol. I, p. 273; and his Quai d'Orsay, pp. 190-191. For further details, see Noguères, op.cit., pp. 196-198; Alexander Werth, France and Munich (London 1939), pp. 288-291; Camille Bloch, "La Politique de l'U.R.S.S. Pendant la Crise de Munich (Mars-Septembre, 1938)", Etudes d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine, vol. I, 1947, pp. 203-205; Les Evénements, vol. VII, pp. 2176-2181. Cf. Vansittart, "Morally Indefensible Agreement", p. 676.

The reception Hitler gave to Chamberlain's final appeal was disastrous. During two hectic meetings with Horace Wilson, Hitler remained adamant: refusal of his proposals meant a march on Czechoslovakia. Wilson pleaded, argued and again sketched out, as he had to Kordt in August, the advantages of an Anglo-German agreement. He said that he "had been much struck ... by a speech in which Herr Hitler had said that he regarded England and Germany as bulwarks against disruption, particularly from the East." Wilson also added that Britain would stand by France if she were obliged to fulfil any treaty obligations.[1]

But in London Chamberlain's efforts to find a peaceful solution continued unabated. His conciliatory broadcast and press statement have already been noted. Benes was once more advised that Czechoslovakia could not be saved from occupation.[2] Both Bonnet and Henderson argued against waging a preventive war. Phipps tried to convince the foreign office that all resistance forces in France

1. Notes of a Conversation, Sept. 27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1129, pp. 564-567. See also, Memorandum on a Conversation, Sept. 27, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 634, p. 964. Rothstein, op.cit., p. 103, interprets Wilson's statement as an offer of an Anglo-German alliance against the USSR. Cf. Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 264-265.
2. Halifax to Newton, Sept. 27, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1136, p. 570.

were communists in the pay of Moscow.[1] Finally, yet another scheme was elaborated to meet Hitler's terms. It envisaged an occupation by stages and negotiations between Germany, Britain, France and Czechoslovakia to neutralize and guarantee the latter country. On September 28, after a message to Hitler from Chamberlain suggesting another meeting[2] and with the help of Mussolini, the prime minister dramatically announced to the house of commons that a four power conference would take place at Munich.

A parallel suggestion for an international conference on the crisis had ironically come on September 27 from Roosevelt, in the form of an appeal addressed to Hitler.[3] The next day Kirk made a verbal communication to Potemkin, suggesting the Soviet government advise Germany and Czechoslovakia to preserve peace.[4] In their reply, after referring to Litvinov's March proposal for a conference, the Soviet government again suggested the "immediate convening of an international conference" to consider "effective means of averting further aggression". Russia

1. Henderson to Halifax, Sept. 28, 1938, ibid., no. 1155, p. 586; Phipps to Halifax, Sept. 26, 28, 1938, ibid., nos. 1099, 1160, pp. 544, 588.
2. Halifax to Henderson, Sept. 27, 28, 1938, ibid., nos. 1140, 1158, pp. 572-573, 587.
3. Roosevelt to Hitler, Sept. 27, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, pp. 684-685.
4. Hull to Various U.S. Missions, Sept. 27, 1938, ibid., pp. 677-678.

was prepared to take an active part.[1] This final proposal was her last attempt to enter into the great power negotiations on Czechoslovakia.[2]

Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini met at Munich on the 29th. The agreement eventually reached there had still to gain Czechoslovakia's assent. On September 30 Benes asked Alexandrovsky what was Russia's attitude to the two possibilities facing Czechoslovakia; that is, "further struggle or capitulation." Before the Soviets could answer Benes withdrew his enquiry.[3] For this he has been accused of having "merely sought 'to justify himself' before history."[4] Czechoslovakia had meanwhile capitulated.

1. Note from Potemkin to Kirk, Sept. 28, 1938, quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 306. Soviet historiography is now extremely critical of U.S. policy in 1938, asserting that Roosevelt and his European ambassadors, especially Bullitt and Kennedy, were convinced appeasers and played an active role in preparing the Munich conference. See e.g., M. Baturin, S.SH.A. i Myunkhen, iz Istorii Amerikanskoi Vneshnei Politiki, 1937-1938gg. (The U.S.A. and Munich, From the History of American Foreign Policy, 1937-1938, Moscow 1961); his "The United States and Munich", International Affairs (Moscow), no. 4, Apr. 1959, pp. 75-81; Yu. V. Arutyunyan, "Rol Amerikanskoi Diplomatii v Organizatsii Myunkhenskoi Konferentsii 1938 goda" (The Role of American Diplomacy in the Organization of the 1938 Munich Conference), Voprosy Istorii, no. 2, Feb. 1958, pp. 76-95.
2. Tippelskirch to German Foreign Ministry, Sept. 29, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 664, p. 996.
3. Alexandrovsky to Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Sept. 30, 1938, N.D.H.M., nos. 57-58, 60, pp. 126-128, 130-131; Potemkin to Alexandrovsky, Sept. 30, 1938, ibid., no. 59, p. 129. For the difficulties involved in Alexandrovsky's transmission of Benes' enquiry, see Cienciala, "Review of New Documents", pp. 587-588.
4. Zemskov, op.cit., p. 75.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM MUNICH TO PRAGUE.

The first official step taken by the USSR after the Munich conference was to totally disassociate itself from recent events. On October 2 Tass stated that, contrary to reports, Daladier had not been empowered to speak for the Soviet government. Two days later a further communiqué denied that either Maisky or Suritz had been consulted or kept regularly informed of developments. They were given no information beyond that available in the press. It was emphasized that Russia had nothing whatever to do either with the Munich conference or its decisions.[1] Thereby, as Potemkin informed Maisky, the Soviets were able to "refute the swindle" attempted by Britain and France.[2]

Maisky vigorously set to work in London to buttress this contention. He circulated among his political acquaintances a long memorandum which outlined the course of Anglo-Soviet relations during September. It gave explicit details of diplomatic conversations and the extent of contacts; contending that Moscow had been cold-shouldered. Only the meeting of September 23 at Geneva was singled out as the "one occasion which approached something

1. Texts in Degras, vol. III, pp. 306-307.
2. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 741.

like consultation" between the two governments.[1] Maisky argued that Chamberlain's attitude during the crisis, as previously, had been based on a consistent policy of "seeking any arrangement with the Fascist powers ... rather than work in association with the U.S.S.R."[2] He had "tried to trick ... [Britain] into his four power pact."[3]

In conversation with Bonnet on October 1, Litvinov again restated his conviction that Hitler had been bluffing and never meant to risk war. If France and Britain "had stood firm they would, with Russia's help, have made Hitler climb down."[4] Potemkin was much more revealing. He told Schulenburg that the Munich conference was "the rebirth of the 'notorious' Four Power Pact, which wanted to force its will on Europe". A general conference should have dealt with the Czech dispute.[5] Coulondre was informed

1. A copy of this memorandum can be found as an Enclosure in a Letter from Maisky to Lloyd George, Oct. 4, 1938, Lloyd George Papers, G/14/1/9. On Oct. 1, 1938 Maisky had sent Lloyd George a copy both of Litvinov's March 17 press statement, and his speech at the League on September 21, with the suggestion that the material would "be of interest ... in the present circumstances." Lloyd George Papers, G/14/1/10. Among the others the ambassador briefed were: Dalton (Entry of Oct. 11, 1938, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 185); Amery (vol. III, pp. 293-294); Liddell Hart (vol. II, p. 195); Thomas Jones and George Bernard Shaw (Jones, op.cit., p. 419); and Arthur Greenwood, who quoted it almost verbatim in parliament on October 5. See below, pp. 226-227. Presumably others, such as Churchill, Nicolson, and Sinclair were also informed.
2. Liddell Hart, loc.cit.
3. Entry of Oct. 4, 1938, Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives.
4. Phipps to Halifax, Oct. 1, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 100, p. 67.
5. Memorandum by Schulenburg, Sept. 29, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. II, no. 667, p. 998.

by the deputy commissar that the USSR had been deliberately excluded from the negotiations. A fourth partition of Poland would be the inevitable consequence of Munich.[1] This had already been implied on October 1 in Pravda.[2]

These statements adequately suggest the reaction of the Soviet Union to the Munich conference. Their criticisms of appeasement had been so vehement and sustained that they could not have been totally surprised by events. Annoyance, disappointment and anger vented publicly by Soviet diplomats no doubt hid deeper feelings of disillusionment. Stalin has been described as "alarmed and humiliated to the quick."[3] The Soviet government "drew the necessary conclusions from the Munich betrayal by the Western Powers."[4]

In one sense the conference was indeed seen as only the latest, if not the most dramatic, in a long series of Anglo-French concessions to nazism. But Soviet interests were involved in Czechoslovakia by virtue of treaty relations and strategic considerations. Yet they were ignored and their proposals, among which were included

1. Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 165, 176. See also, Angelo Rossi, The Russo-German Alliance, August 1939-June 1941 (London 1950), p. 3.
2. Budurowycz, op.cit., p. 127, fn. 2.
3. Isaac Deutscher, Stalin, A Political Biography (2nd edn., London 1967), p. 426.
4. B.N. Ponomaryov, et.al., History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Moscow 1960), /hereafter: History of the C.P.S.U./, p. 507.

suggestions for a conference, disregarded. This act confirmed Soviet suspicions that neither Britain nor France had any intention of resisting Hitler. It corroborated their interpretation of appeasement as a policy aimed at concluding a four power pact, and isolating the USSR.

The Soviets were also convinced, as a result of Munich, that the western powers intended to divert German expansion eastwards. The political implications of the agreement and the neutralization of Czechoslovakia indicated a French withdrawal from eastern Europe. Geographically it opened to Hitler prospects of unlimited economic and political expansion east of the Reich. Thus, as Stalin later suggested, the Sudeten areas "were yielded to Germany as the price of an undertaking to launch war on the Soviet Union".[1] It was in this sense also that the Anglo-German declaration signed at Munich by Chamberlain and Hitler was understood in Moscow; namely, as a promise of benevolent neutrality if Germany attacked Russia, and as giving Hitler

1. Joseph Stalin, Leninism (London 1940), p. 527. Virtually any Soviet monograph presents the above interpretation as the implications of Munich for the USSR. See e.g., Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 740-741; Polyakov, op.cit., pp. 281-286; Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 363-365; V.I. Potemkin, Politika Umirotvoreniya Agressorov i Borba Sovetskogo Soyuza za Mir (The Policy of Appeasing Aggressors and the Struggle of the Soviet Union for Peace, Moscow 1943), pp. 22-24; Falsifiers of History, pp. 27-28; Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 321; Blishchenko, op.cit., pp. 63-74; Trukhanovsky, Vneshnyaya Politika Anglii, p. 333.

a free hand in eastern Europe.[1]

Most important for the future of Soviet policy in western Europe was the fate of collective security. As the most fervent advocate of that policy Litvinov must have been acutely embarrassed by having to witness the Munich conference as a spectator. Five years of effort to enter the councils of Europe as an equal power was shattered by the ironic renewal of the 1933 four power pact scheme. That his policy had suffered a major setback must have been evident in the kremlin. But to assert that Munich was the "final collapse" of the Litvinov approach[2] seems an unwarranted assumption. This contention is generally based on certain tentative moves in Nazi-Soviet relations,[3] similar to those already noted in June-July 1938 and even earlier. The economic overtures, however, now came from Schulenburg and not from the Soviet side, and in any case

1. Maisky, Spanish Notebooks, p. 183, fn. 1; Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 365. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 166; Charles Webster, "Munich Reconsidered: A Survey of British Policy", International Affairs, vol. XXXVII, no. 2, Apr. 1961, p. 148; and A.J. Toynbee, "A Turning Point in History", Foreign Affairs, vol. XVII, no. 2, Jan. 1939, pp. 305-306, draw the same conclusion.
2. Gerhard L. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941 (Leiden 1954), /hereafter: Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union/, p. 6.
3. See details in Hilger and Meyer, op.cit., pp. 288-289; DeWitt C. Poole, "Light on Nazi Foreign Policy", Foreign Affairs, vol. XXV, no. 1, Oct. 1946, p. 141. Duroselle, op.cit., p. 89, points out that while anti-German articles in the Soviet press diminished they did not altogether cease.

were unsuccessful.[1] Rather, what seems to have taken place was a periodic shift in emphasis. Soviet policy has here been interpreted as essentially very flexible. Theoretically able to choose between the alternatives of Geneva or Berlin, between collective security and isolation followed by accommodation with Germany, Moscow's policy entered a gestation period. Soviet officials alternated between sombre threats of isolation and assurances to the contrary. Maisky confided to Dalton that the Soviet government would not "for the present do anything dramatic. They would wait for a month or so and watch developments."[2] Speaking to Boothby at a later date, Maisky described his government as having decided after Munich "to have done with Geneva and retire into a well-protected isolation."[3] He told Liddell Hart the same, but added: "... whatever the immediate advantages of this policy the Government of the U.S.S.R. recognised its possible long-term dangers, and were thus inclined to defer any definite decision to cut loose from the West."[4]

An immediate decision, however, was not taken. In fact, the Journal de Moscou rather belatedly renewed the

1. Craig and Gilbert, vol. II, pp. 495-499, give a useful summary of Schulenburg's post-Munich efforts to improve economic relations with the USSR.
2. Entry of Oct. 11, 1938, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 185.
3. Memorandum by Boothby on a Conversation with Maisky, [hereafter: Boothby Memorandum], Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Boothby, Fight to Live, p. 189.
4. Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 222.

standard Soviet call for a great power conference.[1] In February 1939, addressing a meeting of the Anglo-Russian parliamentary committee, Maisky was still warning that "there might be a change of policy".[2] Several weeks later he stated the Soviets were "hesitating before deciding on a policy of complete isolation." They had therefore agreed "to wait and see how things developed."[3] The situation from October 1938 to March 1939 seems to have been a particularly unsettled one in Soviet foreign policy.

Foreign diplomats in Moscow generally appraised the situation accurately and with commendable reserve, largely along the above lines. Their reports in fact exhibit such a degree of uniformity as to suggest a considerable mutual exchange of ideas on the problems involved. They all emphasized the bitter disappointment felt in Moscow at the events of September. Soviet press opinion, they reported, totally condemned the Anglo-French betrayal of Czechoslovakia; warned that collective security had been severely if not irreparably damaged and that further fascist aggression was inevitable; and emphasized that world peace was being dangerously threatened. The protestations that

1. Text in Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, "The Munich 'Agreement' Through Soviet Eyes", News Bulletin, no. 20, Oct. 29, 1938.
2. Memorandum by Lord Strabolgi on a Conversation with Maisky [hereafter: Strabolgi Memorandum], Sept. 20, 1939, Dalton Papers.
3. Minute by Butler, Mar. 9, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 194, p. 208.

the Soviet Union had intended to play, and would have played her part, were stronger than ever.

Underlying much of Russian comment was an acute awareness of the many anti-Soviet implications of the Munich settlement. These the foreign diplomats also perceptively elicited. Litvinov's personal position was considered to be secure, if somewhat shaken. Only his advocacy of League policies was compromised. As to predictions of future Soviet policy, most assessments were fairly restrained on the short term implications. Chilston envisaged no radical change. The Soviets did not intend to voluntarily isolate themselves further from European affairs. Kirk agreed with this view, and dismissed as boastful Russian proclamations of self-sufficiency. After some initial exhilaration at the prospects of a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement, even the German embassy concluded that Soviet policy had undergone no major change.[1] Coulondre alone maintained his belief that a Soviet approach to Berlin was inevitable. For the meantime he described the kremlin's policy as "tenant à leur habitude plusieurs fers au feu."[2]

1. Chilston to Halifax, Oct. 18, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 217, pp. 192-194; Kirk to Hull, Oct. 31, 1938, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 591-592; Tippelskirch to Schliep, Oct. 3, 10, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, nos. 476-477, pp. 602-607; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Nov. 18, 1938, ibid., no. 480, p. 609; Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 165-176, 171.
2. Ibid., p. 169.

That this was indeed the policy being pursued was confirmed in a speech delivered by Molotov on November 6, 1938, the anniversary of the bolshevik revolution. He scathingly criticized the policy of the "fascist and so called democratic Powers" who connived in the defeat of Czechoslovakia. The "second imperialist war", he warned, was in danger of expanding.[1] Molotov, usually associated with the Rapallo alternative in Soviet foreign policy,[2] was implying that an isolationist policy was on the cards.

The only positive political action undertaken by the USSR, however, was a move to minimize the effects of isolation implied in the Munich settlement. Litvinov readily responded to the Polish ambassador's overtures to improve relations.[3] A joint communiqué on November 26, 1938 reaffirmed the Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1932, and announced the intention to increase trade and regulate various frontier incidents.[4] Izvestia described the

1. Quoted in Degras, vol. III, pp. 308-311.
2. See above, p. 66.
3. Details in Final Report by Grzybowski, Nov. 6, 1939, Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, The Polish White Book, Official Documents Concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1933-1939 (London 1940), /hereafter: Polish White Book/, no. 184, pp. 204-207. See also, Entries of Oct. 18, Dec. 10, 1938, Szembek, op.cit., pp. 358-359, 386-387; Budurowycz, op.cit., pp. 127-134.
4. Text in Polish White Book, no. 160, pp. 181-182. See also, ibid., nos. 161, 162, pp. 182, 182-183; and Tass communique, Dec. 21, 1938, quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 314. Britain was immediately assured by Beck that no major policy change was involved. Kennard to Halifax, Dec. 9, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 417, p. 419. See also, Noël, op.cit., pp. 271-274.

declaration as only one of the measures contemplated by Russia to create a system of collective security.[1] The Poles were unenthusiastic about any such interpretation, but Polish-Soviet interests otherwise coincided. Both countries had been excluded from Munich and were potentially threatened by the four power pact. They also shared a mutual wariness over reported German plans for a separatist Ukraine.[2] Finally, having acquired Teschen in September with German help, Beck had now to correct the imbalance in Polish policy by effecting a détente with Moscow; thereby preventing any steps towards a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement.

The period from October 1938 to March 1939 is one of the most important in Anglo-Soviet relations before the war. Chamberlain's policy during this time was directed towards continuing the work of a general European settlement begun by the Munich conference. Consequently, more attention than before had to be paid to British policy in central and eastern Europe. At the same time a series of events and problems in this post-Munich period provide considerable evidence on the Soviet aspect of appeasement

1. Izvestia, Nov. 28, 1938, quoted in Budurowycz, op.cit., p. 132.
2. Vereker to Halifax, Jan. 10, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 529, p. 577; Note by Lipski, July 6, 1945, Lipski Papers and Memoirs, p. 452; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Dec. 3, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. V, no. 108, pp. 139-140. For the Ukrainian problem, see below, pp. 237-242.

diplomacy.

The first such problem was the proposed guarantee to Czechoslovakia. The annex to the Munich agreement stated that Britain and France stood by the offer, contained in the Anglo-French proposals of September 19, "relating to an international guarantee of the new boundries of the Czech State against unprovoked aggression."[1] Germany and Italy were to join when the Polish and Hungarian minorities' question was settled. Czechoslovakia would then be legally neutralized.

British policy and attitudes towards the guarantee were extremely ambiguous. It had been suggested early in 1938 as a suitable replacement for Czechoslovakia's alliances, so disliked by Germany. Suggestions for British participation as a guarantor were carefully avoided. In September the situation changed and Chamberlain committed his government, although "with foreboding".[2] The strategic difficulties involved were obviously as clear to him as to his critics. But from the prime minister's point of view the guarantee was conceived in political rather than military terms. He had conceded on this point to the French in the hope that the Sudetenland did indeed represent Hitler's last territorial claim in Europe, and that Germany would

1. U.K. Delegation (Munich) to Halifax, Sept. 30, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1224, pp. 628-629.
2. Feiling, op.cit., p. 391.

be bound henceforth to diplomatic negotiations. Consequently, Hoare asserted in parliament that the guarantee would be "more effective" in ensuring Czechoslovakia's security than her French and Soviet pacts.[1]

The anomalies of this approach were apparent when the composition of the guarantor powers was being discussed. Although excluded from the conference on the grounds of German opposition, the USSR was actually envisaged as a participant by the British government. This subject was discussed between Halifax and Maisky, while the prime minister was still in Munich.[2] During the Munich debate in parliament Hoare and Simon expressed the hope that Russia might be willing to join in the guarantee.[3] Dirksen, who enquired about these statements, was told that whether Russia wished to take part was primarily for her to decide.[4]

The reasons for this were both legal and political, as Halifax intimated later to King Carol of Rumania, on a visit to London. Questioned on the obvious incompatibility of having both Russia and Germany participate, Halifax explained that the September 19 Anglo-French plan "had implicitly assumed a Russian guarantee, or ... an invitation

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 3, 1938, col. 156.
2. Halifax to Chilston, Sept. 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1221, pp. 624-625.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 3, 5, 1938, cols. 156, 346.
4. Halifax to Henderson, Oct. 7, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 164, p. 128.

to Russia to give her guarantee". The second consideration was "domestic politics, namely, that no doubt considerable political opposition would be incited" if Russia were not invited to join. It was agreed that the "essential" participant should be Germany.[1]

This conclusion was reaffirmed during the Anglo-French talks in Paris on November 24. Chamberlain was even quite willing, given Czech agreement, to completely exclude the Soviet Union. He suggested Prague "should not be pressed to ask for a Russian guarantee." It was made quite clear that Britain did not envisage the guarantee as a practical measure which might lead to war with Germany. Rather, Chamberlain stressed what he hoped would be the deterrent nature of any arrangement. It was for this reason that Britain insisted on a guarantee which would only operate when three of the four Munich powers had agreed. The unlikelihood of dividing the Rome-Berlin axis on the Czech issue reflects the real British position.[2]

On December 10, when Newton questioned the Czech foreign minister, Frantisek Chvalkovsky, the latter was non-

1. Halifax to Palairet, Nov. 17, 1938, ibid., no. 262, p. 232. Kennard pointed out that Poland would strongly oppose Soviet participation. It would again revive the whole problem of passage. Kennard to Halifax, Nov. 30, 1938, ibid., no. 390, pp. 373-375.
2. Record of Conversations, Nov. 24, 1938, ibid., no. 325, pp. 300-306. See also, Bonnet, vol. II, p. 57.

committal on Soviet participation in the guarantee.[1] It had in fact already been refused on October 9.[2] Alexandrovsky was also informed that Czechoslovakia was "'no longer interested in the Russian alliance'."[3]

The whole subsequent history of the guarantee assumes a largely theoretical value. It was never implemented. Its importance to this point has been in the indications contained on British views concerning central Europe and the USSR; that is, a post-Munich military defence of Czechoslovakia was out of the question; and Soviet participation in the guarantee was not to be encouraged. These considerations stemmed from Chamberlain's desire not to impede developments towards a final settlement with Germany. From Hitler's point of view the Munich agreement and the Anglo-German declaration seemed to underwrite his theme of 'you keep the sea and let us have the land'. He clearly resented any Anglo-French interest in eastern Europe. The definitive German reply to a later Anglo-French request for implementation of the guarantee reflects this view. It bluntly stated that the "general development of this part of Europe primarily belongs to the sphere of the Reich's

1. Newton to Halifax, Dec. 11, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 423, pp. 423-424. Cf., Minute of Conversation Between Chvalkovsky and Newton, Dec. 10, 1938, Documents and Materials, vol. I, no. 43, pp. 289-290.
2. O Československé Zahranični političe. Sbornik Stati 1918-1939 (Prague 1956), p. 382; and Ministry of Defence Archives of the USSR, cited in "Great Patriotic War", part III, p. 91. Cf. Newton to Halifax, Dec. 14, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 428, p. 428.
3. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 197.

most essential interest...."[1] The German occupation of Prague on March 15, 1939 brought an end to an episode, which Halifax described as an "embarrassing commitment", and Strang called a "sham".[2]

Aside from the guarantee, several other problems forced the British government to consider its position on eastern Europe. These included the necessity to define its relations with the USSR, the discussions over the 'free hand' for Germany, policy regarding France's eastern alliances, and the problem of Ruthenia and the Ukraine separatist movement.

Largely in response to domestic criticism and possibly coinciding with Halifax's personal inclination, government members were hurriedly pressed to deal with Anglo-Soviet relations. On the very day the Munich conference opened, September 29, Halifax found it expedient to explain to Maisky, in a most conciliatory manner, the reasons why Russia had been excluded. He urged Maisky not to misinterpret the event. The necessity of continuing negotiations to avoid war, and Hitler's and Mussolini's reservations

1. Note Verbale, Feb. 28, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, no. 175, pp. 218-220. See also, Coulondre to Bonnet, Dec. 22, 1938, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Le Livre Jaune Français, Documents Diplomatiques, 1938-1939 (Paris 1939), /hereafter: Livre Jaune Français/, no. 35, pp. 48-49; Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 249-251; and Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, pp. 49-52.
2. Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 280, p. 273; Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 148.

toward the Soviets, made their participation impossible. The ambassador was assured that this "in no way signified any weakening of a desire on our part to preserve our understandings and relations with the Soviet Government." His general attitude seemed to Halifax "as, indeed, it was likely to be, one of some suspicion".[1] The next day Cadogan informed Maisky of the decisions reached at the Munich conference. The latter "did not mince words", and declared that Munich was a "major defeat for Britain and France ... a milestone marking the beginning of German hegemony in Europe". To a Labour acquaintance he added, "'war has become inevitable.'"[2]

Anglo-Soviet relations came up many times during the four day parliamentary debate on the Munich settlement. Chamberlain himself did not refer to Russia in his long speech on September 28, neither on October 3, nor in his wind-up on the 6th. He merely expressed satisfaction at how the four great powers had agreed on a difficult question and thereby avoided war.[3] But Attlee, Sinclair,

1. Halifax to Chilston, Sept. 29, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1221, pp. 623-625. Cf. Maisky, "Munich Drama", part V, p. 20; and his Who Helped Hitler? pp. 89-90. Daladier gave similar reasons for the exclusion of the USSR when discussing the question in the chambre des députes on October 4. Edouard Daladier, Défense du Pays (Paris 1939), p. 144.
2. Diary Entry of Sept. 30, 1938, Maisky, "Munich Drama", part V, p. 22; and his Who Helped Hitler? p. 85.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 3, 1938, col. 45.

Eden, Dalton and Churchill, among others, criticized the government for cold-shouldering the USSR and failing to explore adequately the possibilities of resisting Germany with Soviet help. It was alleged that only a united front of peaceful powers could have restrained Hitler. They also warned of a possible Soviet retreat into isolation as a consequence of Chamberlain's pursuit of a four power pact. Some predicted a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement.[1] Dalton supplemented his criticism with very explicit evidence, derived from the Soviet embassy, on the exact nature of Anglo-Soviet discussions during September.[2]

Replying to these charges, Hoare suggested that France had been primarily responsible for consulting with the USSR. To talk of the 'cold-shoulder' was a "complete exaggeration of the position." He then confirmed Dalton's descriptions of Maisky's contacts with the government, and added that at Geneva, the British delegation maintained the contact.[3] Nonetheless, A.V. Alexander returned to the subject, claiming the government had received on September 8 a report on

1. Ibid., Oct. 3, 5, 1938, cols. 57-58, 63-65, 74, 86-87, 141-144, 363-364. See also, ibid., Oct. 4, 5, 1938, cols. 173-174, 182, 287. For an interesting discussion of Labour thinking on the USSR and collective security at this point, see Labour Party, Policy Committee, Labour Policy After Munich, no. 8, Oct. 8, 1938; and Record of an Informal Discussion, Oct. 19, 1938, Dalton Papers.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 3, 1938, col. 141.
3. Ibid., Oct. 3, 1938, cols. 152-153.

Litvinov's proposal for staff talks made to Payart.[1] Inskip denied the validity of the information; and repeated the official explanation as to why there had been no Soviet representative at Munich. He also rejected the solution based on a triple alliance. It would have offered "no remedy for the disease" and would have been a return to "power politics".[2]

To counter what he considered the misleading impression from the government, Maisky circulated in London the memorandum on Anglo-Soviet contacts during September referred to above. Inevitably his information was brought up in parliament. Greenwood quoted almost verbatim from Maisky's narrative and again criticized the government's handling of its relations with Moscow.[3] But Simon closed the government's case by assuring members that there had been no intention of excluding Russia from any European settlement. Nor had Britain succumbed to four power diplomacy.[4] In the Lords Halifax presented similar views, but was answered by similar criticisms from Lord Snell.[5]

1. Ibid., Oct. 4, 1938, cols. 286-287.
2. Ibid., Oct. 4, 1938, cols. 297-298, 304.
3. Ibid., Oct, 5, 1938, col. 356. Maisky had described these contacts as: "... a) rare; b) in the nature of an exchange of views on the situation or information given to the Soviet Government on the already accomplished facts; c) except the meeting at Geneva, which had no direct results, there was not a single case of consultation...." Letter from Maisky to Lloyd George, Enclosure, Oct. 4, 1938, Lloyd George Papers, G/14/1/9.
4. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 5, 1938, col..346.
5. H.L. Deb., vol. 110, Oct. 3, 1938, cols. 1301-1302, 1313.

The prime minister's concluding speech on October 6 revealed the deep gulf which still separated his policy from that of his critics in all parties. As on so many previous occasions, he described armaments and military alliances as a "policy of utter despair". Instead, the government intended to continue its efforts of avoiding war by diplomatic negotiations.[1] The one concession Chamberlain did make to his critics was a commitment to an invigorated rearmament programme.

If parliamentary statements seemed to offer hopes of closer Anglo-Soviet relations, other discussions and comments indicated otherwise. Chamberlain confided to the king that he intended "to leave the Soviets alone."[2] Then, with considerable frankness, it was suggested to Dirksen that Britain understood how Germany had to keep an eye on Soviet air power.[3] Hoare declared that "after a further rapprochement between the four European Great Powers, the acceptance of certain defense obligations, or even a guarantee by them against Soviet Russia, was conceivable in the event of an

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 339, Oct. 6, 1938, cols. 549-550.
2. Notes by King George VI, quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI, p. 358.
3. This appears to be a reference to the discussion between Hitler and Chamberlain at Munich, concerning possibilities of abolishing bombers. Chamberlain thought Russia "could be left out of account." But Hitler disagreed in view of Russia's two to four thousand aircraft. Note of a Conversation, Sept. 30, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1228, p. 628.

attack by Soviet Russia."[1]

On October 10 Lord Winterton, chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, declared in a speech that the Soviet Union had not offered to help Czechoslovakia, but "only made vague promises owing to her military weakness." Two days later Winterton repeated his observation. The Soviet embassy issued two statements declaring the accusation to be a "complete perversion" of their position.[2] Maisky lodged an official protest with Halifax, who amicably suggested recriminations over past events were useless.[3] The incident was also debated rather inconclusively in the Commons. Chamberlain stated that the matter had been settled in discussions between the Soviet ambassador and Winterton. The latter did not withdraw his comments in spite of opposition pressure.[4] Although not a senior

1. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Oct. 31, 1938, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, no. 260, p. 321. See also, Herbert von Dirksen, Moscow, Tokyo, London (London 1951), p. 225; Memorandum by Dirksen, Aug. 18, 1939, Documents and Materials, vol. II, no. 29, pp. 160-161.
2. Extracts from Winterton's speeches and the text of the Soviet protests are in Coates, vol. I, pp. 594-595. See also, Earl Winterton, Orders of the Day (London 1953), p. 241.
3. Halifax to Chilston, Oct. 11, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 184, pp. 153-154. For Maisky's account, see his: "Munich Drama", part VI, pp. 24-25; Who Helped Hitler? pp. 87-89. Soviet historians generally devote much space to this incident which they interpret as a British attempt to blame the USSR for Munich. See e.g., Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 367-369. Popov overestimates Winterton's importance, referring to him as an "influential political personality, one of the largest landowners in England". Ibid., p. 367, fn. 100.
4. H.C. Deb., vol. 340, Nov. 3, 14, 1938, cols. 378, 648-654.

cabinet member, Winterton's comments probably reflected most of his colleagues' opinions. Hoare, for example, considered in retrospect that Stalin had "no intention of involving Russia" in an Anglo-German quarrel, nor was he "in any position to join in coercive action against Hitler" because of the purges.[1]

While not immune from expressing himself similarly on Russia,[2] Halifax seemed to maintain a slightly different perspective. He also spoke to Dirksen, but suggested that despite the establishment of useful contacts with Germany, Britain need not forego her relations with the Soviet government.[3] In conversation with Maisky, Halifax laid great stress on the need to improve Anglo-Soviet relations.[4] Kennedy was likewise informed that Britain "was going to try and keep as friendly as she could with Russia"; partly because the German army might some day want to get together with the Soviet Union.[5] Halifax was convinced that so long as Hitler was alive a Nazi-Soviet pact was impossible.

1. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 302. See also, Maugham, Munich, p. 29; Simon, op.cit., p. 253; and the opinions of R.S. Hudson, parliamentary secretary to the department of overseas trade, quoted in Entry of Dec. 22, 1938, Dalton Diary.
2. Minute of Conversation Between Dirksen and Halifax, Aug. 9, 1939, Documents and Materials, vol. II, no. 25, p. 129.
3. Halifax to Henderson, Oct. 7, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 164, p. 128.
4. Halifax to Chilston, Oct. 11, 1938, ibid., no. 184, p. 154.
5. Kennedy to Hull, Oct. 12, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 86.

Russia could either become isolationist or maintain contact with western Europe. However, he cautiously warned that the future was "still far too uncertain! Russia, for good or evil, is part of Europe and we cannot ignore her existence."[1] On October 18 Chilston reported that Moscow was eager to know the meaning of the conciliatory statements made in the Commons and to Maisky.[2]

Friendly relations with Russia appears to have largely been Halifax's personal emphasis. Government policy generally in regards to central and eastern Europe developed along lines quite inimical to any professed improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations. In fact the strongest support for the view that Britain gave Germany a 'free hand' in eastern Europe can be found in the months following Munich.[3] This is not to suggest, as do Soviet historians, that there existed a conscious conspiracy to foment a Nazi-Soviet confrontation. Rather British policy was precise on the need for <u>désintéressement</u> in eastern Europe, but discreetly vague on the consequences.

Chamberlain himself never directly referred to Britain's sanctioning the <u>Drang nach Osten</u>, but many of his statements

1. Letter from Halifax to Phipps, Nov. 1, 1938, <u>D.B.F.P.</u>, 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 285, p. 253.
2. Chilston to Halifax, Oct. 18, 1938, <u>ibid.</u>, no. 217, p. 193.
3. For a detailed analysis of this problem, see André Scherer, "Le Problème des 'Mains Libres' à l'Est", <u>Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale</u>, vol. VIII, no. 32, Oct. 1958, pp. 1-25.

and government actions bear this out.[1] His refusal to bind Britain to a military guarantee of the new Czech frontiers has already been noted. After the Munich conference he assured Hitler that Britain sought neither the economic nor the military encirclement of Germany.[2] In the Commons he admitted Germany's de facto economic predominance in south-east Europe, but would not draw the conclusion that this implied political supremacy as well.[3] Halifax later revealed that after Munich the government envisaged Germany as the "dominant power on the continent, with predominant rights in southeastern Europe, particularly in the field of commercial policy...."[4] He considered this "inevitable" and a "normal and natural thing".[5] It was on the basis of such opinions that Dirksen and Edward Raczynski, the Polish ambassador, were convinced Britain was prepared to condone German expansion in this direction.[6]

1. D.C. Watt, "Pirow's Berlin Mission in November, 1938", Wiener Library Bulletin, vol. XII, nos. 5-6, 1958, p. 53, rejects the suggestion that Pirow brought Hitler an offer from Chamberlain for a free hand in eastern Europe.
2. Note of a Conversation Between Chamberlain and Hitler, Sept. 30, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. II, no. 1228, p. 639.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 340, Nov. 1, 1938, col. 80.
4. Minute of a Conversation Between Dirksen and Halifax, Aug. 9, 1939, Documents and Materials, vol. II, no. 25, pp. 128-129.
5. Letter from Halifax to Phipps, Nov. 1, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 285, p. 252. Halifax deleted from the draft a following phrase recognizing that it would be a mistake ever to try and prevent this predominance. Birkenhead, op.cit., p. 421.
6. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Jan. 3, 4, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, nos. 286, 287, pp. 362, 366-367. Raczynski to Lipski, Dec. 19, 1938, Documents and Materials, vol. I, no. 44, Enclosure, pp. 300-301.

Indeed, throughout the autumn and winter, a sustained effort was made at the economic appeasement of Germany,[1] which had embarked immediately after Munich on an intensive economic offensive in south-east Europe.[2]

From the British embassy in Paris came further support for this policy. Phipps, although aware of the cynicism behind his views, believed that if Hitler was determined to move eastwards, "the less we are consulted the better".[3] The Berlin embassy was more outspoken. G.A. Ogilvie-Forbes, the counsellor, pointed out that the Pax Britannica was in any case ineffective in central and eastern Europe. Nothing could stop Hitler from creating a system of vassal states. The best policy to retain German good-will necessitated Britain recognizing she could no longer police the whole continent.[4] Henderson was as usual much more blunt. He maintained that co-operation with Hitler meant "acquiescing to a certain extent" in his aims in eastern Europe. A conflict of interest between Germany and Russia,

1. See details in Gilbert and Gott, op.cit., pp. 192-197, 199-205.
2. Ripka, op.cit., pp. 302-323; Elizabeth Wiskemann, "The 'Drang nach Osten' Continues", Foreign Affairs, vol. XVII, no. 4, July 1939, pp. 764-773; the same author's Undeclared War (2nd edn., London 1967), pp. 38-46, 87-101, 153-176, 314-318; F.I. Notovich, "Nemetsko-Fashistsky Drang Nach Osten Posle Myunkhena" (The German-Fascist Drang Nach Osten After Munich), Trudi po Novoi i Noveishei Istorii, vol. I, 1948, pp. 237-285; and Moisuc, "Roumanie Après Munich", pp. 327-335.
3. Letter from Phipps to Halifax, Nov. 1, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, appendix II, p. 621.
4. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, Jan. 3, 1939, ibid., no. 515, pp. 562-563.

such as in the Ukraine, was of no concern to Britain.[1] The only evidence as to doubts on the wisdom of this policy comes from Ashton-Gwatkin and Orme Sargent, assistant under-secretary of state for foreign affairs. The former was prepared to write off eastern Europe as a "bad debt". "What really matters",he wrote, "is the political use to which ... [Germany] puts it...."[2] Sargent indicated his awareness that a 'free hand' might in fact strengthen Germany to the point of constituting a threat to France and ultimately Britain.[3]

Concrete diplomatic action was also taken in support of these theoretical discussions, specifically in regards to relations with France. Throughout 1938 a dominant British fear was that of becoming involved in a war through France's extensive eastern treaty commitments. These were also considered a major irritant to improved relations with Germany. The Munich agreement with its professed aim to neutralize Czechoslovakia was a major step forward. The ties between western and eastern Europe were dramatically weakened. During October and November Chamberlain urged

1. Henderson to Halifax, Mar. 9, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 195, pp. 213-216.
2. Letter from Ashton-Gwatkin to Mallet, Nov. 14, 1938, Gilbert Archives.
3. Kennard to Halifax, Nov. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 385, p. 366, fn. 1. Cf. Colvin, op.cit., p. 302, quoting from the Cadogan Diary.

the French to continue this development. At the Paris talks on November 24, he expressed his misgivings if France should find herself entangled in eastern Europe as a consequence of the Franco-Soviet pact. Bonnet assured him that German intrigues in the Ukraine would not be sufficient grounds to invoke the treaty.[1] Halifax shared Chamberlain's apprehension. While he agreed that France should protect herself and Britain "from being entangled by Russia in war with Germany", he did not suggest denouncing the Franco-Soviet pact.[2]

Meanwhile, the British government supported France's efforts to conclude an agreement similar to the Anglo-German declaration. Chamberlain considered this "another step" towards European appeasement.[3] A Franco-German declaration was finally signed on December 6, 1938.[4] Considerable controversy has surrounded it. Ribbentrop was to claim that Bonnet intimated France recognized eastern Europe as a sphere of German interest.[5] Despite

1. Record of Anglo-French Conversations, Nov. 24, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 325, pp. 306-307.
2. Letter from Halifax to Phipps, Nov. 1, 1938, ibid., no. 285, p. 253.
3. Record of Anglo-French Conversations, Nov. 24, 1938, ibid., no. 325, p. 287. See also, Halifax to Phipps, Nov. 7, 10, 1938, ibid., nos. 291, 300, pp. 260, 267.
4. Text in Livre Jaune Français, no. 28, p. 38.
5. Letter from Ribbentrop to Bonnet, July 13, 1939, ibid., no. 163, p. 221.

Bonnet's vigorous denials on subsequent occasions,[1] it would appear that he created the impression France had tacitly abandoned eastern Europe,[2] to withdraw behind a "diplomatic 'Maginot Line'".[3] This was definitely the assumption in Berlin. It was also strongly suspected at the time in London. Bonnet had mentioned to Phipps that he wished to "'loosen the ties that bind France to Russia and Poland'."[4] Such sentiments were similar to British views on the problem, and accorded with the impressions given to French ministers on November 24. While a Franco-German détente was in the making, the Franco-Soviet pact became an uncomfortable vestige of a very different foreign policy. When the European situation deteriorated in 1939

1. Speech in the chambre des députés, Jan. 26, 1939, ibid., appendix II, pp. 423-425; Letter from Bonnet to Ribbentrop, July 21, 1939, ibid., no. 168, pp. 228-231; Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 35-49; his Quai d'Orsay, pp. 207-215; and Les Evénements, vol. IX, p. 2712. Coulondre op.cit., p. 197; and Alexis Léger, in a letter quoted in Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay, p. 214, support the foreign minister's contentions. Cf. Noël, op.cit., pp. 278-280.
2. E.J. Knapton, "The Duel for Central Europe: Some Aspects of French Diplomacy, 1938-1939", Journal of Central European Affairs, vol. II, no. 1, Apr. 1942, pp. 1-19; Jacques Dugowson, "La Déclaration Franco-Allemande du 6 Décembre 1938", Recherches Internationales à la Lumière du Marxisme, no. 23-24, Jan.-Apr. 1961, pp. 113-138; and Charles Bloch, "Les Relations Anglo-Allemandes de l'Accord de Munich à la Dénonciation du Traité Naval de 1935", Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, vol. V, nos. 18, 19, Apr., July 1955, pp. 33-49, 41-65, all support this conclusion. Sherer, op.cit., p. 24, draws the distinction between eastern Europe and the Ukraine, and says the "laisser faire" policy applied only to the latter.
3. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 50.
4. Kennard to Halifax, Nov. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 385, p. 366, fn. 1; Phipps to Halifax, Dec. 8, 1938, ibid., no. 407, p. 397, fn. 1.

Bonnet had to retrace his footsteps. But the damage had been done, and this made it all the more difficult for Anglo-French policy to reassert its presence in eastern Europe during the following spring.

The Soviets themselves had no intention of denouncing their treaty with France, but questioned its usefulness.[1] Although informed of the intended Franco-German declaration, they were not shown the text beforehand.[2] Its meaning seemed clear in Moscow: a guarantee of the Franco-German border, "laissant en fait à Hitler les mains libres en Europe orientale."[3]

As already indicated, policy on the Czech guarantee, attitudes towards the Soviet Union and relations with France were all conducted with the view of maximum support for German appeasement. The same was true of the Ukraine publicity. The Vienna award of November 2, 1938, by which Germany and Italy fixed the new Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontier, leaving a truncated Ruthenia[4]

1. Chilston to Halifax, Oct. 18, 1938, ibid., no. 217, p. 193; Entry of Oct. 11, 1938, Dalton Diary.
2. Ministry Note, Nov. 28, 1938, Livre Jaune Français, no. 27, p. 37.
3. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 673. "Great Patriotic War", part III, p. 89; Borisov, op.cit., pp. 416-420; and Belousova, op.cit., pp. 277-281, all relate the French declaration to the one Chamberlain signed with Hitler at Munich and consider it to have voided the Franco-Soviet pact.
4. Known also as Carpatho-Ukraine, Carpatho-Ruthenia, or sub-Carpathian Russia. For background and details, see D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, chapter 1; D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, chapters 3-4; Cienciala, Poland and the Western Powers, pp. 152-168; and especially Petro Stercho, Carpatho-Ukraine in International Relations, 1938-1939 (Ph.D. dissertation, Notre Dame 1959).

nominally autonomous, evoked no British protest. Ruthenia then became the centre of a campaign for a 'greater Ukraine'.

This activity aroused considerable interest and was a topic of intense speculation from October 1938 to January 1939. Military information coming into the foreign office and the despatches of diplomats indicated that Hitler was ready to embark on a new programme of expansion, and suggested Britain might be faced with a German attack on Russia. The German war office believed neither France nor Britain would march in defence of the USSR.[1] Reports consistently stressed the probability of Hitler moving eastwards, initially towards the Ukraine.[2]

Horace Wilson informed Maisky of this intelligence, and warned that Hitler was a "very adroit and clever calculator. He knows where to strike and when to strike."[3] Vansittart added that "in British governing circles ... it was now a very popular idea that Hitler's next blow would be eastwards, against the Soviet Ukraine."[4] In fact, so

1. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, Dec. 6, 29, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 403, p. 387, no. 505, Enclosure 2, p. 546.
2. All documents relevant to British policy on the Ukraine question, and information on the eastward direction of German military objectives are conveniently indicated in Rothstein, op.cit., pp. 282-295; Duroselle, op.cit., pp. 95-97.
3. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 375.
4. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted ibid. See also, Memorandum on the Ukrainian Question, Jan. 17, 1939, Gilbert Murray Papers, for Sargent's views.

long as speculations on German military moves were thus consistent, Chamberlain also pursued his policy of désintéressement on this question. This was in accordance with the views attributed to him by his parliamentary private secretary:

> I think that Chamberlain felt... Hitler had a great influence in the Danube Basin, and indeed in the Ukraine, and really Germany could have got all they wanted by peaceful means very easily....[1]

The prime minister made a special point of securing a French assurance that the Franco-Soviet pact would not be invoked should Germnay "begin the disruption of Russia" by her agitation in the east.[2] He was convinced that Russia "could not be an enemy to be feared by Germany".[3] The Ukrainian question was also raised during the Anglo-Italian talks in Rome, in January 1939. Chamberlain indicated that British information suspected a German move towards the Ukraine. He "would not say that such a war would necessarily involve the Western Powers also, but once

1. Douglas-Home, "The Munich Conference". Elucidating these remarks, he writes: "What I had in mind was the large German minority in the Ukraine which was sympathetic to Germany. I think the Danube basin and the Ukraine could have become an area with influence running widely through it. I was not thinking of annexation." Letter from Sir Alec Douglas-Home to the writer, June 12, 1968.
2. Record of Anglo-French Conversations, Nov. 24, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 325, p. 306-307.
3. Record of Anglo-Italian Conversations, Jan. 11-14, 1939, ibid., no. 500, p. 526.

war began one never could tell when or where it would stop." However, Mussolini foresaw neither a German sponsored, independent Ukraine nor an attack on Russia.[1]

In striking contrast to western preoccupations with the Ukraine, the Soviet government ostensibly treated the problem with indifference if not disdain. Maisky and Suritz did not take it very seriously, and Litvinov gave an impression of "unconcern" in Moscow diplomatic circles.[2] Speaking to Seeds, the foreign commissar dismissed with his "usual optimism" German plans in the Ukraine.[3] Nonetheless, Alexandrovsky warned the Czech government against lending support to any Ukrainian irredentist movement.[4]

It was first publicly mentioned on December 27, 1938 in the Journal de Moscou, only to be dismissed as a distraction for Hitler's real plans against the west.[5] The same newspaper argued on January 10 that Germany would

1. Ibid., p. 525. A.M. Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma v Evrope, Oktyabr 1938-Sentyabr 1939 (The Policy of British Imperialism in Europe, October 1938-September 1939, Moscow 1955), [hereafter: Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma], p. 237, describes Chamberlain's words as a "direct invitation for Hitler to attack the Soviet Union."
2. Halifax to Phipps, Dec. 16, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 434, p. 436; Wilson to Hull, Dec. 15, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, p. 114; Kirk to Hull, Jan. 19, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, p. 732.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 24, p. 25. Maisky spoke in the same sense to Halifax. Halifax to Seeds, Jan. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 38, p. 35. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 675, describes the military and geographic reasons which explain the Soviet attitude.
4. Ripka, op.cit., p. 329.
5. Vereker to Halifax, Dec. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 503, pp. 541-542.

not "venture along the route of greatest resistance". It accused Britain and France of "suggesting to Hitler to leave Western Europe in peace and to go in search of his prey to the east."[1] After assessing the situation very carefully, Vereker agreed with the Soviet view that the Ukraine was part of Russia and any attempt to interfere would mean war. He concluded that the Red army, despite the purges, could successfully deal with any invasion. Vereker's positive military assessment was partly an answer to a French report forwarded to Moscow, suggesting the USSR was "'militarily entirely impotent'", and could not resist a German supported, Ukraine independence movement.[2]

Stalin, in his March 10, 1939 speech, contemptuously dismissed the episode as "suspicious hullabaloo" designed "to incense the Soviet Union against Germany", by annexing the "elephant" (the Soviet Ukraine) to the "gnat" (the Carpathian Ukraine).[3] The reference to Germany was probably based on general suspicion of British intentions in eastern Europe, and particularly on the reports which

1. Quoted in Kirk to Hull, Jan. 19, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 731-732. On January 8, 1939 Pravda had offered the same interpretation. Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, p. 258.
2. Vereker to Halifax, Jan. 10, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 529, pp. 575-579.
3. Stalin, op.cit., p. 627.

reached Moscow of the Chamberlain-Mussolini conversations.[1] According to Rosso, Litvinov revealed his knowledge of the talks to Gryzybowski. "'Paris et Londres', Litvinov stated, 'se donnent bien du mal pour persuader Berlin que la route de l'Allemagne est orientée vers l'Est. Hitler en est toutefois moins persuadé que Français et Anglais ne paraissent l'être.'"[2]

The issue appears in retrospect to have been exaggerated. Whatever Hitler's military intentions,[3] the Ukraine question was abruptly dropped in early January. Ruthenia was incorporated by Hungary in March 1939, thus dispensing with a major irritant in German-Soviet relations.

Anglo-Soviet relations remained in the distant background so long as military reports indicated a German move eastwards. British diplomacy concentrated on disassociating from eastern Europe, improving relations with the Rome-Berlin axis, seeking to end the Spanish civil war, and encouraging a Franco-German détente. But the 'Munich

1. Apparently the Soviets shared the information gleaned by the Italian intelligence services from the British embassy in Rome. Mario Toscano, Pagine di Storia Diplomatica Contemporanea, vol. II (Milan 1963), p. 78, cited in D.C. Watt, Personalities and Policies (London 1965), p. 200.
2. Quoted in Mario Toscano, "La Politique Russe de l'Italie au Printemps 1939", Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, vol. II, no. 6, Apr. 1952, [hereafter: Toscano, "Politique Russe de l'Italie"], p. 2. See also, Mario Toscano, L'Italia e Gli Accordi Tedesco-Sovietici Dell' Agosto 1939 (Florence 1952), pp. 8, 13-21.
3. Robertson, op.cit., p. 155, describes Hitler's attitude to the problem as "uncertain." See also, ibid., pp. 150-155.

spirit' evaporated very quickly. Hitler did not respond to Chamberlain's peace overtures. Instead, bellicosity became his dominant tone in reply to British rearmament, and concern with Germany's anti-Jewish legislation. Halifax personally was a "good deal disappointed" by the deterioration in the situation.[1] The prime minister shared this mood in part, but "his determination to arrive at a stabilization of Europe was too deep-rooted" to be affected by setbacks.[2]

Nonetheless, during January 1939 the government decided to improve the state of Anglo-Soviet relations. This development, which has rarely been commented upon, was prompted by three factors. The first was the sudden change in information coming into the foreign office as to Hitler's military objectives. In late December and early January the Berlin embassy reported that a possible German attack against the west should not be disregarded.[3] Information confirming this increased rapidly. By January 17 Strang minuted: Hitler's "intention /is/ to attack in the West this Spring." Strang added that fear of a two front war would force Germany to try and secure her rear in

1. Halifax to Ogilvie-Forbes, Dec. 15, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 432, p. 434.
2. Massey, op.cit., p. 276.
3. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, Dec. 29, 1938, Jan. 3, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 505, Enclosures, pp. 545-551, no. 515, pp. 561-564.

the east.[1] British ambassadors abroad were also informed of reports that the anti-Comintern pact was to be turned into a military alliance; a move Litvinov had predicted several months earlier.[2]

In response to these developments, the British government decided to strengthen its strategic position in the west by tightening up military arrangements with France, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland.[3] To secure Soviet goodwill in eastern Europe could be an added advantage; especially, as Chamberlain had made clear in the Commons that any attack on France would bring in Britain.[4] Coupled with Bonnet's reaffirmation in the chambre des députés of the continued validity of the Franco-Soviet pact, one can discern an embryonic mutual assistance pact developing between Britain, France and Russia.

1. Minute by Strang, Jan. 17, 1939, ibid., no. 541, p. 590. Entries of Jan. 11, 16, 23, 1939, Inskip Diary, File 2; and Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Feb. 12, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II, indicate that Vansittart's sources of information were partly responsible for these reports.
2. Halifax to Phipps and Clive, Jan. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 40, pp. 37-40; Chilston to Halifax, Nov. 19, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. III, no. 318, p. 280.
3. Dennis Richards, Royal Air Force, 1939-1945, vol. I, The Fight at Odds (London 1953), [hereafter: Richards, vol. I], p. 32; Hore-Belisha Papers, pp. 168-169; 171-172; Halifax to Phipps and Clive, Feb. 10, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, nos. 98-99, pp. 100-102.
4. H.C. Deb., vol. 343, Feb. 6, 1939, col. 623.

The second factor was the renewal of economic contacts between Germany and Russia. During January 1939 German policy in eastern Europe was divided. Field-Marshal Göring and the ministry of economics were pressing for an agreement which could give Germany access to Soviet raw materials.[1] Politically, however, Hitler was still trying to persuade Beck to come to an arrangment over Danzig and the corridor, and secure Polish adherence to the anti-Comintern pact.[2] The former implied a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement leading ultimately to a division of Poland and a move westward. The latter implied a continuation of the Ukraine project against the USSR. It was finally agreed to send to Moscow, Julius Schnurre, head of the eastern section of the German foreign office, economic policy department. While still in Warsaw, en route, the English and French press revealed the nature of his proposed visit.[3]

1. See Memoranda by Wiehl, Nov. 4, 1938, Feb. 6, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, nos. 479, 488, pp. 608, 624-625.
2. Beck, op.cit., pp. 182-183; Minutes of Conversations, Jan. 5, Feb. 1, 1939, Polish White Book, nos. 48, 53, pp. 53, 56-57.
3. Pravda, Jan. 31, 1939, cited the News Chronicle as the source. Duroselle, op.cit., p. 94. The tone and information in the article by Vernon Bartlett, "Russia May be Driven into the Arms of Germany", News Chronicle, January 28, strongly suggest Soviet embassy inspiration. Cf. Vernon Bartlett, And Now, Tomorrow (London 1960), pp. 36-37. Schulenburg blamed the Poles for the leak. Schulenburg to Weizsäcker, Feb. 6, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, no. 487, p.623. See also, Peter Kleist, European Tragedy (Isle of Man 1965), pp. 11-12; Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, pp. 9-12; and the same author's "The Chapter on Russo-German Relations in Volume IV of Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945", Journal of Central European Affairs, vol. XII, no. 1, Apr. 1952, pp. 70-74.

It was immediately cancelled.

The foreign office received details of Schnurre's visit both from Moscow and Warsaw. In contrast to the secret commercial negotiations several months later, the Soviets at this point made no attempt at concealment; indeed, they readily offered information. But Maisky emphasized, as did other Soviet spokesmen, that the visit was taking place on German initiative, and he tried to minimize its importance.[1] Seeds reassured the foreign office that there was, as yet, no indication of any impending military or political contacts.[2] Further rumours of Nazi-Soviet commercial discussions circulated throughout February and were followed in London with great interest. This was a natural reaction in light of a foreign office warning, as early as 1935, that the formation of a German-Soviet economic bloc "would not be in the economic interest of this country, while, politically, it might constitute a great danger."[3]

It was this anxiety over some of the political consequences of recent developments that constitutes the final reason explaining the shift in British policy. The

1. Halifax to Seeds, Jan. 27, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 38, p. 35; Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, Jan. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 36, p. 34.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 35, p. 34.
3. Quoted in Gilbert, Roots of Appeasement, p. 154.

general tenor of information coming into the foreign office seemed to presage a Soviet retreat into isolation, or even worse. On February 1 Cadogan assessed all the information available. He described as "rather ominous" the plans to transform the anti-Comintern pact into a simple pact of mutual assistance, the Nazi-Soviet economic negotiations and the absence of any anti-bolshevik statement in Hitler's January 30 speech. "It seems", Cadogan concluded, "that we shall have to watch very carefully the development of any tendency towards a rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet."[1]

Maisky's pronouncements in London seemed to confirm Cadogan's warning. On February 3, at his own request, Maisky called on Butler. During the course of an extensive discussion, the Soviet ambassador criticized the state of Anglo-Soviet relations. The one exception singled out was the approach to Litvinov at Geneva, when the British government "appeared anxious to enter into friendly relations with the Soviet Government." After a further tour d'horizon, Butler "gained the impression from M. Maisky that the Soviet Government would now pursue an isolationist policy."[2]

1. Minute by Cadogan, Feb. 1, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 76, p. 71. In explanation of British policy in the winter of 1939, Butler writes that "it was obviously worthwhile trying to improve relations with Russia although Sir Alexander Cadogan in particular did not see very much hope. What British diplomacy was trying to avoid was any closer get together between Germany and Russia which was in any case unlikely in the long run owing to the Russians fear of the German army." Letter from Lord Butler to the writer, Sept. 25, 1968.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Feb. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 103, pp. 106-107.

Several days later Maisky told a group of English guests at the embassy that Russia was "obviously much wounded by Munich", and Britain could "expect no advances from her side." But an approach from London might be reciprocated.[1] The Anglo-Russian parliamentary committee was also advised of a possible change of policy.[2] In Moscow Litvinov bluntly warned Seeds that the Soviets would "'keep aloof' ... as their interests were not directly threatened."[3]

This was not the first time such reports reached London. But it was at last being taken partially into consideration.[4] Further evidence of this was a request to the Moscow embassy to report on the possibility of concluding a war trade agreement with the USSR in the event of an outbreak of hostilities. It was assumed Russia would

1. Diary Entry of Feb. 9, 1939, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 391. The group also included Boothby, Richard Law, Vernon Bartlett and J.B. Priestly.
2. Strabolgi Memorandum, Sept. 20, 1939, Dalton Papers.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Feb. 19, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 121, pp. 123-124. Cf. Naggiar to Bonnet, Feb. 24, 1939, quoted in William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 1937-1940 (New York 1952), pp. 60-61. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 387, ignores these obvious indications of isolationism from Soviet officials. He merely cites British opinions on this trend and denies it was ever part of Soviet policy, which continued as previously to support collective security.
4. Chilston notes: "I remember most distinctly my father voicing his fears of an eventual Nazi-Soviet pact, as far back as the autumn of 1937 (my last visit there) and his complaints that the F.O. discounted his forecast with incredulity and little interest." Letter from Viscount Chilston to the writer, June 26, 1968.

be neutral.[1] However, concern over this development did not signify agreement as to its probability. During November 1938, as already indicated, Halifax stated his disbelief that Hitler and Stalin personally could get together. Seeds himself suggested that warnings from the Soviet side of an approach to Berlin were simply an "old Soviet gambit" and should be disregarded.[2] Likewise after a long conversation with Chamberlain, Kennedy reported that the prime minister "does not take the possibility of a Russo-German alliance seriously. He says they are both so distrustful of each other that it would never work out...."[3]

The combination, therefore, of these three developments - fear of a German move westward, renewed Nazi-Soviet economic contacts, and the threat of a Soviet retreat into isolation - explain British efforts to improve relations with the kremlin. These took several forms. On the political front, Seeds, taking up his appointment as ambassador in succession to Chilston, carried specific instructions from Halifax to dissipate any impression that Britain was cold-shouldering the Soviet Union. Litvinov

1. Letter from H.M. Embassy in Moscow, Feb. 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, appendix III, p. 611.
2. Letter from Seeds to Oliphant, Feb. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 128, p. 132.
3. Kennedy to Hull, Feb. 17, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, (Washington 1956), p. 17.

was accordingly informed, and told of London's "real desire to know - and give friendly consideration to - the Soviet Government's views on international problems."[1] Presenting his letters of credence to Kalinin, Seeds reiterated this wish for improved relations. His use of Russian during the interview produced a "visible sensation".[2]

Halifax again outlined the British view of the USSR before the foreign affairs committee of the Conservative party:

> Best way to describe Russia now is something between the 1914 attitude of 'the unconquerable steam roller' and looking at her as entirely useless militarily. We cannot ignore a population of 180,000,000 people. Our new Ambassador is doing well....[3]

But in answer to a question from Maisky as to whether it was true that an attempt was being made to improve relations,

1. Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 24, pp. 24-25.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 28, 1939, ibid., no. 46, pp. 45-46. Seeds had spent several years in Russia before the revolution. On Chilston's retirement, he asked to be sent to the USSR in fulfilment of a life-long ambition. Sir William Seeds to the writer. Personal Interview. Halifax once described Seeds as the "only Englishman I have met who really wanted to live in Moscow." Entry of July 12, 1939, Dalton Papers.
3. Summary of a Statement made by Halifax to the Foreign Affairs Committee, Feb. 23, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/23/1/8. This summary was obtained by Lloyd George's secretary, A.J. Sylvester, from a "very reliable source". It appears that Maisky also was informed of Halifax's talk. Bilainkin, op.cit., p. 229.

Butler said Britain wanted "friendly" relations.[1] Suggestions in the Commons to institute some form of Anglo-Soviet military collaboration were turned down by the government. Nor in fact did Simon allow himself to be drawn into admitting Britain intended to establish a rapport with Moscow.[2]

What the Soviets were being offered, therefore, were essentially expressions of good-will. But this does indicate again, as did the September 23 approach to Litvinov and the press communiqué three days later, how close to the surface lay the Soviet alternative in British foreign policy. In January 1938 Chamberlain himself had stated he might have to aim at a possible alliance with the USSR.[3] A year later the first hesitant steps were taken. This is not to say that the British government at this time ever considered, let alone proposed, a firm treaty with Stalin. Nor that it would not have been dropped immediately if Hitler had taken a more positive attitude to Chamberlain's peace proposals. Rather, developments from January to March 1939 conformed to that approach Halifax had indicated in November 1938; namely, Britain must not 'ignore' the Soviet Union. In other words, Russian aid should be avail-

1. Minute by Butler, Mar. 9, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 194, p. 208.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 343, Feb. 8, 1939, cols. 929-930; vol. 344, Feb. 22, Mar. 8, 1939, cols. 354-355, 2251-2252.
3. See above, pp. 24-25.

able if and when needed.

If Chamberlain did mistrust Hitler after Munich, as is often alleged, then some firm political understanding with Stalin would have been a useful adjunct to Britain's renewed armaments programme. One of the few historians to specifically comment on Anglo-Soviet relations in the winter of 1938-1939 concludes that the refusal to establish a common front against nazism at that time constitutes "la grande faute de la politique anglo-française d'avant-guerre."[1] On the other hand, if Chamberlain was still intent on a final Anglo-German settlement, then the same reasons for leaving the Soviets alone would operate after the September crisis as before.

In actual fact, this was precisely the case. The continued post-Munich dismal reports of the Moscow embassy would have conveniently justified any policy of restraint towards the Soviet Union. Seeds shared most of Chilston's views, and the embassy personnel had not changed. They predicted that in case of war the Soviets would probably wish to see the collapse of both the allies and Germany; thus, giving them an "unrivalled opportunity to fish in troubled waters". The Soviet Union would maintain a policy of "nervous neutrality", unimpeded by ideological or

1. W.N. Medlicott, "De Munich à Prague", Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, vol. IV, no. 13, Jan. 1954, p. 15.

moral considerations.[1] A long despatch from Seeds, enclosing four memoranda from the embassy staff, summed up the situation as of March 6, 1939. Aside from drawing certain comparisons with Tsarist Russia of his student days, Seeds merely expressed his agreement with the enclosures. Fitzroy Maclean vouched for the political stability of the regime particularly in peacetime, but probably in case of war as well. However, he warned that the Soviet leadership "would not scruple to change horses in mid-stream." Firebrace, in an assessment not appreciably different from the one he submitted almost a year earlier, described the Red army as loyal, though weakened considerably by the purges. In defence of Soviet territory it would prove a serious obstacle, but could not distinguish itself in offensive operations. The Soviet air force, in Charlton Hallawell's estimation, would perform similar to the army. F.H. Todd, the commercial attaché, outlined the enormous strains the economy would have to bear in wartime. His estimate of its ability to hold up was not encouraging.[2] Undoubtedly, this was the picture the more cautious members of the British government carried with them during the forthcoming negotiations for a pact with the USSR.

1. Letter from H.M. Embassy in Moscow, Feb. 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, appendix III, pp. 611-614.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 6, 1939, ibid., no. 183, and Enclosures, pp. 188-199.

On the economic front renewed Russo-German commercial negotiations and their subsequent abrupt suspension instigated a parallel British effort. It was rumoured that Britain was considering a termination of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of 1934, partly due to a built-in imbalance which operated in Russia's favour. The subject was first broached in a conversation on January 27 between Halifax and Maisky, and again brought up by Kalinin two days later.[1] Maisky warned that a denunciation of the treaty "would have an extremely bad political and economic effect."[2] Hudson was advised in the same sense by Davies.[3] On February 20 Chamberlain announced in the Commons that Hudson would visit Moscow, among other northern capitals, in late March.[4] When informed of this, Seeds suggested that these trade negotiations should be viewed purely in business terms.[5] A strong tendency to avoid attributing to them any political implications was typical of the British attitude throughout. The Germans, in contrast,

1. Halifax to Seeds, Jan. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 38, pp. 35-36; Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 28, 1939, ibid., no. 46, pp. 45-46.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Feb. 14, 1939, ibid., no. 103, p. 106.
3. Davies, op.cit., p. 278.
4. H.C. Deb., vol. 344, Feb. 20, 1939, cols. 16-17. For a description of the working of the 1934 trade agreement, and the favourable press reaction to the parliamentary announcement, see Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, "Anglo-Soviet Trade, Visit of Mr. Hudson to Moscow", News Bulletin, no. 6, Mar. 1, 1939.
5. Letter from Seeds to Oliphant, Feb. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 128, p. 132.

who were later to use economics as a prelude to politics, could not but be resentful and suspicious of these developments. Schulenburg claimed Halifax intended the Hudson visit to give a "more tangible form" to his policy of closer Anglo-Soviet relations. However, Dirksen rather astutely commented that any such liaison was a "threat rather than a practical policy."[1]

Finally, and of great importance when one considers the usual lack of personal contact between British and Soviet officials, were the numerous social and political meetings which occurred between January and March 1939. From being one of the least officially consulted ambassadors in London, Maisky suddently became very busy indeed. He had a series of meetings with Halifax, Butler and Hudson at the foreign office to discuss Anglo-Soviet political and economic relations. This gave both sides an opportunity for a full and quite frank exchange of views. Social relations also warmed considerably. On February 20 Halifax, Churchill, Chilston and others dined at the Soviet embassy. Maisky, it was reported, "heard hopeful phrases" from Halifax.[2] Then, for the first time since the days of Ramsay MacDonald, a British prime minister was a guest at the Soviet embassy.

1. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Feb. 27, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, no. 325, p. 422; Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Jan. 3, 1939, ibid., no. 286, p. 363.
2. Bilainkin, op.cit., p. 228. This would appear to be a return invitation to the one Maisky received to Halifax's private residence on November 4, 1938.

Chamberlain, with cabinet ministers Hoare, Burgin, Inskip and Winterton were entertained by Maisky on March 1.[1]

The response to Britain's hand of friendship was quite unpromising. The general attitude adopted by Soviet diplomats and officials was that the USSR was "unaffected by the tumult of Western Europe."[2] Litvinov continued to intensely criticize appeasement diplomacy, and argued that his government detected no sign that Britain and France would do anything but continue to capitulate.[3] He had no reply to Seeds' question as to why British rearmament went unnoticed. The Soviet press continued to direct its "sneers ... at the weakness of the Western Powers".[4] In London Maisky took essentially the same line. Britain could not be relied upon to resist the dictators. Therefore, there was a "growing belief in Russia in isolationism." The USSR was nearly self-supporting and militarily invulnerable.[5] According to Maisky's record of this conversation, he warned Hudson that Moscow "would judge the seriousness of [British] intentions by the degree

1. Ibid., p. 232; Coates, vol. I, p. 601.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 46, p. 46.
3. Langer and Gleason, op.cit., pp. 60-61; Seeds to Halifax, Feb. 19, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 121, p. 124.
4. Ibid.; Seeds to Halifax, Jan. 26, 1939, ibid., no. 24, p. 25. See also, Seeds to Halifax, Feb. 20, 1939, ibid., no. 125, p. 128.
5. Letter from Hudson to Halifax, Mar. 9, 1939, ibid., no. 193, Enclosure, pp. 207-208. Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 222; and Fischer, op.cit., p. 556, record similar opinions voiced by Maisky at this time.

Anglo-Soviet relations were improved not by words but by deeds."[1] Butler found the ambassador "very suspicious" of Britain's approaches to Russia. The latter "could not believe that friendship with Russia formed part of the Prime Minister's policy of appeasement...." He suspected both Chamberlain's motives for being so kind to him at the embassy reception, and the Hudson visit. "It struck me", Butler concluded, "that he [i.e., Maisky] thought that the reason why we were approaching them was that ... the Government were anticipating trouble and were therefore seeking the help of Russia."[2]

This latter observation has in fact become the basic Soviet interpretation of this particular phase of Anglo-Soviet relations. Britain's approaches are seen as a "manoeuvre" designed to reinsure against the failure of Chamberlain's primary policy, rapprochement with Hitler; as a means to further pressure Germany; and taken in response to domestic opinion.[3]

Maisky's comments accurately foreshadowed the tone of Stalin's speech on March 10. The rather outspoken criticisms by the Soviet ambassador could possibly have

1. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 384.
2. Minute by Butler, Mar. 9, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 194, pp. 208-209.
3. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 384-386.

been intended to prepare the foreign office for what was a virtual rejection of British overtures to Russia since late January. The speech to the 18th congress of the C.P.S.U. reflected the course of Soviet foreign policy since Munich, and ambiguously hinted at future orientations.

Almost the first words of Stalin's address was a repetition of Molotov's November 18, 1938 description of the opening of the "new imperialist war". He recounted the history of recent events, and accused Britain and France of abandoning collective security. They had taken up a "position of non-intervention ... of 'neutrality'", while conniving to direct fascist aggression against the Soviet Union. The Ukraine episode he described as a plan to provoke a Russo-German confrontation without due reason. "Politics is politics", Stalin quoted, warning that the "big and dangerous political game started by the supporters of the policy of non-intervention may end in a serious fiasco for them." In conclusion, he outlined the objectives of Soviet foreign policy thus: to strengthen business relations "with all countries"; not to be drawn into the conflicts between capitalist nations; to strengthen relations with friendly neighbouring countries and to support victims of aggression; and to continue the

struggle for proletarian solidarity.[1]

Stalin's speech received little attention at the time, particularly in Britain, but has since been the subject of considerable comment. Several diplomats immediately noticed the indications of a conciliatory attitude to Germany,[2] from which the conclusion has been drawn that Stalin's foreign policy leads in a straight line from this speech to the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 23, 1939.[3] Various subsequent statements by Soviet and German leaders support this view; the former suggesting that a hint was indeed given, the latter confirming that it was understood in Berlin.[4] On the other hand, this speech can most

1. Stalin, op.cit., pp. 619-630. See also, Pravda, Mar. 13, 1939, which emphasized Stalin's criticism of the western democracies, in Kirk to Hull, Mar. 14, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, p. 744; the speech by D. Manuilski, a member of the executive committee of the Comintern, quoted in Beloff, vol. II, pp. 226-227; History of the C.P.S.U., p. 514; Erickson, op.cit., pp. 510-513, for an analysis of speeches by Voroshilov and other military leaders; and the interesting comments in Deutscher, op.cit., pp. 428-430. Cf. Stalin's speech to the 17th Party congress, January 26, 1934, which is not very different from the 1939 report, in Stalin, op.cit., pp. 470-486.
2. Kirk to Hull, Mar. 30, Apr. 6, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 750, 751-752; Rosso to Ciano, Mar. 12, 1939, quoted in Toscano, "Politique Russe de l'Italie", pp. 3-4; and Davies, op.cit., pp. 279-280. (The date attached to Davies' journal entry conflicts with its concluding remarks.)
3. Rossi, op.cit., pp. 9-10; Duroselle, op.cit., p. 99; Langer and Gleason, op.cit., p. 62.
4. Record of a German-Soviet Conversation, Aug. 24, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 213, p. 228; Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, May 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 441, p. 590.

profitably be seen as an astute exercise in the policy of simultaneously keeping several irons in the fire. And in this sense, it was also consistent with various prior statements of Soviet leaders. Its importance at this point was that Stalin himself hinted at the options open to Russia.

Seeds' impressions of the speech were at once astute and short-sighted. He pointed out that Stalin had merely given official confirmation of the line taken by the Soviet press and the main tendencies noticed by observers of Soviet affairs. In this respect Seeds rightly stated that the speech "contained little that was new or unexpected." As in other diplomatic reports, he did notice that Stalin reserved his more violent comments for Britain and France, who were accused of encouraging Germany to move eastwards against Russia. Also, that for Stalin there was nothing to choose between the two hostile blocs. The major point of innovation which Seeds failed to stress adequately was that the Rapallo alternative in Soviet foreign policy was now clearly on the cards, stated on the authority of Stalin. The ambassador's concluding remarks were particularly apt.

> Those innocents at home who believe that Soviet Russia is only awaiting an invitation to join the Western democracies should be advised to ponder M. Stalin's advice to his party:- 'To be cautious and not

allow Soviet Russia to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire.'[1]

1. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 452, pp. 411-419. A short summary of the speech was telegraphed on March 11.

CHAPTER SIX

BRITAIN, THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE, PART ONE.

The British government totally ruled out intervention to counter the German army occupation of Prague on March 15, 1939. The crisis was considered to be an internal affair of the Czech government and the guarantee inoperative. The French government agreed. Britain, France and the USSR each lodged protests in Berlin against the German action.[1] Significantly, the Soviets did not immediately take the initiative with any independent proposals, as had been the case after the Anschluss. Schulenburg even dismissed Litvinov's protest as designed to keep in line with the western powers.[2] But Pravda and Izvestia both blamed the Munich policy and 'non-intervention' for recent events, and again accused Britain and France of directing German aggression eastwards. Pravda did add that Russia was concerned with the security of small states and would not remain indifferent to acts of

1. Texts in Halifax to Henderson, Mar. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 308, p. 291; Bonnet to Coulondre, Mar. 17, 1939, Livre Jaune Français, no. 76, pp. 99-100; Izvestia, Mar. 20, 1939, quoted in Degras, vol. III, pp. 322-323.
2. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 19, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 43, p. 47.

aggression.[1]

Aside from the dismay or anger Hitler's latest coup may have caused to many, giving rise to questions regarding Germany's previous use of the self-determination principle and Hitler's ultimate intentions, March 15 was strategically crucial for Anglo-Soviet relations. Prior to September 1938 Czechoslovakia's treaties with France and the USSR had formed an axis running from Paris to Moscow, thus binding western and eastern Europe. Consequently, the ultimate danger to Germany of a two-front war was in theory realizable. The destruction of Czech independence suddenly made a German threat to Rumania and Poland possible. Collaboration between east and west could now only be achieved through Poland, or the Soviet Union with Polish help.

From March to August 1939 the British government was forced to elaborate a policy for eastern Europe. Until September 1938 it had continuously urged France to weaken its post-1918 security system east of Germany. After the occupation of Prague, Britain had to abandon the principle of non-intervention east of the Rhine and, ironically, rebuild France's eastern security system. Above all, policy towards Russia, which previously existed only as

1. Leading articles in Pravda and Izvestia, Mar. 20, 1939, quoted in Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 475, pp. 446-447.

a negative attitude, had to be formulated and executed.

The response within the British government to the occupation of Prague was quite uneven. In parliament Chamberlain again justified the Munich settlement, but admitted that the move was not in the spirit of that event. His government, however, would still aim "to substitute the method of discussion for the method of force".[1] Simon then repeated the well-worn arguments against conferences and indefinite commitments, despite widespread opposition criticism.[2] The speeches of those members urging closer relations with the Soviet Union, were reported to Moscow by the Tass representative.[3]

Halifax personally reacted very strongly, and bluntly criticized German policy and methods during an interview with Dirksen. The foreign secretary twice posed the question as to the real limits of German ambitions. Dirksen tried without success to suggest that in contrast to the settled conditions of western Europe, some changes were demanded in the east.[4] He later described this

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 345, Mar. 15, 1939, cols. 438-440.
2. Ibid., Mar. 15, 1939, cols. 550-555.
3. Central State Archives of the October Revolution, quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 393. Rothstein returned from Geneva in October 1938 to take up the London post. He played a particularly active role in the coming Anglo-Soviet negotiations, leaking information of proposals to the press. His activities were known to the government. See Halifax to Seeds, July 19, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 349, p. 386.
4. Halifax to Henderson, Mar. 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 279, pp. 270-272.

interview as "stormy and unpleasant", and noted the "sharper line" being taken by Halifax.[1]

In fact, the foreign secretary took two further positive steps. He persuaded Chamberlain to adopt a stiffer position than in parliament for a speech scheduled for March 17 at Birmingham.[2] Secondly, Halifax instructed Vansittart to brief Maisky on the change to be expected in the prime minister's speech. The Soviet ambassador, previously briefed after rather than before the event, was "heartened" by the news.[3] Vansittart served as such an intermediary several times in the following months. Finally, in a discussion with Kennedy, Halifax outlined his trend of thought. The British government, he stated, had been faced with alternative proposals: that policy "loosely termed collective security"; or, the avoidance of commitments unless Britain herself was attacked. As a result of recent events the "advantages of general co-operation" would be more carefully assessed.[4]

Chamberlain's March 17 speech was a more exact state-

1. Dirksen, op.cit., p. 230; Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 18, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 35, p. 37.
2. Birkenhead, op.cit., p. 432; Cadogan Diary, Entry of Mar. 16, 1939, quoted in Colvin, op.cit., p. 294; Alan Campbell Johnson, Viscount Halifax (London 1941), pp. 510-513.
3. Colvin, op.cit., p. 295; Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 361. Maisky does not mention this incident in his memoirs.
4. Halifax to Lindsay, Mar. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 394, p. 365. See also, H.L. Deb., vol. 112, Mar. 20, 1939, cols. 314-319.

ment of his position and future policy than has generally been credited. Although he again defended the Munich agreement, the occupation of Prague was vigorously denounced, and he questioned whether it portended a move towards world domination. Britain was interested in south-east Europe but would not undertake unspecified commitments operating in unforeseen conditions.[1] The speech was a very subtle restatement of traditional ends with a hint of a re-examination of means. Chamberlain was at once acknowledging the arguments of his critics, though remaining adamantly opposed to their methods. It was not completely his fault if this policy was now misinterpreted, especially by the press, to mean the abandonment of appeasement and the pursuit of collective security. It was, however, this habit of ostensibly conceding to parliamentary and public opinion, but withholding a complete diplomatic commitment which so hampered relations with the USSR. As the pressure of public opinion increased in the following months, the government found themselves literally forced to carry out a policy towards the Soviet Union on which many members still had

1. Chamberlain, op.cit., pp. 413-420. Dirksen was especially struck by the reference to British interest in eastern Europe. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 18, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 23, p. 25.

grave doubts. This had its effect in Moscow as well, which rebounded against the British government. It is clear that Maisky advised the kremlin on the basis of public opinion, rather than government thinking.

It would be misleading to interpret the events of March 15, 1939 and the subsequent guarantees to Poland and Rumania as the "new British diplomatic revolution."[1] To assert that as a response to the occupation of Prague Chamberlain irrevocably abandoned appeasement and substituted a policy of collective defense in which the USSR would be included is patently false. It will instead be seen that while the policy of German appeasement was less

1. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 356. This was a common contemporary interpretation by British historians. See e.g., G.P. Gooch, "The Coming of the War", International Affairs, vol. XIX, no. 1, June 1940, p. 5; Medlicott, British Foreign Policy, p. 253. Soviet historians of course emphatically deny that Chamberlain's policy changed at all in March 1939. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 390, notes that unquestionably after Prague "some changes" took place. He suggests this was not a "revolution", but rather concerned "only tactics and methods". See also, ibid., pp. 390-393. V.I. Popov, "Burzuaznaya Istoriografiya Angliya i S.Sh.A. ob Anglo-Franko-Sovetskikh Peregovorakh, 1939 Goda" (British and U.S. Bourgeois Historiography on the Anglo-French-Soviet Negotiations of 1939), in A.M. Nekrich, ed., Protiv Falsifikatsii Istorii Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny (Against the Falsification of the History of the Second World War, Moscow 1964), [hereafter: Popov "Burzuaznaya Istoriografiya"], pp. 112-113, claims that the thesis of a revolution in British policy is traceable to G.M. Gathorne-Hardy, A Short History of International Affairs, 1920-1939, (4th edn., London 1950), p. 485.

publicized in the coming months, it still remained a basic motive in British policy and re-emerged briefly in July 1939. Only in this light will the course of Anglo-Soviet relations from March to August 1939 be comprehensible; that is, as part of Chamberlain's policy of conciliation through greater strength. To the policy of rearmament, hastened by the Munich settlement, he now added territorial guarantees in eastern Europe. This was the major innovation in British policy. Chamberlain's "weapons had changed, his purpose had not."[1]

To the policy of guarantees the prime minister also wished, within strictly circumscribed limits, to add a Soviet pledge of support. He remained dogmatically opposed to dividing Europe on ideological principles.[2] Least of all did he ever conceive of creating an anti-German alignment. But guarantees and limited military commitments were intended, not to encircle Germany, rather to influence her towards peaceful methods. From a position of strength Britain would give full consideration to Hitler's reasonable claims, but would also resist the use of force. These innovations were designed to secure a lasting peace; not to wage war. "As always, I want to

1. Feiling, op.cit., p. 402.
2. Feiling describes this as Chamberlain's "deepest objection" to closer relations with Russia. Ibid., p. 408.

gain time," Chamberlain noted, "for I never accept the view that war is inevitable."[1] He would subsequently do nothing that might bring it nearer.

Unfortunately for the British government, neither Chamberlain's patience nor his faith in Hitler's ultimate peaceable intentions were shared by the Soviet Union. Stalin, just like Chamberlain, intended to keep all his options open. But unlike the latter, Stalin was in more of a hurry to commit himself. He opened the forthcoming negotiations with wide ranging proposals intended to quickly assess British intentions. These proposals demanded that Chamberlain abandon appeasement and prepare for war by a firm political and military alliance with the Soviet Union. Otherwise Stalin would try to ensure Soviet security in Berlin, instead of in London. For the kremlin, therefore, the ideological polarization of Europe into blocs would be the surest method of defence. The character of Chamberlain's response to these alliance proposals reflected for a long time hesitation, indecision, and a marked reluctance to abandon an appeasement policy which might still succeed, in favour of alliance diplomacy which he had so long and adamantly rejected. The habit of close relations with the Russians did not come easily to the Chamberlain government.

It was not, however, in response to the Prague coup

1. Diary Entry of Mar. 19, 1939, quoted ibid., p. 401.

that Britain approached the USSR. Rather, a reported German threat to Rumania set in motion Britain's involvement in the "wasps' nest of Eastern European politics."[1] On March 17 V.V. Tilea, the Rumanian minister in London, asked Halifax for a "precise indication" of Britain's attitude should Rumania be attacked. Tilea suggested that the problem might be facilitated if his government were to agree with Poland to apply their joint treaty against Germany and, secondly, if the Balkan entente powers agreed to guarantee each other's frontiers.[2]

Halifax took up both these suggestions. The relevant governments in south-east Europe were circulated for their opinions.[3] More significantly, he instructed Seeds to enquire of the Soviet government "whether they can give any indication that they would, if requested by Roumanian Government, actively help the latter to resist German aggression."[4] Presumably the basis for this action, as the later requests for a declaration, was Stalin's March

1. Dirksen, op.cit., p. 232.
2. Halifax to Hoare, Mar. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 395, pp. 366-367. Moisuc, "Roumanie Après Munich", p. 366, fn. 36, p. 337, fn. 39, quoting from the Rumanian Archives, points out they contain numerous despatches indicating a possible German-Hungarian invasion. The Polish-Rumanian treaty of 1921 was only directed against Soviet aggression.
3. Halifax to Kennard, Knatchbull-Hugessen, Waterlow and Campbell, Mar. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 390, p. 361.
4. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 17, 1939, ibid., no. 389, p. 361.

10, friendly references to his neighbours. Also, the London press reported that the Soviet Union had intimated to both Warsaw and Bucharest that they could count on support if attacked.[1] In actual fact, Maisky had personally informed Tilea on March 1 of Russian intentions to aid Rumania. The latter was advised that it would not be in her interests, "ni sur le plan intérieur, ni sur celui de la politique extérieure, de faire des concessions à l'Allemagne...."[2] The foreign office heard of this offer through Tilea and asked Seeds to comment.[3] Despite a subsequent Tass denial, this was again reiterated by Litvinov to the Rumanian minister in Moscow.[4] On March 11 Litvinov also apparently proposed to Grzybowski a division of spheres of influence in the Baltic states betweeen Poland and Russia.[5] These contacts presumably gave rise to the rumours.

It is significant that the basic principles which were

1. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Mar. 13, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. IV, no. 496, pp. 631-632.
2. Rumanian Archives, quoted in Moisuc, "Roumanie Après Munich", p. 335.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 476, pp. 448-450.
4. Tass communiqué of Mar. 21, 1939, quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 324; Rumanian Archives, quoted in Moisuc, loc.cit.. Pravda, Mar. 19, 1939 and Izvestia, Mar. 21, 1939, voiced concern at German pressure on Rumania. Ion Popescu-Puturi et.al., La Rumanie Pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale (Bucharest 1964), pp. 106-107.
5. Budurowycz, op.cit., p. 145 and fn. 2.

to guide British policy towards Russia were already inherent in Halifax's enquiry. First, there was no suggestion of direct Anglo-Soviet co-operation or mutual assistance. The security of eastern Europe was to be a matter of individual concern to the two powers. Second, Soviet aid was to be severely restricted; available only if requested. Third, the crisis having been activated by Rumania, that country remained the focus of British diplomacy. Tilea's suggestion for Polish-Rumanian co-operation seemed in London the most hopeful method of assuring eastern European security, maintaining the proper balance between restraint and commitment in Anglo-Soviet relations, and providing the least danger of provoking Hitler.

The replies to Halifax's request for information from eastern European governments dictated further policy. Not unnaturally, most simply asked what Britain proposed to do.[1] Litvinov also plied Seeds with questions on British policy, especially whether she intended engaging the USSR while leaving her own hands free. His "most awkward" query was why Bucharest had not approached the Soviet government directly.[2] This was a very uncomfortable

1. For a summary of the various replies, see Foreign Office Memorandum, Mar. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 496, pp. 470-472.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 18, 1939, ibid., no. 403, p. 372. Halifax later explained to Maisky that Bucharest had seen no real danger and therefore had not approached Moscow. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 19, 1939, ibid., no. 432, p. 391.

interview for Seeds, who was unprepared for Litvinov's various suspicions. Several hours later, the latter again received Seeds who stated that the enquiry on Soviet policy towards Rumania was to be suspended. Nevertheless, Litvinov insisted on giving his views that "no good purpose would be served" by the British approach. Instead, he proposed a conference of British, French, Polish, Rumanian and Soviet delegates to meet in Bucharest "to discuss possibilities of common action."[1]

Maisky, who believes there would have been no second world war had this conference been summoned, followed up the proposals during an interview with Halifax on the 19th. The ambassador suggested that a conference would be the "quickest method of attaining results". The ostensible reasons Halifax advanced for its rejection were the inability to find a responsible minister to attend, and the anxiety that a meeting called without the certainty of success was dangerous.[2] By this was meant, as Chamberlain explained later, the fear that "if the conference failed to reach

1. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 19, 1939, ibid., no. 421, p. 385. The Tass communiqué of March 21 added Turkey to the list of powers.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 19, 1939, ibid., no. 433, p. 392; Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 104; and ibid., pp. 104-106, for his description of the conversation. Halifax's rejection of a conference as "premature" is a term which originated in the Tass communiqué of March 21. Birkenhead, op.cit.,p. 435, accepts previous assertions that Halifax personally welcomed the idea.

agreement, the position would be much worse, and much more encouraging to Germany...."[1] The real reason was the counter-proposal which Halifax hinted was being considered. This would "constitute a plain signal of danger" to Germany, "afford a rallying point and vitalising force" for smaller states, and be capable of speedy implementation. Finally, he asked Maisky to keep in touch;[2] an offer the ambassador did not fully take advantage of.

Once again the usual Soviet panacea - the conference - was being followed by the usual British rejection. The procedure must surely have been predictable in the kremlin. Conferences were intensely disliked by Chamberlain. Acceptance would flagrantly signal British adherence to the anti-appeasement camp. The suggestion was therefore turned down within a matter of hours. In the Soviet view, the British government "evidently aspired to impel the USSR to speak out in defence of Rumania and by this become entangled in a conflict with Germany...."[3] For more than a week after this proposal Litvinov desperately urged the

1. Entry of Mar. 23, 1939, Dalton Diary. Cf. Dalton, vol. II, p. 232; Citrine, op.cit., p. 368.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 19, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, nos. 432, 433, pp. 392-393. The conference proposal was also advanced by Suritz in Paris. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, Mar. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 458, pp. 422-423. For the reasons Simon gave for its rejection, see H.C. Deb., vol. 346, Apr. 13, 1939, cols. 135-136.
3. Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 328.

wisdom of a conference upon Seeds. Halifax's rejection of it as 'premature' deeply disturbed Litvinov.[1] His persistence is quite understandable in light of what Maisky has revealed about the foreign commissar's personal position. After Munich the Soviet government considered adopting a policy of isolation. "They were dissuaded from this course by Litvinov, who, following the seizure of Prague, made a final effort to build a peace front on a scale adequate to meet the requirements of the situation." The conference proposal was advanced "in order to test British and French intentions, of which they [the Soviets] were suspicious." The unfavourable British response, which Maisky called "another blow to the policy of effective collective security", then "led to the dismissal of Litvinov."[2] Before this was to happen, however, the Soviets were to propose a mutual assistance pact. Meanwhile, the British response undoubtedly increased suspicion in the kremlin as to the sincerity of Chamberlain's supposed conversion from appeasement.[3] From March 18, Maisky notes, Chamberlain began a "systematic sabotage of all attempts at honest collaboration" with the USSR.[4]

The new British proposal was actually worked out by

1. See e.g., Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 21, 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, nos. 461, 528, pp. 429, 509.
2. Boothby Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Boothby, Fight to Live, p. 189; Entry of Mar. 28, 1939, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 233.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 528, p. 528.
4. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 104.

the prime minister himself and completed on March 19. He called it "pretty bold and startling", and assured a Labour delegation that it would force Germany to fight on two fronts if she started a war. Privately Chamberlain was confident it would not bring Britain into conflict with Berlin and, above all, would gain time.[1] At the suggestion of Corbin, who criticized an earlier draft of the declaration as being ineffectual, it was "stiffened up". The final version envisaged France, Russia, Poland and Britain agreeing "to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance" in case of a threat to any European state. This declaration of intent would be followed by detailed consultations on specific situations.[2]

The declaration proposal was a major step towards ending Britain's policy of non-involvement in eastern Europe and as such was a considerable concession. But it seemed neither to satisfy nor impress anyone. Litvinov raised various objections, not least that Poland would refuse to be committed. And once again he argued in favour of a conference. Although it was considered "insufficiently

1. Copy of Letters from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Mar. 19, 26, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II; Feiling, op.cit., p. 401; Entry of Mar.23,1939, Dalton Diary.
2. Halifax to Campbell, Mar. 23, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 506, p. 486, and fn. 2; Foreign Office Memorandum, Mar. 22, 1939, ibid., no. 496, p. 473; Halifax to Phipps, Seeds and Kennard, Mar. 20, 1939, ibid., no. 446, p. 400.

effective" the Soviet government accepted, subject to French and Polish concurrence.[1] Both Litvinov and Maisky suggested that the Baltic and Scandinavian countries should also be invited to adhere after publication. This idea was gently dismissed by Cadogan who told Maisky that the slight military assistance gained thereby would not outweigh the danger of Germany being then able to raise the encirclement argument.[2] Significantly, Soviet interest in the Baltic states was already being expressed. After the German seizure of Memel on March 23, the Soviet government notified Estonia and Latvia that any threat to their independence could not be regarded with disinterest. The démarche was not publicized despite Soviet insistence.[3]

The four power plan was allowed to lapse. Beck objected to Soviet participation for exactly the same reasons he had advanced during the eastern Locarno negotiations in 1934.[4] He argued that it would destroy Poland's policy of non-alignment, place Warsaw directly in the Soviet camp, and might even drive Hitler into war. He proposed instead a secret Anglo-Polish "Gentlemen's

1. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 461, p. 429; Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 329.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 490, p. 467; Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 25, 28, 1939, ibid., nos. 526, 552, pp. 508, 531.
3. "Great Patriotic War", part IV, p. 127.
4. Beck, op.cit., pp. 34-39, 73-75.

Agreement" in the sense of the declaration; thereby, as Kennard noted, he would not have to insist on Soviet exclusion.[1] Maisky was briefly informed of Poland's position, of which he later expressed some understanding.[2] On March 24 Raczynski elaborated a scheme for Anglo-Polish co-operation, which led within a week to the British guarantee.[3] London was not informed, however, of Warsaw's parallel negotiations with Germany, which included a German offer of an anti-Soviet understanding.[4]

The Polish plan came as an added factor in an already involved situation. During the Anglo-French talks, held in London on March 21-22, the possibilities of action in case of Polish and Rumanian objections to Soviet participation had been anticipated and fully debated. Bonnet

1. Kennard to Halifax, Mar. 21, 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, nos. 459, 479, 485, pp. 428, 453, 463; Beck's instructions to Raczynski, Mar. 23, 1939, Polish White Book, no. 66, pp. 70-71.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 552, pp. 530-531; Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 4, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 3, p. 20.
3. Halifax to Kennard, Mar. 24, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 518, pp. 500-502. For a detailed analysis of these negotiations, see T. Desmond Williams, "Negotiations Leading to the Anglo-Polish Agreement of 31 March 1939", Irish Historical Studies, vol. X, nos. 37, 38, Mar., Sept. 1956, pp. 59-93, 156-192.
4. Lipski to Beck, Mar. 21, 1939, Polish White Book, no. 61, pp. 60-64; Memorandum by Ribbentrop, Mar. 21, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 61, pp. 70-72; Entry of Mar. 22, 1939, Szembek, op.cit., pp. 433-434; Beck's Instructions to Lipski, Mar. 25, 1939, Lipski Papers and Memoirs, no. 139, pp. 504-507.

emphasized that Russian military assistance would be important if Poland participated. (French insistence on the need to include the Soviets in this capacity was in advance of British thought on the problem and continued so for months to come.) Chamberlain, however, questioned this assumption. It was finally agreed that, failing a four power declaration, the Polish government would not be immediately pressed to accept Soviet aid. Rather existing treaties (Polish-French, Polish-Rumanian, and the Balkan entente; the remnants of the original French system) were to be strengthened, and some form of British assistance provided. It would later be explained to Poland and Rumania that a degree of Soviet participation was also intended.[1]

This new course of action was adopted by March 24. On the crucial question of the Soviet role, one which ultimately affected the outbreak of the war, the British government deferred to Beck. In so doing they ignored the whole experience of France's relation with her east European allies since 1935. Soviet aid could only be effective with Polish co-operation. The failure first to secure that co-operation to a large extent condemned the

1. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, Mar. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 484, pp. 458-461; Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 162-163.

subsequent negotiations with Russia to failure. Beck's objections to being publicly associated with the Soviet Union were accepted. The idea of direct Russian involvement was abandoned; they were relegated to the second line of defence. Poland was instead chosen to be the pivot of the eastern front. The first phase of Anglo-Soviet collaboration ended thus after a brief seven day experiment.

The decision to concentrate on strengthening the resistance capacity of Poland and Rumania, rather than any arrangement with the USSR, stemmed from various considerations and was reached with some differences evident within the British government. Poland and Rumania as the two countries most immediately threatened had first to be secured. Soviet participation would have involved lengthy negotiations and pressure on Beck which the British government, even if so disposed, was in no position to apply. It would also have had to be "justifiable for the sake of some large and secure advantage."[1] But British military opinion considered the Russian army "impotent" and "completely demoralised".[2] The most that could be expected from the USSR, Halifax told Kennedy, was that

1. "Note on Foreign Policy", Hickleton Papers, A4.410.12.1; Halifax, Fulness of Days, p. 206.
2. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 344.

they "might send some ammunition to Poland". British military opinion considered Warsaw as the more valuable ally.[1] "This error in appreciation", notes Strang, "had a powerful effect on policy."[2]

Various political factors also contributed towards pushing Russia into the background. On March 24 two despatches from Seeds arrived at the foreign office, either of which could have erroded any confidence in Soviet foreign policy. The first contained his rather gloomy analysis of Stalin's March 10 speech.[3] The second argued that, if a German move eastwards was clearly limited and intended only as a prelude to a war in the west, Stalin would remain aloof, with "considerable satisfaction at the prospect of an international conflict from which all the participants would be likely to emerge considerably weakened...."[4] A foreign office memorandum of March 29 summed up Soviet policy as "invariably opportunist", and expressed ignorance as to the "real intentions" of that government.[5]

1. Kennedy to Hull, Mar. 24, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 99. See also, Templewood, loc.cit.; Ismay, op.cit., p. 101.
2. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 167; Cf. his Moscow Negotiations, p. 19.
3. See above, pp. 260-261.
4. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 476, p. 499. See also, Phipps to Halifax, Mar. 28, 1939, ibid., no. 555, p. 535, reporting similar views by Colonel Gauché, head of the French deuxième Bureau.
5. Foreign Office Memorandum, Mar. 29, 1939, ibid., appendix IV, p. 622.

Several other political considerations were carried over from policy towards the USSR during 1938. The British government, even at this late date, still intended to avoid what Halifax described as "framing a line-up on ideological prejudice."[1] Chamberlain was continuously advised to beware of exposing Britain to the charge of encirclement. In the Commons he therefore indicated that Britain would not obstruct any reasonable efforts on the part of Germany to expand her export trade. Nor would his government advocate a policy which led to ideologically opposed blocs.[2] Finally, information from various embassies had led Halifax to conclude that Soviet participation might in itself jeopardize the constructive part of British policy, consolidate the anti-Comintern pact, and arouse anxiety among various friendly governments.[3]

1. Halifax to Campbell, Mar. 23, 1939, ibid., no. 507, pp. 487-488.
2. Feiling, op.cit., p. 402; H.C. Deb., vol. 345, Mar. 23, 1939, cols. 1461-1463.
3. Halifax to Kennard, Mar. 27, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 538, p. 516. The effect on Italian opinion which "was beginning to talk bitterly about England associating herself with the Soviets" was particularly feared. Perth to Halifax, Mar. 24, 1939, ibid., no. 509, p. 492. Chamberlain was still hopeful that France and Italy could reach a settlement. Maisky appears to have been aware of this consideration, as he made a point of questioning Cadogan on the Italian attitude to events. Entry of Mar. 23, 1939, Dalton Diary; Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 552, p. 531. Curiously, relations between Rome and Moscow were at the time improving. See, Toscano, "Politique Russe de l'Italie", pp. 5-9; Biddle to Hull, Apr. 3, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 107.

Emphasis at this point must again be placed on the problem of attitudes towards the Soviet Union. According to Hoare, who later put himself among the supporters of an agreement with Moscow, most members of the cabinet "were undoubtedly influenced by suspicion of the Soviet". Chamberlain "was constantly declaring" the Russians could not be trusted. Both he and Simon appear to have exercised particular restraint and from the outset doubted the possibility of a satisfactory agreement with the USSR.[1] After Beck's refusal to join in the declaration proposal, Chamberlain questioned whether it was

> worth-while to go on with Russia in that case? I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia. I have no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive, even if she wanted to. And I distrust her motives, which seem to me to have little connection with our ideas of liberty, and to be concerned only with getting every one else by the ears.[2]

He also regarded Russia as a "very unreliable friend with very little capacity for active assistance but with an enormous irritative power on others." She did not have

1. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 342-352, 370; Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p. 364; Entry of Mar. 23, 1939, Dalton Diary, Simon, op.cit., p. 253. Vansittart did consider Hoare as "very sound on Russia". Entry of May 3, 1939, Dalton Diary. Various indications in the Templewood Papers confirm this opinion.
2. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Mar. 26, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II; Feiling op.cit., p. 403.

the same aims as Britain, was "afraid of Germany and Japan, and would be delighted to see other people fight them." As to Soviet methods of negotiating, he disliked their publication of despatches and "continuous close communication with the Opposition".[1] Maisky's lobbying activities were evidently no secret to the government and, from the evidence in the prime minister's private correspondence, were a source of extreme annoyance.

Chamberlain's "hesitation" in dealing with the Russians, it has been asserted, was not derived from "ideological prejudice", but from military and intelligence reports which suggested Soviet strength would collapse, and his "feeling that Russia was playing power politics rather than seeking peace."[2] Nevertheless, at least one of his colleagues believes that he "saw Communism as the major long-term danger" to Europe and Britain in particular.[3] Another described the prime minister as a "man of prejudices which were not easily eradicated", and who had "what amounted to a hatred of the Russians."[4] Whatever

1. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Apr. 9, 1939, Templewood Papers XIX:(C)II; Feiling, op.cit., p. 408.
2. Ibid., pp. 403-407.
3. "The Foreign Secretary Opens Up. A Conversation with Lord Home [Sir Alec Douglas-Home]", The Observer, Sept. 16, 1962.
4. Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, Oct. 26, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12.

the case, Chamberlain's personal reservations were a powerful factor in government policy towards the Soviets.

Others in the cabinet supported a policy of closer relations with the USSR, and eventually convinced Chamberlain to agree to a mutual assistance pact. As early as March 18 Hore-Belisha voiced his support of an alliance with the USSR.[1] Chatfield, the minister for the co-ordination of defence, despite his reservations on Soviet military strength, held out the importance of Russia both as a deterrent to Hitler and to counter a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement. Halifax, supported eventually by Cadogan and a number of foreign office officials, seem to have been the strongest voices for a more positive policy towards the USSR.[2] During the Anglo-French talks, the foreign secretary reminded the ministers not to give the Soviet Union the "idea that we were pushing her to one side." Rather, Britain and France should do their best to secure her participation.[3]

For the meantime the policy adopted in late March towards the USSR reflected the more conservative attitudes in the cabinet. The containment front was to be based on

1. Hore-Belisha Papers, p. 185. See also, ibid., pp. 189-190.
2. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 352; Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, Oct. 26, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12.
3. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, Mar. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 484, pp. 459-460.

Poland and Russia. Halifax felt that it was "desirable to preserve the interest" of the Soviets in the proposed arrangements for eastern Europe. It was therefore decided by March 27 that they be "kept in touch with developments and invited to undertake to lend their assistance in certain circumstances in the most convenient form."[1] (This was almost a restatement of the original March 17 enquiry to Moscow.) In other words, the government believed that "even the benevolent neutrality" of the Soviet Union would be an advantage to Poland and Rumania. The Soviets could supply war material and act as a communications corridor in case of hostilities. "It is important", Halifax noted, "not to reinforce their tendency towards isolation".[2] The Anglo-French staff talks, which opened in London on March 29, reaffirmed the government's conclusions on the USSR.[3]

The theme of securing Soviet neutrality was one which recurred often in the months ahead. E.R. Sword, British military attaché in Warsaw, had earlier considered neutrality the most useful role for the USSR. Kennard merely added that a "friendly Russia ... [was] of paramount importance."

1. Halifax to Kennard, Mar. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 538, p. 516; Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 537, p. 515. The French government was asked to co-operate with these efforts. Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 167-170.
2. Halifax to Kennard, Mar. 27, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 533, p. 517. See also, Strang, Home and Abroad, pp. 160-161.
3. Richards, vol. I, p. 33.

Neutrality was also favoured by Burgin in conversation with Dalton.[1] The attractiveness of a benevolent Soviet arsenal was that this involved, in the words of Seeds, "friendliness and contacts but no obligations."[2] To have relegated Stalin to the role of a passive and hopefully benign spectator was a naive miscalculation on the part of the Chamberlain government. It was arrived at on the erroneous assumption that Stalin's own interest dictated support for the status quo in eastern Europe, as opposed to a division of the spoils between himself and Hitler.

The conclusion which British policy had reached on Russia had a direct and deleterious effect on the visit simultaneously being paid to Moscow by the Hudson trade mission. This could have been used to strengthen economic links as a prelude to closer political relations. Hudson personally was apparently very committed to such an outcome.[3] Both he and Vansittart had told Maisky that the "political aspect of the visit was even more important than trade."[4] However, Ashton-Gwatkin, who accompanied the

1. Kennard to Halifax, Mar. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 498, Enclosure, pp. 478, 480; Kennard to Halifax, Apr. 5, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 12, p. 38; Entry of Apr. 13, 1939, Dalton Diary. Dalton rejected the idea as a "most miserable second-best". He wanted the Red air force to be in from the start.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 545, p. 524.
3. Sefton Delmer, Trail Sinister (London 1961), p. 384. The author was the Daily Express correspondent who accompanied the trade mission.
4. Entry of Mar. 28, 1939, Dalton Diary.

mission, states that "Hudson was given precise instructions by the Foreign Office not to embark on any political discussions during his tour."[1]

Emphasis on the political was in fact reciprocated in conversation with Soviet officials. A. Mikoyan, commissar for foreign trade, appeared ready to make commercial concessions in return for political advantage. But Hudson was extremely disappointed to discover at one point that he had misconstrued Litvinov's remarks, assuming the foreign commissar was proposing more than just the six power conference.[2]

As the possibility of open collaboration with the USSR diminished after March 24, the inherent political aspects of the visit became a source of potential embarrassment. The problem of agreeing on a final press communiqué illustrated the differing British and Soviet positions. Halifax telegraphed on March 27 severe instructions to avoid mentioning any political questions in the communiqué. Unfortunately, Seeds and Hudson had already given their approval,on the grounds that references to a desire to

1. Letter from F.T.A. Ashton-Gwatkin to the writer, Sept. 17, 1968.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 23, 25, Apr. 3, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, nos. 505, 519, 608, pp. 485, 503-504, 584-585. Seeds found Hudson an "ambitious" personality, who insisted on a meeting with Stalin. This Litvinov politely rejected. Sir William Seeds to the writer. Personal Interview.

improve Anglo-Soviet relations "appeared harmless".[1] The ambassador's efforts to halt publication surprised Litvinov and, according to Maisky who thus informed Cadogan, had caused a "rather unfortunate impression in Moscow." The foreign commissar pointed out that statements made by Hudson to the London press before his departure had led public opinion, both there and in Moscow, to attach political importance to the mission. Even Halifax had indicated as much.[2] On March 28 Izvestia commented that the talks had "revealed a number of essential differences".[3]

Hudson appealed to the journalists accompanying him not to report on what he considered the failure of his mission.[4] He left Moscow with only a "Soviet promise to buy an increased quantity of cured herrings from Scotland", and to continue discussions in London.[5] It was a confused Seeds who, after the communiqué difficulty, questioned the foreign office on whether the government intended "publicly

1. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 27, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 532, p. 512; Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 27, 1939, ibid., no. 533, p. 512.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 28, 1939, ibid., no. 545, pp. 523-524; Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 211, p. 235. See also, Entry of Mar. 28, 1939, Dalton Diary.
3. Quoted in Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, p. 286.
4. Letter from Sefton Delmer to the writer, Apr. 28, 1968.
5. Delmer, op.cit., p. 384. On the fate of these discussions, see Minute by Ashton-Gwatkin, Apr. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 175, pp. 208-209; Halifax to Seeds, July 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 487, p. 533.

to abandon after a week's trial, recent policy of consulting Soviet Government and to relapse into an aloofness which has poisoned relations since Munich."[1] Halifax's reply, sent on April 18, notified him that Cadogan had expressed to Maisky the government's regrets for any harm created by the incident.[2] The mission is now interpreted by Soviet historians as "having been dictated by secret political aims - to threaten Germany by a rapprochement with the USSR"; indicating thereby "that nothing had changed in British foreign policy and its relations to the USSR".[3]

Seeds' observations were almost a direct echo of the views current in the Moscow press and among Soviet diplomats. Speaking in London on March 15, Maisky stated: "You will find that in the last resort the fate of peace or war in our time depends on the kind of relations which exist between London and Moscow."[4] A week later Pravda was again warning Britain and France about their lack of devotion to collective security.[5] The harmful effect of

1. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 545, p. 524.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 18, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 211, p. 235.
3. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 395-397. See also, Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, pp. 286-287; F.D. Volkov, SSSR - Angliya, 1929-1945gg. (USSR - Britain, 1929-1945, Moscow 1964), pp. 246-249, who come to a similar conclusion.
4. Quoted in Coates, vol. I, p. 603. The speech was printed in Izvestia on March 17. It is often quoted by Soviet sources, immediately after Stalin's March 10 speech, as indicative of Russia's continued commitment to collective security. See e.g., Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 761-762.
5. Beloff, vol. II, p. 231.

London's rejection of the conference proposal has already been indicated. Likewise, Chamberlain's speech in the Commons, which again dilated upon the need to avoid splitting Europe into blocs,[1] was unfortunate. Litvinov did not conceal from Seeds the suspicion of the Soviet government as to the sincerity of Chamberlain's conversion from a "policy of giving way before German aggression." He twice mentioned the parliamentary statement as a typical example.[2] Hudson was also subjected by Litvinov to a historical review of the course of appeasement, culminating in the Munich conference and the cold-shouldering of the USSR. He predicted a Europe entirely German, bounded only by Britain and the Soviet Union. "Even that will not satisfy German ambitions but the attack", Litvinov declared, "smiling happily, would not be directed to the East."[3] On March 28 Both Pravda and Izvestia accused the democracies of again reverting to an appeasement policy.[4] The basis for such statements were thus explained to Dalton by Maisky:

1. See H.C. Deb., vol. 345, Mar. 23, 1939, cols. 1461-1463.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Mar. 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 528, p. 509.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 3, 1939, ibid., no. 608, pp. 584-585. Maisky "used to tell ... [Vansittart] that he thought Hitler would go West rather than East. Van[sittart] says that lately M[aisky] has not been so sure...." Entry of Mar. 24, 1939 Dalton Diary. Hitler's handing over of Ruthenia to Hungary was seen in Moscow as proof that he intended turning west instead of east. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 675; Deborine, op.cit., pp. 34, 37.
4. Frederick L. Schuman, Night Over Europe, The Diplomacy of Nemesis, 1939-1940 (London 1941), p. 226. See also, "Great Patriotic War", part III, p. 94.

> Chamberlain wanted (1) to frighten Germany by some evidence of a rapprochement with the S[oviet] U[nion], though he did not seriously intend the latter, and (2) to meet the electoral argument that he was cold-shouldering Russia.[1]

The lack of further developments in Anglo-Soviet relations, and the attention being paid to Poland and Rumania were producing the inevitable feelings of mistrust in Moscow, and deepening suspicions of western plots to divert Germany eastwards.[2] Maisky complained to all his political contacts of the lack of further Anglo-Soviet consultations, and plainly vented his irritation at not being kept in touch. His isolation, no doubt, reflected badly on his own position vis-à-vis his government. He was finally called to the foreign office on March 29, and for the first time officially informed that the four power declaration was being dropped. Cadogan explained that Britain and France were contemplating giving assurances, involving direct military assistance, to both Poland and Rumania. Such a course, Maisky noted, would be a "revolutionary change in British policy". The role envisaged for the USSR, according to Cadogan, was for "sympathy and ... active assistance ... in whatever way

1. Entry of Mar. 28, 1939, Dalton Diary.
2. See the observations by Grzybowski, in the Entry of Apr. 12, 1939, Szembek, op.cit., p. 444; and Tippelskirch to Schliep, Mar. 27, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 112, p. 139.

might seem most suitable and effective."[1]

Maisky was thus briefed only generally on developments prior to the guarantee. When questioned in the Commons on April 13, Simon slightly misrepresented the situation when he stated the ambassador had been given a "provisional outline of the new course".[2] On the other hand, Maisky certainly exaggerated when he let it be understood he had seen Cadogan "merely on routine matters. We then exchanged little bits of information, but there was no sort of consultation at all."[3] However, confronted by the Liberal leader, Archibald Sinclair, who had the details of the conversation, the ambassador confessed having made the remarks about a revolution in British policy.[4]

The various records of the ambassador's unofficial

1. Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 565, p. 544. Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 4, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 4, pp. 21-23. Soviet sources still insist Moscow was not informed the declaration was to be dropped until April 1. See e.g., Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 329; Falsifiers of History, p. 35. Cf. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 1, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 597, p. 574.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 346, Apr. 13, 1939, col. 137.
3. Memorandum by Sylvester on a Conversation with Maisky (I), Mar. 31, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130.
4. Letter from Sinclair to Lloyd George, Apr. 1, 1939, ibid., G/18/4/9. Sinclair's information was derived from conversations with Vansittart and O.S. Cleverly, the prime minister's principal private secretary. The letter continued: cabinet ministers "have not yet managed to dispel the cold atmosphere which has enveloped the relations between the Foreign Office and the Soviet Embassy since Eden's resignation, and it is quite likely that Halifax himself does not appreciate the difference in the atmosphere which Maisky feels."

conversations at this point do indicate a certain distortion of facts designed to put the Soviet issue directly before the government. To this end he succeeded in convincing his political acquaintances that Russia was again being cold-shouldered. In response to this, continuous pressure on the government was applied informally with the aim of getting Chamberlain to clarify his policy towards the USSR. He briefly saw Greenwood and Sinclair on the morning of the 30th, before the special cabinet meeting. They were told of secret reports - both from indirect German sources and the American embassy in Warsaw - indicating an immediate German attack on Poland. The government was therefore considering a statement. To Sinclair's question - "'What about Russia?'", Chamberlain referred to Maisky's conversation with Cadogan the previous day.[1] (At that time, however, a unilateral guarantee had not yet been mentioned.)

In the afternoon Halifax solicited French reaction to a proposed government statement, designed "to give timely warning to ... /Germany/ in terms as little provocative as possible" against any move towards Poland. The statement would constitute an interim guarantee of Polish independence,

1. Entry of Mar. 30, 1939, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 237.

pending the completion of other consultations.[1] It was thus agreed upon before the Soviets were officially notified. A visit to Halifax by Maisky scheduled for four o'clock was cancelled due to pressure of work. His irritation at not having seen Halifax since the 19th was vented during a meeting two hours later with Dalton and Greenwood.[2]

As a result of a Labour party executive meeting at nine o'clock, it was agreed to press Chamberlain "to get something put in about Russia". The dilemma facing the party was whether to support the guarantee as an "instalment of collective security" and insist on a Soviet role, or else reject it altogether until Moscow was included. The first alternative prevailed. Consequently, that same evening (the 30th) Greenwood, Alexander and Dalton saw the prime minister in the cabinet room at no. 10.

> We told him that he would never get away with it to-morrow unless he brought in the Russians. We dwelt not only on the state of opinion in our own Party and elsewhere, but on the crude importance of having the Russians on our side if trouble should come.... The P.M. said the Government were anxious to consult the Russians and were keeping in touch with them,

1. Halifax to Phipps, Mar. 30, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 566, p. 545; Halifax to Kennard, Mar. 30, 1939, ibid., no. 568, p. 546. The French and Poles immediately agreed, Phipps to Halifax, Mar. 30, 31, 1939, ibid., nos. 575, 592, pp. 549, 567; Kennard to Halifax, Apr. 1, 1939, ibid., no. 595, p. 572; Minute of Conversation, Mar. 30, 1939, Polish White Book, no. 68, pp. 71-72.
2. Entry of Mar. 30, 1939, Dalton Diary.

> but he himself had been surprised at the strength of the objections taken by many States to having anything to do with Russia.

He mentioned difficulties with Poland, Portugal, Spain and Canada. It was agreed, however, at Dalton's suggestion that the parliamentary statement scheduled for eleven a.m. the following day should be postponed for several hours. This would enable Chamberlain to take into account the results of Halifax's early morning conversation with Maisky.[1]

The meeting having once again been delayed, Maisky instead saw Sylvester at the request of Lloyd George. The latter was seeking information both on the government's proposed statement and the Soviet position. Maisky proclaimed his ignorance as to precisely what the government intended; merely noting that he had "'heard in round about ways'" that an Anglo-French pledge was to be given to Poland and Rumania. The Soviet government "'were not consulted about it and have not been informed ... officially.'" Therefore, he could not say whether he was satisfied or not. Maisky then accused the foreign office of "dis-

1. Ibid.; Dalton, vol. II, p. 242. Cf. W.N. Medlicott, Contemporary England, 1914-1964 (London 1967), p. 402, fn. 1. On April 13, when Burgin again mentioned the difficulty about Canada, an exasperated Dalton replied: "'... it is about time the Canadians were told to go to Hell, and that they did not understand either the politics or the military strategy of Eastern Europe.'" Entry of Apr. 13, 1939, Dalton Diary. Nonetheless, Feiling, op.cit., p. 408, confirms that Chamberlain felt French Canada was opposed to an agreement with Russia.

courtesy" for not consulting him, and for never having officially sent him a copy of the four power declaration.[1]

The meeting with Halifax finally took place at one o'clock and opened with apologies to Maisky for the repeated delays. The foreign secretary then read out the proposed statement. After dealing with criticism, he asked whether Chamberlain might say the Soviet government approved of the statement. According to Halifax's report of the conversation, this was to avoid "any unnecessary appearance of divisions" between Britain and Russia. Maisky claimed the reason advanced was "to prevent any quarrelling on the part of the Opposition." Not unnaturally, he refused his approval, but did consent to Chamberlain making some reference that British action accorded with the principles of Soviet policy. At the same time Halifax was twice warned the Soviet government "had no wish to force themselves on anybody, and would therefore take no initiative."[2]

Reporting the details of this conversation later in the day to Sylvester (for Lloyd George's information),

1. Memorandum by Sylvester on a Conversation with Maisky (I), Mar. 31, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130.
2. Memorandum by Sylvester on a Conversation with Maisky (II), Mar. 31, 1938, ibid., Halifax to Seeds, Mar. 31, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 589, pp. 556-558. For Maisky's description, in which he erroneously claims the talk was with Chamberlain, see his Who Helped Hitler? pp. 107-108. Following this interview, Vansittart assured the ambassador of the government's desire "to keep in close touch and co-operation with Moscow." Entry of Apr. 2, 1939, Dalton Diary.

Maisky complained of the liberty taken in the Commons of associating the USSR with the guarantee. He did not mention he had agreed to permit some vague reference.[1] The Soviet Union, he explained again, was "not prepared to be put into the position of unwanted saviours." Therefore, they would "not move unless or until they were asked to move." Sylvester then informed the ambassador of the contents of a conversation Lloyd George had just had with Chamberlain. "'I think Mr. Lloyd George is right in saying of Poland', Maisky observed, 'that this is a reckless gamble on the part of the Prime Minister to believe that he can really stop Hitler by combining Britain, France and Poland.'" In the political, economic and military spheres Poland was much too weak.[2]

Thus after several days of intensive lobbying Maisky had again succeeded in bringing the Soviet issue to the attention of the government. As for any success in trans-

1. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 108, again denies he gave any sort of approval.
2. Memorandum by Sylvester on a Conversation with Maisky (II), Mar. 31, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130. The prime minister had invited Lloyd George to an interview in order to give him the "latest information." Letter from Chamberlain to Lloyd George, Mar. 31, 1939, ibid., G/4/2/1. On April 2 Maisky also briefed Dalton on his talk with Halifax, and repeated the substance of the Chamberlain-Lloyd George interview. Maisky's knowledgeability provoked from Dalton the teasing remark: "'I suppose the P.M. told you of this conversation.'" Entry of Apr. 2, 1939, Dalton Diary.

lating this into practical politics, his efforts must be considered a failure. The only acknowledgement he gained was this statement from the prime minister, after announcing the guarantee: "I have no doubt that the principles upon which we are acting are fully understood and appreciated by that Government."[1]

Nothing in fact could have been further from the truth. The effect of the guarantee in Moscow was catastrophic. The Soviet press did not mention the reference to the USSR. Seeds cabled that the guarantee was "misunderstood and not at all appreciated." Litvinov, obviously angered, complained that the two previous proposals for Anglo-Soviet co-operation had been "summarily dropped." Instead Britain had taken the initiative to embark on a policy of which he knew little. The Soviet government "had had enough, and would henceforth stand apart free of any commitments ... a course which might possibly be in their best interests." Seeds' attempts at conciliation failed. Halifax considered the Soviet attitude totally unjustified, and seemed annoyed the guarantee to Poland was not appreciated in Moscow.[2]

The whole "notorious'policy of guarantees'"[3] has in

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 345, Mar. 31, 1939, col. 2416.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 1, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 597, pp. 574-575; Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 4, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 3, pp. 20-21.
3. "Great Patriotic War", part IV, p. 127.

fact been harshly treated by Soviet historians. They have argued that it "aimed to disguise and facilitate an agreement with Hitler's Germany, to prevent the adoption of efficient measures against fascist aggression together with the USSR, and to lull the vigilance of the peoples of Europe."[1] It was an admission the "Munich policies" had failed and, consequently, a change of "tactics" was necessary. The western powers had tried to appease Hitler, then they decided to frighten him.[2]

The British and French governments are criticized for having given pledges, not buttressed by any "firm obligations which would have convinced the Hitlerites that an attack on Poland would signify war with the western powers."[3] Maisky called the guarantees a "great blunder", a "scrap of paper ... vague and mysterious."[4] The decision finally to open negotiations with the USSR was a manoeuvre designed only to press Hitler into agreement. It was a "projection of the same Munich policy into a new situation."[5]

1. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 391. See also, Trukhanovsky, Vneshnyaya Politika Anglii, pp. 342-347; Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, pp. 287-297.
2. Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, pp. 327-328.
3. Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 763.
4. Note of a Conversation with Maisky at the Soviet Embassy [probably by Sylvester], Oct. 3, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130; Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 109.
5. "Great Patriotic War", loc.cit.

Despite the above criticisms, the guarantee was a major step in British foreign policy. One of the most dogmatic views held by Chamberlain - never to undertake obligations in unforeseen circumstances - was abandoned. And with this went another basic tenet, that territorial guarantees could only be limited to western Europe. Britain was now committed to resist any attempt to forcibly upset the status quo of an east European country. What seriously weakened the gesture was that it was taken without having previously secured the benefits of the larger containment front, envisaged during March. This defensive bloc had been precisely intended to do away with the need of a unilateral commitment.

Equally important was Chamberlain's failure to secure for the guarantee either the approval or a prior military commitment from the Soviet Union. Presenting the move to Maisky as a fait accompli two hours before its announcement in parliament, alienated, possibly irrevocably, Soviet opinion. The credibility of Litvinov's policy must have been virtually diminished. He himself immediately told Seeds that he could not believe Britain would ever fight for Danzig or the corridor.[1] The whole incident gravely

1. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 1, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 597, pp. 574-575.

weakened Britain's position in any future approach to Moscow, and restricted the foreign office's ability for diplomatic manoeuvre. It gave Stalin the initiative to choose freely and without scruple any of the options open to him: alliance with Britain; agreement with Germany; or neutrality, benevolent to either side.

The British government clearly recognized, despite advances in rearmament, it could not militarily aid Poland (or Rumania which was guaranteed on April 13).[1] Criticism in parliament that only the Soviet Union could fill this role was a statement of the obvious. In the estimate of the general staff, the Poles "could not survive for any length of time unless ... supplied by a friendly Russia." Although Soviet neutrality was thus considered important for Polish survival, (a fact the French military stressed heavily), the British general staff "placed equal or even greater emphasis on the benefits of an alliance with Turkey." They still considered the Russian army incapable of offensive operations, and the air force weak.[2]

Therefore, on military grounds an alliance with the

1. Lord Chatfield, The Navy and Defence, vol. II, It Might Happen Again (London 1947), [hereafter: Chatfield, vol. II], pp. 174-175; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 350; Henderson, Failure of a Mission, pp. 227-228; Birkenhead, op.cit., p. 434; and "Note on Foreign Policy", Hickleton Papers, A4.410.12.1; W.N. Medlicott, The Coming of War in 1939 (London 1963) pp. 21-22.
2. Richards, vol. I, pp. 33-34. As early as March 18, 1939, the chiefs of staff emphasized the importance of an agreement with Turkey and Greece. Notes by Hoare on 1937-1939, Foreign Policy Committee, Templewood Papers, X:5.

USSR was not considered of primary importance. But the decision to give the guarantees was not so much derived from strategic considerations as from political pressures. The government seemed acutely aware of the "imperative demand by public opinion" to secure the position of Poland.[1] Opinion in parliament and to some extent in the cabinet agreed. The guarantees, as those concerned have explained, were intended to clearly warn Hitler that the next aggression would bring Britain and France into the conflict. They were intended to deter and not provoke; to serve as a buttress to diplomacy, rather than a battle-ground for the military.[2]

The debate in parliament on the guarantee showed how the exact limits within which Chamberlain had framed his action were not clearly understood. Greenwood, Sinclair, Churchill, Lloyd George and Eden all talked of the need to include the USSR. But Churchill and Lloyd George viewed the guarantee as the first instalment of the 'grand alliance', the major component of which - a Soviet commitment - was lacking. The latter especially emphasized the

1. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 161. See also, Langer and Gleason, op.cit., p. 75.
2. "Note on Foreign Policy", Hickleton Papers, A4.410.2.1; Halifax, Fulness of Days, p. 205; Henderson, Water Under the Bridges, p. 71; Strang, Home and Abroad, pp. 160-161; Chatfield, vol. II, pp. 174-176; Feiling, op.cit., pp. 403-404; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 347-349; Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, July 7, 1952, Templewood Papers, XIX:12.

practical military difficulties and the necessity of Soviet support.[1] After the debate Nicolson, Churchill and Lloyd George discussed the situation with Maisky. Churchill stressed Polish and Rumanian fears of allowing Soviet troops into their country. Maisky expanded on his favourite theme of Poland's weakness.[2] Chamberlain's reaction afterwards was to dismiss the "hysterical passion of the Opposition" and their "pathetic belief that in Russia is the key to our situation."[3]

The difficulties of combining Soviet support with the commitment to Poland were elucidated during talks held with Beck, who visited London in early April. On the very day the conversations opened, April 4, a Tass communiqué denied a report that the Soviet Union had undertaken to supply Poland with war materials or to close its markets to Germany.[4] The timing of this démenti could not have been coincidental. Beck made it quite clear that

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 345, Apr. 3, 1939, cols. 2480, 2493, 2501-2502, 2506-2510, 2513-2514. Both Lloyd George and Eden had been thoroughly briefed by Liddell Hart on this aspect before the debate. Liddell Hart, vol. II, p. 218-219.
2. Diary Entry of Apr. 3, 1939, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 394. The discussion got on to the question of Italy: "Maisky takes the line that Russia will not come in to any coalition which includes Italy and that they will have no confidence in France or ourselves if we start flirting with Italy and opening negotiations with Mussolini." Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives. See also, Entry of Apr. 3, 1939, Henry Channon Diaries, p. 192.
3. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Apr. 9, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
4. Text in Degras, vol. III, p. 328.

he could sign no mutual assistance pact with the USSR. Such a move would compromise Poland's position and precipitate an immediate conflict with Germany. Chamberlain sharedthe latter view and agreed not to openly bring in Russia. But he also suggested, as Halifax did earlier without success, that the Soviet Union had a useful role in wartime as a source of military supplies. Despite sustained argument from the prime minister, Beck refused to even consider the proposition.[1] Any move by Britain and France towards closer relations with the USSR would necessitate Poland publicly disassociating herself. One of the few points the two foreign secretaries agreed upon was their equally low military evaluation of the Soviet Union.

Halifax had explained that "one of the difficulties about Soviet Russia in this country was that some members of the Labour party believed that, if Great Britain and the Soviet Union could join hands, the world would be safe for ever more." Not unnaturally Beck disagreed. But the problem, as Halifax reasoned, was how to get the "maximum degree of collaboration from Soviet Russia without entailing dangerous consequences." On the assumption

1. A despatch from Kennard, emphasizing the importance of Soviet aid to Poland, arrived in London too late to influence the talks. Kennard to Halifax, Apr. 5, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 12, p. 38.

it would not be too embarrassing for Poland, Britain would try to improve her relations with the USSR. "This would not mean that they would make an agreement ... but that they would try to establish such relations as would enable them to expect help from Soviet Russia in case of war."[1] The strategy was "not to estrange Russia, but always keep her in play."[2]

For the second time in two weeks the British government deferred to Beck. On the question of giving the Polish-Rumanian alliance a general character, instead of being directed only against Russia, Beck's refusal was accepted. On the necessity of making Polish-Soviet relations more flexible, the British had no more success than the French in previous years. This aspect was dropped until its sudden re-introduction by Voroshilov in August. Despite the difficulties this new situation presented for Anglo-Soviet relations, the summary of conclusions drawn up on April 6 recognized the importance

1. Record of Anglo-Polish Conversations, Apr. 4, 1939, ibid.,nos.1-2, pp. 1-19. For further elucidation of Beck's policies at this point, particularly towards Russia, see Beck, op.cit., pp. 190-195; Entries of Apr. 3, 13, 1939, Szembek, op.cit., pp. 439-440, 440-445; Noël, op.cit., pp. 323-340; Grigore Gafencu, Last Days of Europe (New Haven 1948), pp. 29-53.
2. Record of Anglo-Rumanian Conversations, Apr. 25, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 285, p. 331.

of maintaining the "best possible" relations with the USSR.[1] The proposals finally formulated by the British government in mid-April reflected the 'possible', rather than the 'best'.

The discussion on how to approach the Soviets intensified in the week following Beck's departure from London. Halifax admitted Britain was "going to try and go along with them", but was "not very hopeful of any results."[2] He immediately received Maisky, who questioned him with "inquisitorial persistence" on the meaning and scope of the Anglo-Polish agreement. The probability of staff conversations, and definition of direct and indirect aggression, the honesty of British attempts at collective security, and a warning on the unreliability of Polish policy were points raised by Maisky. As a result of a suggestion from Seeds that a more positive gesture be made to the Soviet ambassador, in view of Litvinov's annoyance over the guarantee, Halifax merely referred to the

1. Record of Anglo-Polish Conversations, Apr. 6, 1939, ibid., no. 16, p. 49. The communiqué on April 6, ibid., no. 10, pp. 35-36, publicizing the reciprocity of the Anglo-Polish agreement, declared that this move "should not preclude either government from making agreements with other countries". This was interpreted by the Soviet government as a sign of western concurrence in further agreements with Germany. Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 763. In fact, the signature of an Anglo-Polish alliance was purposely delayed in order to await developments in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations.
2. Kennedy to Hull, Apr. 6, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 114.

intention of continuing negotiations with Russia and to keep Maisky informed.[1]

A further conversation on April 11 revealed the two countries were still as far apart as ever. Maisky tried to discredit Beck as pro-German, and urged that Anglo-French assistance to Poland and Rumania be made conditional on their adopting a more reasonable attitude towards Russia. He refused to consider the Soviet government itself making any gesture to alleviate the anxieties of the border states. Instead, the ambassador criticized bilateral pacts in favour of a "system of real collective security." Any concrete proposal from London, he added, would be sympathetically considered.[2] Halifax was very pessimistic at the conclusion of these conversations. He felt the Soviet government persistently ignored the difficulties facing Britain. Little progress had been made, and in his view, Maisky "had not been particularly helpful", least of all in advice to force a Polish agreement to Soviet assistance.[3] Halifax, voicing the same opinions to Kennedy, added that he "hesitates to tell Maisky very much,

1. Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 6, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 19, pp. 53-54; Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 6, 1939, ibid., no. 13, pp. 45-46. Seeds had suggested some reference to a possible "conference of sorts" or a multilateral security agreement.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 11, 1939, ibid., no. 42, pp. 82-83. Suritz made a similar statement in Paris. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 14, 1939, ibid., no. 161, pp. 198-199.
3. Halifax to Kennard, Apr. 12, 1939, ibid., no. 50, pp. 98-99.

because ... what he tells him is given over to the enemies."[1] For his part, the Soviet ambassador's impression afterwards was one of equal mistrust, and continued apprehension lest the British government "'don't mean business'."[2]

Various proposals for further negotiations with Russia were being concurrently floated. Seeds wired his emphatic agreement with the Soviet ambassador's view that some means should be found to prevail on Poland and Rumania to agree immediately to Soviet military assistance. One possible method was to use the Franco-Soviet pact, indicating to the two border states that French assistance could only be given in concert with the USSR.[3] On this as on many other points Seeds was ahead of the foreign office in pressing forward for agreement.

On April 9 a conference at the French comité de la défence nationale had agreed to approach Litvinov and Voroshilov with the aim of ensuring Soviet aid. Suritz was informed of this new move the following day.[4] At the same time Eden had come forward with another suggestion.

1. Kennedy to Hull, Apr. 11, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 125.
2. Entry of Apr. 12, 1939, Dalton Diary.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 13, 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 52, 161, pp. 104, 198-199.
4. Bonnet, vol. I, pp. 177-180; and his Quai d'Orsay, pp. 239-240, asserts he proposed talks on a Franco-Soviet military convention. Cf. Gamelin, vol. II, p. 406; Namier, Europe in Decay, pp. 59-60, 249-250.

He advised Chamberlain and Halifax that the four parties to the Straits convention (France, Russia, Turkey and Britain) should issue a declaration on preserving the status quo in the eastern Mediterranean.[1] Finally, under pressure in parliament from Dalton, Simon replied that the government "had no objection in principle" to an Anglo-French-Soviet military alliance.[2] In practice, as the opening round of the tripartite negotiations proved,[3] the objections were considerable.

On April 13 the British government further enlarged its east European commitments by giving a guarantee to Rumania; largely at the insistence of France, which also took parallel steps. After previous anxieties that Britain intended to leave Rumania as a corridor to the east, Maisky indicated his approval. Acting on instructions from Litvinov, he informed the foreign office that the USSR was prepared to take part in giving assistance to Rumania; and was ready to discuss methods and the roles of the

1. Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs, The Reckoning (London 1965), /hereafter: Avon, The Reckoning/, p. 54.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 346, Apr. 13, 1939, cols. 136-138. Dalton denied Rothstein's suggestion that he had concerted this exchange beforehand. Entry of Apr. 17, 1939, Dalton Diary.
3. The Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, which have received considerable attention from historians, are only dealt with here in outline. Instead, attention will be focused on policy behind the various British and Soviet proposals, and on the influence of the parallel German-Soviet negotiations.

various powers to accomplish this aim.[1]

This offer, which was made prior to what is usually considered the opening British proposal in the negotiations, has not received due attention. Having twice publicly denied any intention to unilaterally supply assistance to the border states - on March 22 and April 4 - an offer suddenly came from Moscow. Its origins may have been based on a misunderstanding. During their conversation of April 11, Halifax had asked, according to Maisky, whether the Soviet Union would supply Rumania with arms and materials in case of war. The British record contains no such request and Halifax could not recall having put the question. Soviet aims would appear to have been to elicit from London definite proof of British intentions to commit themselves militarily in eastern Europe. On this point, for obvious reasons, there was considerable doubt in Moscow. It was, moreover, ostensibly as a direct result of Maisky's negligence in not pressing for a reply to this proposal that he was recalled on April 15 for consultations.[2]

After thanking the ambassador for the suggestion,

1. Entries of Apr. 12, 17, 1939, ibid.; Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 166, 176, pp. 201-202, 209. Suritz informed Bonnet likewise. Jean Zay, Carnets Secrets (Paris 1942), p. 57, quoted in Noël, op.cit., p. 350.
2. Entry of Apr. 12, 1939, Dalton Diary; Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 196, pp. 223-224; Halifax to Phipps, Apr. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 247, p. 266.

Halifax proposed the USSR make a public unilateral declaration that in the event of aggression against any of its European neighbours which was resisted "the assistance of the Soviet Government would be available, if desired, and would be afforded in such a manner as would be found most convenient."[1] (This faithfully echoed the very circumscribed role originally solicited on March 17, and confirms the continuity evident in Britain's attitude towards the USSR.) Maisky was speechless; Litvinov critical and insistent on a reply to his April 14 proposal.[2]

On April 17 the foreign commissar handed Seeds a comprehensive counter-proposal containing eight clauses for the consideration of the British government. In essence, it envisaged a mutual assistance treaty between Britain, France and the USSR; the simultaneous conclusion of a military convention; and the provision of military assistance in case of aggression to all east European states bordering on the USSR from the Baltic to the Black Seas.[3] The proposal, which was also transmitted to Paris,

1. Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 14, 1939, ibid., nos. 166, 170, 176, pp. 201-202, 205-206, 209-210.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 15, 17, 1939, ibid., nos. 182, 193, pp. 215, 221-222.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 18, 1939, ibid., no. 201, pp. 228-229.

was an extension of an independent French offer on April 14 for the Franco-Soviet pact to be utilized should hostilities result from the guarantees.[1] This had been considered in Moscow as "closer to the principle of equality and reciprocal obligations" than the British proposal.[2]

The preliminary exchange perfectly illustrated the very wide gulf separating Soviet and British conceptions of European security. The former intended a 'grand alliance' which would split Europe into contending ideological blocs; a coalition that was visible, firm, with equal obligations, equal risks, and which provided an automatic system of sanctions against aggression.[3] It was also intended to give Moscow and not Warsaw the position of senior partner in eastern Europe. The Soviet government stated its price and waited for an acceptance. This was to be Litvinov's last move as foreign commissar.

If the April 15 proposal was distasteful and suspect in Moscow, the April 17 retort was positively repugnant in

1. Ibid., p. 228; Halifax to Phipps, Apr. 17, 1939, ibid., no. 198, p. 225; Phipps to Halifax, Apr. 15, 20, 1939, ibid., nos. 183, 186, 241, pp. 216, 217, 260-262. Document no. 241 contains the proposed French text. Bonnet preferred his own approach, but reluctantly agreed to associate with the declaration. Bonnet, vol. II, p. 180.
2. Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, pp. 330-331; who also give the original Russian text of the proposals.
3. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 116-118; Falsifiers of History, p. 36; Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 771-772.

London. The British government desired "early cover in the most practical form" for the countries most immediately threatened. The comprehensive proposals from Moscow, "though logically complete", were premature and ignored the practical difficulties besetting the government. Halifax admitted to "embarrassment in certain quarters" at the Soviet attempt to associate "too closely and openly" with the Anglo-French alliance.[1] This move blatantly upset and ran counter to every single guideline posited for the opening of the Russian negotiations. Despite profound misgivings, the foreign office was aware that great care would have to be taken in handling the Soviet reply; "a flat rejection would enable the Russians to cause ... considerable embarrassment".[2]

The obstacles to its acceptance seemed to come with a veritable rush as rumours of Litvinov's offer circulated. The Polish government was quick to notify its opposition and was supported in this by Kennard. The Italians and Germans hinted that soliciting Soviet aid was proof of a British encirclement campaign. The Finns, who considered the Russians more in need of help than themselves, notified

1. Halifax to Phipps, Apr. 18, 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 210, 247, pp. 234, 267; Halifax to Kennard, Apr. 20, 1939, ibid., no. 233, p. 254.
2. Halifax to Phipps, Apr. 20, 1939, ibid., no. 240, p. 260. See also, Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 164; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 353-354.

their opposition. The Latvians and Estonians also made their position similarly clear, if with less brashness.[1]

The Rumanians had the advantage of making their views known during the visit to London from April 23-26 of Grigore Gafencu, the new foreign minister. Inasmuch as that country was the "vital point in the system" Britain was trying to create,[2] its views had to be considered. The discussions seemed to confirm the wisdom of the policy London was pursuing, particularly towards the Soviet Union. Due to a position analogous in some ways to Poland, Rumania could not openly associate with the USSR. Chamberlain solicited the Rumanian foreign minister's approval of the view that this would only introduce a dangerous element into the situation and precipitate a hostile German reaction. He urged that Gafencu make known these difficulties both to

1. Kennard to Halifax, Apr. 18, 19, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 204, 222,pp. 231, 244; Charles to Halifax, Apr. 29, 1939, ibid., no. 317, p. 377. For a useful description of Baltic reaction to the tripartite negotiations, see Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, ed., Les Frontières Européennes de l'U.R.S.S., 1917-1941 (Paris 1957), pp. 131-151, 183-194. This should be further supplemented by the account of the Finnish minister in London, G.A. Grippenberg, Finland and the Great Powers (Lincoln, Nebraska 1965), pp. 16-54.
2. Kennard to Halifax, Apr. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 165, p. 201.

Labour party leaders,[1] and in Paris, where the quai d'orsay seemed prepared to sanction closer connexions with the Soviet Union. All agreed that such a policy would be an embarrassment to everyone but the Germans. A Soviet declaration along lines previously advocated therefore appeared the most hopeful policy.[2]

To reconcile what the foreign office considered the prime considerations - the need for Soviet help in wartime, respect for the susceptibilities of Poland and Rumania, the importance of not provoking Hitler, nor allowing him to use the anti-Comintern propaganda - a revised declaration proposal was worked out. It was thought that making Soviet assistance dependent on a prior Anglo-French involvement would give Litvinov the assurance of reciprocity he had requested. The Soviet proposal for a triple alliance, despite support from the French, was rejected.[3] This

1. For a record of Dalton's conversations with Gafencu, see Entry of Apr. 23, 1939, Dalton Diary. Gafencu was less categorical in his views on Russia than in the above conversations. There were also other indications that in case of need Rumania would accept Soviet aid. Halifax to Hoare, Mar. 27, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. IV, no. 541, p. 520; Hoare to Halifax, Apr. 2, 1939, ibid., no. 602, p. 579; Halifax to Hoare, Apr. 10, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 37, pp. 75-76.
2. Record of Conversations, Apr. 24, 25, 1939, ibid., nos. 278-279, 285, pp. 295-315, 321-334. See also, Gafencu, Last Days of Europe, pp. 63-64.
3. Halifax to Kennard and Hoare, Apr. 28, 1938, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 304, pp. 357-358; Halifax to Phipps, Apr. 28, 1939, ibid., no. 305, pp. 358-359.

decision was confirmed by April 28.

It has been argued that Britain should have accepted that "most dazzling prize" of a triple alliance offered by the Soviet Union and worked out the details later.[1] That this was not the inclination of the government, nor perhaps entirely possible given the hesitation over difficulties to hand, is clear from the above. It is also clear that the begrudging acceptance finally given a month later, served only to vitiate much goodwill on both sides. By then other factors had also entered the situation.

On April 3, 1939, "operation white", a directive for the preparation of war with Poland, was given out by the German high command.[2] In a speech on April 28 Hitler denounced the Polish-German declaration of 1934 and the Anglo-German naval treaty, and omitted his usual anti-Soviet diatribe.[3] The final directive preparing for an attack on Poland was made on May 23, when Hitler also stated that in the event of an Anglo-French-Soviet alliance he would be constrained to attack in the west as well.[4]

1. Dalton, vol. II, p. 250; Churchill, vol. I, pp. 325-326. In retrospect Seeds agrees that this should have been the strategy to adopt. Sir William Seeds to the writer. Personal Interview.
2. Directive by Keitel, Apr. 3, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 149, pp. 186-187; Directive by Hitler, Apr. 11, 1939, ibid., no. 185, pp. 224-227.
3. Speeches of Adolf Hitler, vol. II, pp. 1605-1656.
4. Minutes of a Conference, May 23, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 433, p. 576.

Litvinov's sudden replacement by Molotov, announced in the Soviet press on May 4, was another crucial development. This culminated what was several vital weeks in Soviet foreign policy. Maisky had been recalled to Moscow on April 15, just prior to the Soviet proposal for a triple alliance. The timing suggests that a quick British response was not anticipated. The rapidity of developments had also probably left him quite disorientated. He was joined by Merekalov who, on April 17 in conversation with Weizsäcker, had broached the possibility of a normalization in German-Soviet relations.[1] If Merekalov could bring to Moscow news of an opening to Berlin, Maisky's report, one can assume, must have been depressing. He himself states he was recalled specifically to discuss the prospects for the conclusion of a triple alliance. At a government conference he "told the truth and only the truth - and the picture in consequence was not a very consoling one." He

1. Memorandum by Weizsäcker, Apr. 17, 1939, ibid., no. 215, pp. 266-267. There had in fact been several inconclusive contacts between Soviet and German officials earlier in April. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, p. 23; Kleist, op.cit., pp. 15-18. Soviet sources, when dealing with Nazi-Soviet relations, either ignore these early contacts or dismiss them as "non-committal mutual soundings". Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 184. Merekalov, a Litvinov appointee, did not return to Berlin. Maisky, who anticipated staying in Moscow for the May Day celebrations, returned to London on April 28.

seems to have advised, however, a continuation of the negotiations.[1]

While both ambassadors were in Moscow, Potemkin set out on April 22 for a diplomatic fact-finding journey in east and south-east Europe. Within a week he had already been to Bucharest, Sofia and Ankara, and no doubt reported on such factors as Balkan cohesion, the strength of resistance to Germany, possibilities of Soviet assistance and the Anglo-Turkish negotiations . The state of each of these was not favourable from the Soviet point of view. There was little unity, less military capability, and on the Straits British influence had deeply penetrated.[2]

Potemkin's trip can be seen as part of a two-pronged strategic Soviet offensive, both towards the Baltic and the Black Seas. Following the March 28 démarche in Riga and Tallinn, Litvinov expressed to the Finnish government Russia's interest in several Finnish islands as protection for Leningrad.[3] The trip to south-east Europe, therefore,

1. Ibid., pp. 119-123. Bilainkin, op.cit., p. 246, claims quite plausibly that Maisky told Stalin "that, while Chamberlain remained at the helm he must confess to doubts about the degree of British enthusiasm for a Russian agreement...."
2. For details of some of Potemkin's conversations, see Knatchbull-Hugessen to Halifax, Apr. 30, May 5, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 322, 378-379, pp. 380, 433-435; Gafencu, Last Days of Europe, pp. 184-189; and his Prelude to the Russian Campaign (London 1945), pp. 239-241; Beck, opcit. pp. 200-201. In neither of Potemkin's two books does he mention this journey. Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, p. 704, in a brief description, states Potemkin visited only Ankara "for information purposes".
3. Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, vol. I, pp. 161-162, 258-260.

was designed to complete Litvinov's soundings of all Russia's western neighbours. The assessment of the conclusions in Moscow probably indicated that the resistance capacity of the border states could not be depended upon. When taken in conjunction with Maisky's doubts about Britain's interest in a triple alliance, the kremlin must have reached the decision to place no undue impediments in the path of exploring sound relations with Berlin. Litvinov was anti-German, too closely identified with collective security, and Jewish. Molotov, a member of the politbureau, was less committed to the west, closer to Stalin, and had represented the German option in Soviet policy since 1935.[1] From May 4 onwards, both Britain and the Soviet Union were to pursue essentially similar policies; negotiations in Moscow and London respectively, very sensitively tuned to developments in Berlin.

Soviet diplomats immediately let it be known that the change at the narkomindel affected personalities but not policies.[2] These assurances did not convince American

1. Coulondre, op.cit., p. 270, considered Voroshilov, also a member of the politbureau, as favouring a pro-German policy.
2. Assessments of the personal element in Soviet foreign policy under Litvinov vary. See Ivo J. Lederer, ed., Russian Foreign Policy (4th edn., New Haven 1967), pp. 215-231; Craig and Gilbert, vol. II, pp. 344-377; Duroselle, op.cit., pp. 121-135. Cf. A. Ya. Vyshinsky, ed., Diplomaticheskiy Slovar, vol. II (Diplomatic Dictionary, Moscow 1950), col. 161; Arthur Upham Pope, Maxim Litvinoff (London 1943), pp. 440-442.

or Italian diplomats in Moscow, or Coulondre in Berlin.[1] Reaction in Germany was almost immediate. Hitler later claimed the "readiness on the part of the Kremlin to reshape its relations with Germany" became apparent with Molotov's appointment.[2] While this was probably a retrospective reflection, it was nonetheless true that for the first time since 1935 Berlin did respond to the overtures from Moscow.

Seeds and the foreign office were cautious in analysis and pronouncements on the change in Moscow. Molotov, Potemkin, Voroshilov and Maisky officially gave assurances indicating the likelihood of continuity in Soviet foreign policy and the validity of the triple alliance offer.[3] But privately Maisky warned Dalton that if Soviet proposals were turned down, then a change might come.[4]

The possible implications did not in fact escape

1. Kirk to Hull, May 4, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 757-759; Davies to Hull, May 10, 1939, ibid., pp. 760-761; Rosso's opinions, quoted in Toscano, "Politique Russe de l'Italie", pp. 11-14; and Coulondre to Bonnet, May 7, 1939, Livre Jaune Français, no. 123, pp. 153-157.
2. Letter from Hitler to Mussolini, Aug. 25, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 266, p. 282.
3. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Halifax, May 4, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 357, p. 412; Halifax to Seeds, May 6, 1939, ibid., no. 401, p. 453; Seeds to Halifax, May 9, 1939, ibid., no. 421, 422, pp. 469, 471.
4. Entry of May 7, 1939, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 251. Curiously, Maisky at first stated he was unable to "make the Litvinov business out." Later he suggested it "was only a personal quarrel between Litvinov and Stalin". Diary Entry of May 4, 1939, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 401; Strabolgi Memorandum, Sept. 20, 1939, Dalton Papers.

either Halifax or Seeds. As early as April 13 the latter had pointed out the "obvious temptation to the Soviet Government to sit back and do nothing" in face of the British guarantees. He also foresaw a territorial division of eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union. "I do not myself think the danger is more than 'possible'," wrote Seeds, "as ... I am not amongst those who seem incurably suspicious of this country." Anxiety over this Soviet tendency towards isolation was acknowledged by Halifax as a factor against abandoning efforts to secure Moscow's co-operation. However, a Nazi-Soviet agreement he considered "not obvious".[1] Seeds' immediate reaction to Molotov's appointment was to raise the question as to its effect on the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. After further contemplation,he posited three hypotheses: it was either a decision in favour of isolation; a personal quarrel between Litvinov and Stalin; or the latter's desire to exercise full control over foreign affairs. The evidence, in Seeds' opinion, indicated no change in policy.[2] He therefore advised continuing the negotiations in the belief that the Russians were "not

1. Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 13, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 52, p. 104; Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 14, 1939, ibid., no. 170, p. 205; Halifax to Loraine, May 6, 1939, ibid., no. 398, p. 451.
2. Seeds to Halifax, May 4, 12, 1939, ibid., nos. 359, 509, pp. 412-413, 542-546.

manoeuvring to let us down with a sudden bump."[1] The foreign office as well seemed anxious to avoid a breakdown.[2]

The British reply to the Soviet proposal of April 17, delivered almost three weeks later, was essentially a restatement of earlier suggestions for a declaration. The triple alliance proposed by Moscow involved automatic assistance to Poland and Rumania and, therefore, "met with considerable resistance" in London.[3] The only modification the foreign office added was to make Soviet intervention contingent on prior Anglo-French involvement. Seeds' observations that such an answer would only confirm the kremlin's suspicion of Britain's evasive tactics went unheeded.[4]

A negative reply from the Soviet Union was foreshadowed in an important Izvestia article on May 11. The

1. Letter from Seeds to Oliphant, May 16, 1939, ibid., no. 533, p. 572. In purely practical terms the change was a setback to Seeds. "I am very sad at Litvinov's disappearance", he wrote, "We had got to understand each other quite well, whereas Molotov is still an enigma and I shall have to walk warily." Ibid., p. 571.
2. Halifax to Seeds, May 6, 1939, ibid., no. 389, pp. 443-444. See also, Note of Interview with Cadogan, May 4, 1939, Cecil Papers, 51089, p. 136.
3. Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, Oct. 26, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12.
4. Halifax to Seeds, Apr. 29, May 6, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 316, 389, 397, 401, pp. 373-375, 443-444, 448-450, 453; Seeds to Halifax, Apr. 17, 25, 1939, ibid., nos. 196, 282, pp. 223-224, 319.

demand for a triple pact of mutual assistance was emphatically reiterated. Britain's proposals were criticized for not giving the USSR a reciprocal guarantee despite new obligations to be contracted by her. It was finally noted that the western frontier of Russia was not confined only to Poland and Rumania.[1] In a telegram to the narkomindel Suritz commented that the democracies were alloting the USSR the "role of a blind satellite in the coalition".[2] Furthermore, on May 3 Bonnet impulsively handed Suritz the French text of a projected mutual assistance pact.[3] With the widely divergent British and French proposals before him, Molotov subjected the unsuspecting Seeds to a disconcerting and highly embarrassing cross-examination.[4] The Soviet government obviously opted for the maximum offered by the quai d'orsay, and on May 14 rejected Britain's proposals and repeated their previous comprehensive demands. Guarantees to Latvia, Estonia and Finland were now explicitly demanded. In Molotov's opinion

1. The complete text is in Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, News Bulletin, no. 7, May 16, 1939. A. Nekrich, "Dvoinaya Igra Pravitelstva Chemberlena i ee Proval" (The Double Game of the Chamberlain Government and Its Failure), Voprosy Istorii, no. 2, Feb. 1950, p. 55, describes the article as a fundamental document on the subsequent negotiations. See also, the Tass communiqué of May 10, 1939, in Degras, vol. III, p. 330.
2. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 332.
3. Phipps to Halifax, May 3, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 351, p. 406.
4. Seeds to Halifax, May 9, 1939, ibid., nos. 421, 436, pp. 469-471, 483-487. For Seeds' further reaction to this "lamentable affair", see his Letter to Oliphant, May 16, 1939, ibid., no. 533, pp. 571-572.

the essence of the Soviet reply was a "request for reciprocity."[1]

By mid-May British policy was reluctantly but inexorably moving towards accepting an alliance with the USSR. This volte-face can be attributed to several factors. An overwhelming majority of the British public supported a full military alliance with the USSR.[2] An ever widening circle of press and parliamentary opinion was moving in the same direction. In the May 19 parliamentary debate, the more articulate of Chamberlain's critics brought out with considerable force the arguments in favour of an immediate military alliance with the USSR, criticized government hesitations, and urged the construction of a strategically viable eastern front. Churchill particularly, having been briefed the previous day by Maisky, insisted that the objections of Poland and the Baltic states should

1. Seeds to Halifax, May 15, 16, 1939, ibid., nos. 520, 530, pp. 558-559, 567-568. For the original Russian note containing Molotov's reply, see Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, pp. 332-333. Falsifiers of History, pp. 36, 38, interprets British hesitations over the Baltic states as an invitation to Germany to attack Russia via its north-west approach.
2. Tom Harrisson, "Public Opinion about Russia", Political Quarterly, vol. XII, no. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1941, pp. 353-356. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 410-413, 420-421, considers public opinion to have been the major force pressing the government for a Soviet alliance. Certainly British diplomats abroad felt that excessive publicity was hindering the negotiations. See e.g., Henderson, Failure of a Mission, p. 248; Letter from Kennard to Cadogan, Apr. 18, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 213, pp. 236-237; Seeds to Halifax, June 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 103, p. 119.

be overriden; likewise the rumoured irritation of Italy, Portugal and Spain.[1] The government's objection to setting up opposing blocs was once again outlined by Chamberlain in his rebuttal. What was being aimed at was not alliances, rather a "peace front against aggression"; but a "sort of veil, a sort of wall" prevented agreement. He denied that ideological mistrust was a factor in his policy.[2] However, it was the critics who carried the day. The prime minister later commented regretfully that the Commons "had pushed him further than he had wished to go."[3] But it is unlikely that the government could have exposed itself to a breakdown in the negotiations.

Secondly, on May 12 a joint Anglo-Turkish declaration

1. See the speeches by Lloyd George, Attlee, Churchill, Eden and Sinclair, in H.C. Deb., vol. 347, May 19, 1939, cols. 1809-1820, 1820-1828, 1840-1849, 1854-1860, 1866-1876. Also, Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 125-127; Entry of May 4, 1939, Inskip Diary, File 2. Minutes of May 4, 16, 1939, Vansittart Papers, offered very cogent arguments against giving too much weight to the objections of 'friendly states'.
2. H.C. Deb., vol. 347, May 19, 1939, cols. 1828-1840. The prime minister's opening remarks contained a veiled reference to Maisky's activities in leaking details of the negotiations. The ambassador was himself aware that "'at No. 10 Downing Street they think that I am an arch plotter. I do not mind...." He did warn W.P. Coates to be careful about statements to Labour M.P.s , and urged Dalton to caution his colleagues to be more discreet. Entry of May 7, 1939, Dalton Diary.
3. R.P. Ernle-Erle-Drax, "Mission to Moscow, August, 1939", Naval Review, vol. XL, no. 3, Aug. 1952, p. 253. Continued; ibid., no. 4, Nov. 1952, pp. 399-413; vol. XLI, no. 1, Feb. 1953, pp. 57-63. [Hereafter: Drax, parts I-III]. The final draft of these articles, [hereafter: "Draft of Mission to Moscow"], containing some material omitted from the published version, is in the Drax Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge).

announced a temporary agreement on mutual assistance in the Mediterranean area. The foreign office readily recognized, in view of close Soviet-Turkish relations, that the negotiation of a permanent treaty with Turkey would be facilitated by an Anglo-Soviet agreement. In fact, Izvestia welcomed the declaration as an important link in the chain to prevent further aggression.[1]

The French government also applied sustained pressure for a pact along Soviet lines. French officials seemed more inclined to lend a sympathetic ear to the Soviet point of view, and openly expressed their doubts whether the narkomindel would agree to the various British proposals. The Soviet Union, they argued, was entitled to receive an Anglo-French guarantee in exchange for undertaking obligations to Poland and Rumania.[2] Bonnet particularly, in marked contrast to his attitude during the Czech crisis, was determined to strengthen French security by securing the traditional alliance with the USSR. The re-affirmation and enlargement of France's east European commitments since

1. H.C. Deb., vol. 347, May 12, 1939, col. 953; Foreign Office Memorandum, May 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 589, pp. 646-647; Beloff, vol. II, p. 245. The declaration was reprinted in Pravda on May 14. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 706.
2. Minute by Strang, Apr. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 252, pp. 273-274; Phipps to Halifax, Apr. 24, May 3, 1939, ibid., nos. 277, 350, pp. 294-295, 404-405.

April, her total identification with British policy, and the controversial military convention signed on May 19 by Gamelin and General Kasprzycki, the Polish minister of war, made the French government conscious of its extended position and all the more anxious to enlist Soviet aid.[1] On May 17 Corbin indicated to Halifax France's concern at the foreign office's delay and the possible dangerous effects in Berlin.[2]

The latter factor constitutes the final element influencing British policy. In early May General Bodenschatz, Göring's aide-de-camp, leaked information on Nazi-Soviet contacts to the Polish and French embassies.[3] Persistent rumours of these counter-negotiations, which continued into the summer, were forwarded by Henderson and other sources to the foreign office.[4] Even Molotov remarked cryptically that Soviet policy was liable to change, if other states altered theirs. In London Maisky informally dropped the same hints, with the comment that the "need for

1. On this convention, see Gamelin, vol. II, pp. 413-429; Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 217-233; Noël, op.cit., pp. 373-375; Beck, op.cit., p. 199; Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, pp. 463-466.
2. Halifax to Phipps, May 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 539, pp. 577-578.
3. Henderson to Halifax, May 5, 1939, ibid., no. 377, p. 433 and fn. 2; Coulondre to Bonnet, May 7, 1939, Livre Jaune Français, no. 123, pp. 156-157.
4. Henderson to Halifax, May 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 413, p. 463; Letter from Henderson to Cadogan, May 18, 1939, ibid., no. 522 and Enclosure, pp. 594-595; Entry of May 9, 1939, Inskip Diary, File 2. Langer and Gleason, op.cit., pp. 124-125; Davies, op.cit., p. 281; Strang, Home and Abroad, pp. 194-196.

some arrangement to be come to before a month was out was vital".[1] The initial British response, consistent with earlier reaction to such developments, was to describe them as "inherently improbable." According to Horace Wilson, "No stock was to be put in the talk of a Nazi-Soviet deal". Soviet leaders were only bluffing, and would not issue a démenti as this enhanced their prestige in British eyes. It was a convenient method of exerting pressure on London. Ivone Kirkpatrick, transferred from Berlin to the foreign office, considered it a "mistake to imagine that a Russo-German agreement could be ... easily concluded".[2] The French government, however, took these hints much more seriously and quickly convinced their allies of the very real danger of a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement. Under the impact of the above factors, the foreign office moved towards the Soviet position.

These developments, particularly the ultimate agreement to an alliance with the USSR, took place in face of very stiff opposition from the prime minister. On May 14 he once more vented his annoyance with the Russians who,

1. Seeds to Halifax, May 9, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 421, p. 471; Entry of May 7, 1939, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. III, p. 251; Memorandum by Gwilym Lloyd George, May 17, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130.
2. Henderson to Halifax, May 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 413, p. 463, fn. 2; Cadogan to U.K. Delegation (Geneva), May 21, 1939, ibid., no. 574, p. 622; Minute by Kirkpatrick, May 30, 1939, ibid., no. 668, p. 724; Langer and Gleason, op.cit., p. 109.

he wrote,

> will give us more trouble.... they have no understanding of other countries' mentality or conditions and no manners, and they are working hand in hand with our Opposition. The latter don't want to see anything that does not exalt and glorify Russia, or perhaps they might understand that if alliance with Russia which is incapable of giving much effective aid were to alienate Spain and drive her into the Axis camp we should lose far more in the West then we could ever hope to gain in the East.[1]

Chamberlain's military assessment of the USSR was in fact supported by an appreciation from the chiefs of staff sub-committee, submitted on April 24, 1939, which claimed inter alia that "Any substantial Russian military support to Poland is out of the question." This report was even more gloomy than the normally pessimistic ones from Moscow. However, it did add this important proviso: "Russian [economic] cooperation would be invaluable in that Germany would be unable to draw upon Russia's immense reserves of food and raw materials, and should therefore succumb more quickly to our economic stranglehold."[2] Nevertheless, in an apparent volte-face, Cadogan recorded on May 16: "Chiefs of Staff have now swung round to 'whole-hog' alliance with Soviet. P.M. annoyed."[3]

1. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, May 14, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
2. Quoted in Notes by Hoare on 1937-1939, Foreign Policy Committee, ibid., X:5.
3. Entry in Cadogan Diary, quoted in Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, July 6, 1951, ibid., XIX:12.

It was then, in a seemingly penultimate attempt to exert informal influence on the Soviets, Halifax enlisted the aid of Vansittart. After hearing of a conversation the latter had had with Maisky on May 16, where the problem of the Baltic states was fully discussed, the foreign policy committee of the cabinet convinced Chamberlain to approve a further meeting with the ambassador. Vansittart was to discuss the broad outlines of a settlement. This conceded to holding staff talks, but still refused either direct assistance to Russia, or to guarantee the Baltic states. Maisky, however, indicated his government's refusal to consider anything but a full triple alliance.[1] Privately he stated that "ultimately ... [the British government] would be compelled to accept the principle of the Alliance".[2] On May 19 the foreign policy committee was informed of the Soviets' negative reply and took note of the fact Britain was facing the choice of an alliance, or a breakdown of the negotiations. In his diary Cadogan wrote:

> My opinion, much against my will, is hardening in favour of the former. The P.M. hates it. O. Stanley, S. Hoare, Malcolm MacDonald, Chatfield, Burgin and, I think, Inskip in favour of

1. Extract from a Minute by Vansittart, May 16, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 527, pp. 564-565 and fn. 1; Foreign Office Memorandum, May 22, 1939, ibid., no. 589, pp. 639-640 and fn. 1; Colvin, op.cit., pp. 321-322.
2. Memorandum by Gwilym Lloyd George, May 18, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130.

> it. To them I think I should add Halifax. P.M., S. Morrison and J. Simon against. All agreed it must be a Cabinet decision.

On May 20 Cadogan recorded the astonishing, but understandable, fact that the "P.M. says he will resign rather than sign an alliance with the Soviet."[1] The same day Halifax, en route to Geneva to attend the League meetings, stopped in Paris. The British government, he explained to the French ministers, saw great difficulty in agreeing to a straight triple alliance. Daladier immediately insisted on the kremlin's right to expect a direct guarantee. Even in the case of a German attack on Russia, Britain would be involved by virtue of the Franco-Soviet treaty. Since Litvinov's departure the Soviets' attitude had stiffened, and they "were now on their dignity and would accept nothing less than complete equality and reciprocity." Daladier emphasized, in reply to Halifax's enquiry, that there was a serious possibility of an accommodation between Germany and Russia, if agreement was not quickly reached.[2] The following day Cadogan suggested to the British delegation at Geneva they inform Maisky of

1. Entries of May 19, 20, 1939, Cadogan Diary, quoted in Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, July 6, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12. The fact that Chamberlain was "boggling" at an alliance was leaked by De La Warr to Nicolson. Entries of May 16, 24, 1939, Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives.
2. Halifax to Cadogan, May 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 576, pp. 623-625.

London's knowledge of Nazi-Soviet economic contacts and solicit any comments on this. Seeds was likewise instructed and quickly received a démenti from Potemkin.[1]

Further Anglo-Soviet talks were held in Geneva on May 22. Apparently in the unfettered atmosphere away from London, Maisky found Halifax "much 'freer'" and a useful exchange of views took place.[2] The ambassador criticized the weakness of Britain's approach for having been based on the guarantees to Poland and Rumania. Britain's proposals were legally valid, but dangerous in practice. Russia might conceivably be left to fight Germany alone. Only a triple alliance could prevent war. Otherwise the Soviet Union could "take care of herself and ... preserve her own liberty of action." Halifax, while repeating prior arguments, was extremely conciliatory and gradually revealed the extent of concessions Britain was ready to make. Being unable to shake Maisky at all on the main points, he stoically concluded that the choice facing Britain was "disagreeably plain": a breakdown in negotiations or a triple alliance.[3]

1. Cadogan to U.K. Delegation (Geneva), May 21, 1939, ibid., no. 574, p. 622 and fn. 2; Seeds to Cadogan, May 22, 1939, ibid., no. 583, p. 634.
2. Letter from Gwilym Lloyd George to Lloyd George, June 1, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130. Maisky confidently stated the British government "has now come 75% of the way and are bound to come the whole 100%."
3. U.K. Delegation (Geneva) to Cadogan, May 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 581-582, pp. 630-634. Cf. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 127-131; Bonnet, vol. II, p. 185.

It was this possibility which a foreign office memorandum of May 22 discussed in great detail.[1] It outlined both the disadvantages and advantages of a proposed Anglo-Soviet pact, with the two almost balanced. Beside the usual and often-repeated objections, there was now added the fear that Britain might be drawn into a war in support of the Soviet Union against Germany. On the other side the memorandum placed great emphasis on the possible effects of a breakdown. The two most pressing being the danger of a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement, and the encouragement thereby given to German hopes of a free hand in eastern Europe. Finally, and most important,

> it was essential, if there must be a war, to try to involve the Soviet Union in it, otherwise at the end of the war the Soviet Union, with her army intact and England and Germany in ruins would dominate Europe. (There are indications that the real Soviet policy is - and would be - to get us involved and then to try and keep out herself.)[2]

1. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 425, points out that this memorandum "has not received detailed interpretation in Soviet historical literature /he singles out only Trukhanovsky, Vneshnyaya Politika Anglii, pp. 358-359; and Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, vol. I, pp. 165-166/, although it is a very important document for the understanding of the British position in the negotiations. In this memorandum the mercenary, narrow, egotistic aims of British diplomacy in the negotiations are disclosed to a greater extent than in any other document." Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, p. 339, fn. 2, also claims the memorandum exhibits the "anti-Soviet motives which the British government continued to follow".
2. Foreign Office Memorandum, May 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 589, pp. 639-647.

Despite these observations, Halifax succeeded on his return from Geneva to secure cabinet support for a triple alliance. Chamberlain was "very depressed", but resigned himself to the idea.[1] Although the French had various reservations, they agreed to a joint démarche in Moscow.[2] On May 24 in the Commons, Chamberlain made a rather optimistic declaration indicating an imminent agreement.[3]

The Anglo-French draft treaty envisaged tripartite mutual assistance in case of direct aggression; or if any of the contracting powers were involved in hostilities resulting either from the fulfilment of existing pledges, or in response to a request for aid from a state, not guaranteed, but desiring assistance. The states in the latter two categories were further protected by a clause, whereby assistance would be undertaken by Britain, France and the USSR "without prejudice to the rights and position of other Powers." It was thereby hoped to overcome the objections of Poland and Rumania to being either named in the treaty, or forced to accept Soviet aid. The treaty

1. Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, July 6, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12; Kennedy to Hull, May 24, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, pp. 259-260.
2. Minute by Cadogan, May 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 640, p. 693.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 347, May 24, 1939, col. 2267. Chamberlain's statement was communicated beforehand to the Soviet embassy.

also provided for eventual military discussions. Finally, the entire pact was placed under the auspices of the League.[1]

Maisky thought agreement would now prove possible,[2] but he was clearly out of touch with Moscow. From this point onwards the venue of the negotiations switched to the Russian capital, and with this change Maisky's personal official role diminished considerably. He seems subsequently to have been kept ill-informed on the negotiations. His main usefulness for the narkomindel remained as a disseminator of information behind the scenes.

The curious reference which the British draft treaty made to the League, and which was to annoy the Soviets, was the rather desperate invention of the prime minister and Horace Wilson. In a letter on May 28, 1939, the former described the issues as he saw them after Halifax's return from Geneva. This closely followed the arguments set out in the May 22 foreign office memorandum. Chamberlain also pointed out that the press was in favour of an alliance, and "it was obvious that refusal would create immense difficulties in the House even if I could persuade the Cabinet."

1. Halifax to Seeds, May 25, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 624, pp. 679-680.
2. U.K. Delegation (Geneva) to Halifax, May 25, 1939, ibid., no. 621, p. 678.

On the other hand, he described his "deep suspicions of Soviet aims and profound doubts as to her military capacity", and his opposition to a lining up of opposing blocs "which would make any negotiation or discussion with the Totalitarians difficult if not impossible." In these circumstances he sent for Horace Wilson, and from their discussions emerged the idea which

> gives the Russians what they want, but in form and presentation it avoids the idea of an Alliance and substitutes a declaration of <u>intentions</u> in certain circumstances in fulfilment of our obligations under Article XVI of the Covenant. It is really a most ingenious idea for it is calculated to catch all the mugwumps and at the same time by tying the thing up to Article XVI we give it a temporary character. I have no doubt that one of these days Article XVI will be amended or repealed and that should give us an opportunity of reviewing our relations with the Soviet if we want it.

Having clearly worked this out, the prime minister concluded, "I recovered by equanimity".[1]

Although the problem of Nazi-Soviet contacts had been instrumental in influencing British and French attitudes, the actual tempo of these negotiations had been intensified but with little result. British hesitations in agreeing

1. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, May 28, 1939, <u>Templewood Papers</u>, XIX:(C)II. Cf. Kennedy to Hull, May 24, 1939, <u>F.R.U.S.</u>, <u>1939</u>, vol. I, p. 260.

to a pact made the kremlin more amenable to consider approaching Berlin. Likewise the deterioration in Polish-German relations and Japan's refusal to join the pact of steel, signed on May 22, made Hitler receptive to a rapprochement with his ideological enemies. The avowedly anti-British nature of this pact, on which the Soviets were very well informed,[1] also served to reassure Moscow as to Hitler's intentions.

On May 5 and 17 Astakhov met with Schnurre to discuss economic relations. The political aspects were brought up by the Soviet chargé d'affaires.[2] On May 20, after an interview with Molotov who emphasized that a "'political basis'" must precede economic negotiations, Schulenburg cautioned Berlin that the foreign commissar was playing for time, and would take no further initiative.[3] At this point the publicity given to the alleged imminent conclusion of an Anglo-Soviet agreement forced the withdrawal of new

1. This was due to successful Soviet intelligence activities in Tokyo. F.W. Deakin and G.R. Storry, The Case of Richard Sorge (London 1966), p. 221.
2. Memoranda by Schnurre, May 5, 17, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, nos. 332, 406, pp. 429, 535-536.
3. Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, May 21, 1939, ibid., no. 414, p. 547, fn. 2; Schulenburg to Weizsäcker, May 22, 1939, ibid., no. 424 and Enclosure, pp. 558-560. Potemkin's visit to the League was cancelled to forestall a top-level Anglo-Soviet meeting. Maisky, who replaced him, had still not met Halifax at Geneva, and therefore a delay was necessary on the Soviet side.

instructions for Schulenburg, which sought "pacification and normalization" of German-Soviet relations.[1] Instead on May 30, with Hitler's approval, Weizsäcker made a direct invitation to Astakhov to consider the political benefits open to Russia by association with Berlin.[2]

The German government had definitely decided to pursue the negotiations with the Soviet Union. The character of these counter-negotiations for the next two months proceeded with extreme caution on both sides. Mutual suspicion was here as effective a deterrent to progress as in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. Hitler personally wavered for a considerable amount of time.[3] But Germany's immediate purpose, in Weizsäcker's words, was to prevent Anglo-French-Soviet relations "from assuming a still more binding character".[4] This limited aim

1. Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, May 1939, ibid., no. 441, pp. 589-593. These instructions were cancelled between May 26-27.
2. Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, May 27, 1939, ibid., no. 446, p. 598; Memorandum by Weizsäcker, May 30, 1939, ibid., no. 451, pp. 604-607. See also, Kurt Assmann, "Stalin and Hitler, Part I, The Pact with Moscow", U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, vol. LXXV, June 1949, pp. 640-641; Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 347.
3. Weizsäcker's evidence at Nuremberg, cited in Walther Hofer, War Premeditated (London 1955), p. 17, fn. 7.
4. Memorandum by Weizsäcker, May 25, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 437, p. 586. See also, Memorandum by Schnurre, June 7, 1939, ibid., no. 491, p. 662. Dirksen's informant in the British foreign office considerably facilitated Berlin's task. Proposals could be timed to coincide with the state of Anglo-Soviet relations. It is of further interest that a Captain John Herbert King, working in the foreign office communications department, was imprisoned in 1939 for having passed information to the Soviet government. See the report in The Times, June 8, 1956.

remained the prime consideration and suggests some concern as to the success of a tripartite pact. The German foreign office, however, was never optimistic on the chances of a political settlement with Russia, and Schulenburg always urged caution.[1] Rather, it was considered useful in both Berlin and Moscow to begin exploratory economic talks as a prelude to a possible wider rapprochement. Progress was to be extremely slow throughout June and early July, as the tripartite negotiations continued to occupy the centre of the stage.

1. See e.g., Unsigned Memoranda, May 29, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, nos. 449-450, pp. 602-604; Schulenburg to Weizsäcker, June 5, 1939, ibid., no. 478, p. 643.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BRITAIN, THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE, PART TWO.

Molotov's immediate reaction to the Anglo-French draft treaty, communicated to him on May 27, was negative. He complained that the British and French governments "were not interested in obtaining concrete results." The references to the League and the vagueness of the projected military talks were specifically criticized. Seeds suggested meeting the demand for a military agreement.[1] On instructions from Halifax who had sharply expressed his disappointment, if not outright annoyance, Seeds again saw Molotov to elucidate several points. The ambassador wearily concluded his report: "... it is my fate to deal with a man totally ignorant of foreign affairs and to whom the idea of negotiation is utterly alien."[2]

Soviet objections were further spelled out in an address to the supreme soviet on May 31. Molotov, making his first public speech as foreign commissar, did acknowledge that a change of attitude had taken place in the west.

1. Seeds to Halifax, May 27, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 648, 657, pp. 701-702, 710-712. For Molotov's observations on this conversation, see Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, pp. 333-334.
2. Halifax to Seeds, May 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 662, pp. 719-720; Seeds to Halifax, May 30, 1939, ibid., nos. 665, 670, pp. 722, 725-727.

But he repeated his criticism of recent Anglo-French proposals, and insisted that the three Baltic states must be guaranteed. Turning then to relations with Germany, he indicated the possible resumption of commercial negotiations.[1] Despite this reference, in the opinion of both Seeds and Schulenburg the Soviet Union was still prepared to ally with the western powers, but on Soviet terms. Seeds added that London should expect further German-Soviet commercial negotiations. A political agreement he considered "just a possibility".[2]

Molotov's speech was made in the middle of a serious deterioration in Soviet-Japanese relations.[3] Fighting on the Mongolian-Manchurian frontier had broken out again in January 1939 and continued sporadically until September. The uncertain military position in the east was a factor of considerable importance in Soviet policy. A simultaneous threat to the eastern and western borders of the USSR was to

1. Text in Degras, vol. III, pp. 332-340.
2. Seeds to Halifax, June 1, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 681, p. 736; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 1, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 463, p. 626.
3. For a description of the Khalkhin-Gol (Nomon-Han) hostilities, see Erickson, op.cit., pp. 517-522, 532-537. Cf. Potiemkine, vol. III, pp. 681-682.

be avoided at all costs.[1] Consequently, negotiations with both Britain and Germany had to continue to avoid the uncertainty which would follow from a breakdown, and to ascertain which side could offer the maximum degree of security. Molotov's emphasis throughout his speech was in fact on security. The tone was confident and expressive of Soviet desires to establish the USSR as an equal power in the international community.

On June 2 the first Russian draft treaty was handed over. It specifically listed eight states - Belguim, Greece and the six border states - against whom any aggression would automatically invoke the treaty; and proposed the simultaneous conclusion of a political agreement with a military convention. British reservations on the "rights and position" of other states were considered "unnecessary".[2]

Molotov's speech and the official reply evoked consternation in London and Paris.[3] Government and public opinion in both countries had counted upon acceptance in Moscow; the main principle of mutual assistance having been

1. This argument was later used by the Soviets as a major factor justifying the August pact with Germany. E.H. Carr, German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939 (Baltimore 1951), p. 133; and Erickson, op.cit., p. 522, agree that the far east was of greater importance for the Soviet-German talks than for the negotiations with Britain.
2. Seeds to Halifax, June 2, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 697, pp. 753-754.
3. For French reaction, see Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 186-187; Bullitt to Hull, June 5, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, pp. 266-271; Phipps to Halifax, June 6, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 719, pp. 775-776.

agreed. Seeds, who had pressed so consistently for an agreement and conceded on many points to the Soviet view, seemed particularly downhearted. The draft agreement, in his opinion, gave the kremlin all the reciprocity it was entitled to expect and offered terms which were sufficiently generous.[1] Chamberlain now found the whole situation "most annoying". If Russia did not accept the British proposals, he was tempted to call the whole thing off.[2] Dirksen pointed out to Berlin the prevalence of doubts in London as to the expediency of further negotiations. "Official circles", he wrote, "share the general disappointment, but try to belittle the difficulties, in order to justify the optimism so far shown."[3]

More than this was the annoyance caused by the veritable snub delivered by Molotov. For the first time since the 1917 revolution, a British government had actually guaranteed Bolshevik Russia against attack. For this major concession alone Chamberlain no doubt felt the Soviet government should be grateful and drop its other demands. But the fact that this concession was not made earlier, when it could have

1. Seeds to Halifax, June 1, 1939, ibid., no. 681, p. 736.
2. Kennedy to Hull, June 9, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 272. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 356, noted that "it looked at the beginning of June as if the negotiations had finally broken down."
3. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, June 3, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 468, p. 630.

been used as a valuable bargaining point, seemed only to vitiate the force of the British gesture. From early June onwards the whole character and direction of the negotiations changed. Mutual Anglo-Soviet mistrust increased as the negotiations progressed. The balance between resistance and appeasement, established in March and April 1939, began subtly to shift towards the latter.[1] This is not to say that Chamberlain was prepared for an immediate return to appeasement diplomacy. Indeed, contacts between Britain and Germany - at the official higher governmental level - were rare. Rather both Moscow and London began to look with increasing interest towards Berlin. The British government and, particularly, Chamberlain waited for a concrete sign from Hitler that he had abandoned the use of force. Such a move would have then justified a new attempt to negotiate with Germany. Furthermore, as the summer progressed without tangible results in the negotiations, expressions of doubt as to the real value of a treaty with the USSR became more prevalent. This was coupled with increasing efforts to speedily conclude some sort of agree-

1. See A. and V. M. Toynbee, eds., S.I.A., 1939-1946, The Eve of War, 1939 (London 1958), pp. 204-224, for a discussion of the "doubleline of British policy towards Germany." In a conversation with Maisky on July 14, 1939, Lloyd George explained Chamberlain's policy as having this dual purpose. See Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 337.

ment and begin the task of regulating Polish-German relations. For its part the Soviet government continued to insist on extracting the maximum concessions from London, while waiting for Berlin to advance concrete offers.

Before replying to the Soviet draft treaty, the foreign office decided to hasten the negotiating process. On June 5 Halifax, disturbed by the "slow progress" of developments, suggested to Corbin that the Russians send a representative for direct discussions in Paris or London. Corbin advised giving the ambassadors in Moscow full negotiating power.[1] The same day the foreign policy committee of the cabinet discussed whether William Malkin, legal adviser in the foreign office, should go. After the meeting, Halifax and Chamberlain decided to recall Seeds for "consultation and ... further instructions". Due to the ambassador's temporary indisposition, it was then decided to send Strang instead.[2] There was never any question of delegating Collier, as the negotiations were the responsibility of the central department of the foreign office. This is the precise origin of the 'Strang mission'.

1. Halifax to Phipps, June 5, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 715, p. 773.
2. Letter from Cadogan to Templewood, Oct. 26, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12; Halifax to Seeds, June 6, 7, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, nos. 720, 722, 734, pp. 776, 777, 787; Minute by Sargent, June 6, 1939, ibid., no. 724, p. 778; Seeds to Halifax, June 7, 1939, ibid., no. 729, pp. 784-785. See also, Chamberlain's statement in H.C. Deb., vol. 348, June 7, 1939, cols. 400-402.

"I did not go to Moscow to carry on the negotiations", Strang writes, "I went to help the British Ambassador".[1] Seeds is also most emphatic on this point. He comments that Strang's main purpose was to brief him on various aspects of Britain's diplomatic commitments which Molotov questioned and on which he had little information.[2]

It is often alleged that a more senior official should have been sent to Moscow. Daladier himself suggested it at the time.[3] The basis for this view rests upon the intangible problem of Soviet dignity and susceptibilities. There is no doubt that a minister would have suitably impressed the narkomindel as to Britain's intentions. However, the basic areas of dispute would have still remained. Halifax who was later invited by Maisky to the USSR quickly excused himself. He did mention that at one time he had thought of going himself.[4] He even "seemed to like" Eden's offer to visit Moscow, but Chamberlain

1. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 157.
2. Sir William Seeds to the writer. Personal Interview.
3. Phipps to Halifax, June 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 2, p. 2. Cadogan told Corbin there were "arguments" against sending a more eminent personality. Minute by Cadogan, June 8, 1939, ibid., no. 3, p. 4. In his Letter to Templewood, Oct. 26, 1951, Templewood Papers, XIX:12, Cadogan adds that it would have been difficult to spare Halifax at the time.
4. Halifax to Seeds, June 8, 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 5, 38, pp. 6, 51.

vetoed the idea.[1] Halifax felt, rather modestly, that as a general rule the business of negotiations was "better handled by Ambassadors."[2]

In retrospect Maisky and subsequent Soviet historical accounts[3] are severely critical of Strang's mission. Maisky stated it was a "great mistake and was considered derogatory" by his government. Had the foreign secretary

1. Avon, The Reckoning, p. 55; Feiling, op.cit., p. 409. Cf. Entry of July 7, 1939, Dalton Diary. Offers of assistance were not new. Davies volunteered in April to go on special mission but was turned down by the state department. Davies to Hull, Apr. 18, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 756-757 and fn. 42; Langer and Gleason, op.cit., pp. 128-129. This veto is interpreted by Soviet historians as typical of American efforts to sabotage the negotiations. See e.g., V.I. Popov, "Soedinennie Shtati Ameriki i Anglo-Franko-Sovetskie Peregovori 1939 goda" (The United States of America and the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Negotiations of 1939), Voprosy Istorii, no. 1, Jan. 1963, pp. 80-81; A.V. Berezkin, "Iz Istorii Amerikano-Germanskikh Otnosheny Nakanune Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny, 1938-1939 gg.", (From the History of American-German Relations on the Eve of the Second World War, 1938-1939), Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya, no. 5, Sept.-Oct. 1964, p. 94. Seeds believes it was a mistake to have sent Strang, but is quite convinced that a visit by any of the "'politicians'" would have been useless. Sir William Seeds to the writer. Personal Interview. See also, Strang, Moscow Negotiations, p. 21.
2. Halifax to Seeds, June 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 5, p. 6.
3. See e.g., Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 432-434; Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, pp. 346-347.

gone to Moscow the negotiations would have been speedily concluded. As it was, Stalin's suspicions were intensified.[1] And yet, at the time the Soviet ambassador seemed to accept the British choice with little comment. Nor was Strang personally made aware of any particular distaste for his selection.[2] The fact remains, however, that a serious error in tactics was committed. The negotiations were far too delicate and open to misinterpretation on the Russian side. It was not a "routine assignment" as Strang has contended.[3] Looking back, it would have been better not to have sent anyone, or else to have accepted Maisky's invitation, made on kremlin instructions and designed "to probe the genuine intentions" of the British government.[4]

Having conceded on a direct guarantee of the USSR, the next major point of contention to occupy the three powers was the position of certain states which, while not guaranteed, were held to be a vital interest to one of the powers. The British government started out from a

1. Boothby Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Boothby, Fight to Live, pp. 190-191. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 140-144, claims Halifax's official record misrepresents the timing of the invitation.
2. Halifax to Seeds, June 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 5, p. 6; Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 159. Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 432, now describes Strang as "well-known for his anti-Soviet views."
3. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 158. The written instructions he carried with him to Moscow could as easily have been telegraphed. It would appear that what was also involved were confidential oral messages for Seeds.
4. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 141.

principled position; that is, guarantees could not be forced upon independent states. In fact, the real difficulty was Britain's hesitation at allowing the USSR to draw her into war as a result of a "reckless or provocative" reaction to German aggression against the Baltic states.[1] This feeling was strengthened by the considerable number of diplomatic notes reaching London, forcibly describing the objections of Latvia, Estonia, and Finland to being guaranteed by the USSR.

On June 14 Strang arrived in Moscow, bringing with him a new draft treaty and further instructions. In reply to Naggiar's question as to whether Britain really wanted a treaty, he replied in the affirmative but added this must be achieved with "prudence and honour." Rosso had the impression after speaking to Strang that he was "not optimistic about the possibility of a prompt conclusion."[2] Indeed, Potemkin had told the Italian ambassador that Strang's arrival did not mean the negotiations were about to be concluded, as "'certain important points'" had yet to be clarified.[3]

The new British instructions envisaged three-power

1. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 172; Minute by Cadogan, June 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 3, p. 3.
2. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 174; Rosso to Ciano, June 19, 1939, Ministero Degli Affari Esteri, I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, Ottava Serie: 1935-1939 (Rome 1952-), /hereafter: D.D.I., 8th Series/, vol. XII, no. 275, p. 229.
3. Rosso to Ciano, June 11, 1939, ibid., no. 187, pp. 166-167.

consultations in case the security of a non-guaranteed state should be threatened. Mutual assistance would follow agreement. It was also considered undesirable to specifically enumerate the countries concerned.[1] Corbin had warned Cadogan such hesitations would only fill the Russians "with the darkest suspicion." (He then produced a French draft treaty along Soviet lines, which Cadogan strongly advised against being leaked). Maisky likewise told Halifax that an "indispensable condition" for any treaty was a settlement of the Baltic problem.[2]

A foretaste of the kremlin's unyielding mood appeared in a front page Pravda article on June 13. It ridiculed western hesitations and arguments against guaranteeing the Baltic states.[3] Indeed, Molotov's first reaction on June 15 to the joint Anglo-French proposals dealing with this issue was, in the words of a Tass communiqué, "not wholly favourable."[4]

1. Foreign Office Memorandum, June 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 35, and annex 1 and 2, pp. 33-40.
2. Minute by Cadogan, June 8, 1939, ibid., no. 3, p. 4; Halifax to Mack, June 10, 1939, ibid., no. 20, pp. 22-23; Halifax to Seeds, June 12, 1939, ibid., no. 38, p. 50.
3. Seeds to Halifax, June 13, 1939, ibid., no. 42, pp. 54-56.
4. Izvestia, June 16, 1939, quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 347; Seeds to Halifax, June 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 60, p. 79.

The next day the foreign commissar handed Seeds and Naggiar an aide-mémoire containing the Soviet reply. This was accompanied by the complaint that the Russians were being treated as "simpletons ('naivny') and fools ('duraki')." If a way could not be found to guarantee the Baltic states, a triple pact of mutual assistance was preferable.[1] This suggestion Halifax quickly rejected. It negated the object of the negotiations; that is, protection for Poland and other states, and left Russia with the benefits of the British guarantees without any reciprocal obligation.[2]

Halifax made several further attempts to meet Molotov's views on the Baltic. Then, on June 19, in desperation for some form of agreement, the foreign secretary notified Seeds of Britain's readiness to begin staff conversations and to omit the references both to the rights of other powers and to the League, if a political agreement were concluded at once.[3] But a further meeting

1. Seeds to Halifax, June 17, 20, 1939, ibid., nos. 73, 103, pp. 89-91, 115-120. Text of the Soviet reply is in Seeds to Halifax, June 16, 1939, ibid., no. 69, pp. 85-87.
2. Halifax to Seeds, June 19, 1939, ibid., no. 89, pp. 104-105. Halifax later told Dalton that such a solution "would be a plain confession of defeat, [and] would encourage Hitler". Entry of July 12, 1939, Dalton Diary.
3. Halifax to Seeds, June 19, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 89, p. 105.

on June 21 found the discussions still deadlocked. In Molotov's view no progress had been made. A meeting the next day served only to confirm the total rejection by the Soviet government of all British efforts since early June. Molotov insisted on automatic tripartite assistance and a precise enumeration of the eight countries concerned. The Soviet proposals of June 2 still stood as a sine qua non.[1]

By the end of June Halifax's exasperation and annoyance were clearly evident. On the 22nd he telegraphed to Seeds, expressing his complete bewilderment in face of Molotov's "inarticulate obstinacy", and reiterated the objections to listing by name those states which did not wish to be guaranteed. Seeds' reply carefully explained the position as seen from the Soviet point of view and concluded that Britain had to decide: either giving way again, or agreeing to a simple treaty of mutual assistance.[2] In London Halifax turned to Maisky for help. But the Soviet ambassador was unable to offer any elucidation, beyond suggesting that Russia was aiming at "a sort of Monroe doctrine in Eastern Europe". Halifax surprisingly

1. Seeds to Halifax, June 21, 22, 1939, ibid., nos. 119, 123, 126, pp. 134-135, 140-142, 143. See also, Tass communiqué of June 22, 1939, quoted in Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, p. 187.
2. Halifax to Seeds, June 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 127, pp. 144-145; Seeds to Halifax, June 24, 1939, ibid., no. 139, pp. 160-163.

let this comment pass and asked whether the Soviet government really wanted a treaty. During the negotiations Britain had made all the advances and concessions, while Moscow "had not budged a single inch". This attitude, he commented, had a "striking resemblance to Nazi methods".[1]

Throughout June the foreign secretary had attached paramount importance to a speedy and early settlement with the Soviet government.[2] He assured Maisky of Britain's sincere intentions and desire for an agreement. The instructions Strang carried to Moscow stated: "It is better that agreement should be quickly reached than that time should be spent in trying to cover every contingency."[3] And almost every despatch sent to Seeds exhorted him to hasten an immediate conclusion. Indeed, the very wide latitude given him at this stage of the negotiations was precisely intended to secure this end. The reasons for this urgency are similar to those during May, which originally compelled the British government to forego the declaration proposal and accept an alliance with the USSR.

1. Halifax to Seeds, June 23, 1939, ibid., no. 135, pp. 152-153. See also, Maisky's comments on this interview in Entry of June 25, 1939, Dalton Diary.
2. Chilston was twice called to the foreign office for advice. Chilston Diary, Entry of May 10, 1939, records: "To Halifax to be consulted about Russia"; and again on June 3. Letter from Viscount Chilston to the writer, Aug. 6, 1968.
3. Foreign Office Memorandum, June 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 35, p. 34.

Halifax seemed personally convinced that the Russian negotiations remained the "most important factor in the situation". With public opinion everywhere waiting to see if they were concluded, the British government could not risk a breakdown.[1] "It would be folly for us not to conclude an agreement with Russia at the present time in view of our commitments in Eastern Europe," Halifax observed, "and the Nazis themselves would be the first to despise us for omitting so obvious a precaution." Furthermore, Henderson had warned the foreign office that failure in the negotiations would strengthen Hitler's position and enable him to overcome German military opposition to a two-front war.[2]

If anxious to conclude a Soviet pact as quickly as possible, the foreign office was also equally aware of the increasing complexity of the British position. One of the essential reasons impelling the British government to negotiate with the USSR had been the "sobering influence" it was hoped an agreement would have on Berlin. The consolidation of the anti-aggression bloc, in Henderson's opinion, would enable London "to play from greater

1. Letter from Halifax to Henderson, June 14, 1939, ibid., no. 55, p. 75. See also, Letter from Vansittart to Halifax, June 16, 1939, Vansittart Papers.
2. Letter from Halifax to Henderson, June 30, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 194, p. 220; Henderson to Halifax, June 5, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, no. 713, p. 769. Cf. Coulondre to Bonnet, June 1, 1939, Livre Jaune Français, no. 132, p. 181.

strength."[1] The underlying importance of these observations was the awareness of the necessity to negotiate eventually with Germany and settle the Polish-German dispute peacefully. On June 13 Henderson suggested to Weizsäcker that the appropriate moment to renew Anglo-German contacts would be after the conclusion of an Anglo-Soviet pact.[2] Yet the protracted Russian talks seemed only to increase German truculence. The negotiations were represented to Henderson as an encirclement action and, therefore, "an insuperable obstacle to any conciliatory initiative on Hitler's part."[3] The British ambassador acutely summed up the position thus: Hitler "is just as afraid of giving the impression of yielding to threats as we are of showing any indication of 'slipping back to appeasement'."[4]

To try and break out of the deadlock which had thus developed, the British government attempted to redress the balance between appeasement and resistance, by carefully emphasizing that the former was still a part of its policy

1. Letter from Henderson to Cadogan, May 31, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. V, appendix I, p. 808; Letter from Halifax to Henderson, June 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 55, p. 75.
2. Henderson to Halifax, June 13, 1939, ibid., no. 45, p. 61.
3. Henderson, Failure of a Mission, p. 247.
4. Letter from Henderson to Halifax, June 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 150, p. 172. Many in fact suspected the government of having already reverted to an appeasement policy. See Avon, The Reckoning, p. 53; Duff Cooper, op.cit., p. 255; Diary Entries of Apr. 11, 19, 20, 1939, Nicolson, vol. I, pp. 397, 398, 399; Entry of May 8, 1939, Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives.

despite developments since March 1939.[1] Halifax specifically stressed this latter aspect in a speech on June 8 in the house of lords. He desired to make clear the "non-aggressive and hypothetical character" of Britain's new obligations. Because of the various adverse interpretations placed on his remarks he had to amplify several days later.[2] Characteristically, Pravda reproduced western press criticism of the speech, accusing it of being unfortunately timed. Maisky likewise considered that the Anglo-Soviet agreement should firstly have been concluded before such overtures were made to Berlin.[3] Nonetheless, Halifax returned to this theme in a major policy speech on June 29. It set out succinctly and with great honesty the "twin foundations" of British policy: "to resist force ... /and/ to get on with the constructive work of building peace." Then in a rare direct reference to Lebensraum, a word as if by common agreement left out of the vocabulary of British politicians, Halifax insisted that Britain did recognize legitimate economic expansion. But living space

1. See the very acute analysis of British policy during June, in Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, June 24, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 564, pp. 780-783.
2. H.L. Deb., vol. 113, June 8, 12, 1939, cols. 350-364, 428-437.
3. Bilainkin, op.cit., p. 264; Halifax to Seeds, June 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 38, p. 51.

acquired forcibly would meet with British resistance.[1] From the Soviet point of view, such remarks were "an open offer to Hitler Germany to come to terms for a division of the world ... mainly at the expense of the Soviet Union."[2]

On June 29 an article in Pravda gave what appears to be the equivalent Soviet response to these British overtures to Germany. A.A. Zhdanov, member of the politbureau of the C.P.S.U., and chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the supreme soviet, accused Britain and France of not wanting an agreement on equal terms with the Soviet Union, of endless procrastination, and of creating "artificial difficulties" about the Baltic states. Then for the first time since Stalin's March 10 speech and in phrases reminiscent of that occasion, Zhdanov accused the western powers of having ulterior motives; namely, to bring the negotiations to an end and "thus make easier for themselves the road to a deal with the aggressors."[3] The speech contained no encouragement for Germany and by specifying his opinions were only personal, which is hardly believable,

1. Halifax, Speeches on Foreign Policy, pp. 287-297. See also, Letter from Halifax to Fisher, June 21, 1939, H.A.L. Fisher Papers.
2. Falsifiers of History, p. 42.
3. Quoted in Degras, vol. III, pp. 352-354. See also, Bilainkin, op.cit., pp. 265-266; and for diplomatic reaction in Moscow, Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 29, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 582, p. 809; Rosso to Ciano, June 29, 1939, D.D.I., 8th Series, vol. XII, no. 395, pp. 308-309.

Zhdanov left room for considerable manoeuvre on the parts of both Britain and Russia.

Two further factors, however, made it certain that the negotiations with the Soviet Union would meanwhile continue. As previously, the French urged forward their more reluctant ally. In Paris Daladier impressed upon Phipps the need to "rope in Russia as soon as possible." In London Corbin stressed the "psychological peculiarities" of the Soviets and the importance of meeting their demands, even if exorbitant.[1] While in Moscow Naggiar was always first to agree with each new proposal from Molotov. He did in fact suggest that Britain and France meet the Soviet government on the thorny issue of the Baltic states. And it was his idea of drawing up a separate secret document enumerating the guaranteed states which was later adopted.[2]

It was finally the rash of reports on Nazi-Soviet contacts, which left both governments with little choice but persistence. Coulondre's frequent despatches from Berlin clearly impressed his own government. On June 13 Henderson wrote: "I feel intuitively that the Germans are getting at

1. Phipps to Halifax, June 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 2, p. 2; Minute by Cadogan, June 8, 1939, ibid., no. 3, p. 3.
2. Seeds to Halifax, June 17, 22, 1939, ibid., nos. 74, 123, pp. 91, 141. France's greater readiness for an agreement is invariably commented upon in Soviet sources.

Stalin." Göring had several days earlier boasted to him of possible changes in German-Soviet relations.[1] Despite the difficulty of gathering information in Moscow, Seeds was able to report on the activity at the German embassy, noting that commerical negotiations were in progress.[2] Even in London direct information on these developments was being received at the foreign office. Both the Kordt brothers described the existence of definite Nazi-Soviet contacts. Erich Kordt, while on a visit to London, urged that if Britain wanted an agreement with the Soviets they "had better be quick about it!" Both agreed an Anglo-Soviet pact would be a strong deterrent to war.[3]

Yet June was not an especially fruitful month for advances towards a Nazi-Soviet rapprochement. Gustav Hilger, the German embassy counsellor, and Mikoyan several times discussed economic questions early in the month, and a visit by Schnurre to Moscow was tentatively agreed upon. Information on June 17 that Schnurre would come with power to negotiate a commercial treaty enabled Molotov to stubbornly resist any concessions to the British and French ambassadors,

1. Letter from Henderson to Cadogan, June 13, 1939, ibid., appendix I, p. 702; Letter from Henderson to Halifax, June 8, 1939, ibid., no. 9, p. 14.
2. Seeds to Halifax, June 10, 15, 1939, ibid., nos. 19, 57, pp. 22, 77.
3. Memorandum by Risdale, June 16, 1939, ibid., appendix I, p. 705; Letter from Sargent to Henderson, June 23, 1939, ibid., appendix I, pp. 707-708.

during their meetings of June 21 and 22.[1] However, rather than permit the sensation of a visit by a German official to coincide with Strang's stay, Mikoyan preferred to elicit further information from Hilger on what the German government considered to be the existing differences between them. Molotov reiterated this demand during a subsequent interview with Schulenburg and significantly made no mention of a prior need for a political basis.[2] Schulenburg's assertion that the German non-aggression pacts with Estonia and Latvia, signed on June 7, 1939, were an indication of Berlin's peaceful intentions did not impress Molotov. (Nonetheless, Soviet silence on these pacts did indicate the gesture was being contemplated, if not understood, by the kremlin.) The results of Hilger's and Schulenburg's conversations initially prompted Hitler to order the discontinuation of economic discussions and a delay in further political overtures.[3] On the other hand, the end of June and the beginning of July marked a period of significant Anglo-French concessions to the Soviet government.

1. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 2, 9, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, nos. 465, 499, pp. 627-628, 686-687; Tippelskirch to German Foreign Ministry, June 18, 1939, ibid., no. 543, pp. 745-748.
2. Tippelskirch to German Foreign Ministry, June 25, 1939, ibid., no. 568, p. 788; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, June 27, 29, 1939, ibid., nos. 570, 579, pp. 790-791, 805-807.
3. Memorandum by Hewel, June 29, 1939, ibid., no. 583, p. 810; Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, June 30, 1939, ibid., no. 588, p. 813.

It had taken the British government forty days to accept the principle of an alliance with the Soviet Union. This was followed by a period of twenty-five days until on June 27 Halifax telegraphed to Seeds the government's decision to meet Russia's demands on the Baltic states. Mutual assistance was to be rendered in case of aggression "against another European State which the contracting country concerned felt obliged to assist in maintaining its independence or neutrality against such aggression." As a last resort the British government was willing to agree to a published list of states, as proposed by Molotov on June 2, preferably if Holland and Switzerland were included. Halifax felt this was giving the Soviets all they had asked for. "We do expect agreement to be reached without further obstacles being raised from the other side."[1]

Having finally reduced to manageable proportions the problem of the susceptibilities of Poland and Rumania, the British government had reached a similar position on the Baltic states. Halifax had attempted to avoid "driving the Baltic States into the arms of Germany. In the last resort", he noted, however, "we are prepared to take this

1. Halifax to Seeds, June 27, 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 151, 171, pp. 173-174, 193-194.

risk in order to get the Treaty".[1] To the Finnish minister in London, Halifax added that if a Soviet agreement was not in accordance with Finland's desires this was because "higher issues were at stake." The foreign secretary stressed the consequences of a failure; namely, Germany's current efforts to reach an understanding with the USSR would succeed.[2]

Fortified with these substantial new concessions, Seeds and Naggiar met Molotov on July 1 and 3. The foreign commissar agreed to place the list of guaranteed states in an unpublished annex to the treaty. But he did object to the inclusion of the Netherlands, Switzerland and Luxemburg, (the latter state included at French insistence). At the same time he also raised a further objection. He commented that so far the treaty made no provision for "indirect aggression." Seeds was quick to point out that the June 2, Soviet draft treaty did not refer to this. Nonetheless,

1. Halifax to Seeds, July 1, 1939, ibid., no. 199, p. 225. Chamberlain, however, "was insistent on not accepting any formula 'which would drive the Baltic States and Finland into Germany's arms'." Feiling, op.cit., p. 412. "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 92, now accuses the British of having encouraged Estonia and Latvia to sign the non-aggression pacts with Germany, aiming thereby "to sabotage negotiations with the Soviet Union and giving Hitler Germany to understand that the 'Baltic corridor' was open for an attack upon the U.S.S.R."
2. Halifax to Snow, July 5, 8, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 243, 278, pp. 264-266, 307-308; Gripenberg, op.cit., pp. 38-41.

the Soviet government insisted on direct and indirect aggression being mentioned. A definition of indirect aggression would be placed in the unpublished protocol.[1]

Molotov's assertion of this point at this particular juncture reflects not so much its novelty - the problem had been broached previously[2] - but rather its timing. His last interview with Schulenburg had not furthered German-Soviet relations, nor had they been broken off. Rather, mingling firmness with pliability, Molotov had returned the ball to the German court and awaited a clearer commitment from Berlin.[3] By the same token, he advanced matters slightly in the Anglo-French negotiations and stipulated yet further conditions. He could then watch with equanimity which side would advance faster and further.

The introduction by the Russians of the problem of indirect aggression seemed in July to completely exhaust British patience. "The Russian business is quite

1. Seeds to Halifax, July 1, 4, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 207, 225-227, pp. 230-232, 249-252.
2. See Strang, Home and Abroad, pp. 178-179. Cf. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, pp. 181-182.
3. It was probably to further encourage Germany that Astakhov and Ivan Cherny, the Soviet air attaché in London, hinted informally that Russia had no desire to conclude a pact with Britain. Memorandum by Weizsäcker, June 3, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 469, p. 630; Memorandum by Woermann, June 15, 1939, ibid., no. 529, pp. 728-729; Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, June 29, 1939, ibid., no. 581, p. 808. Cf. Grummon to Hull, July 19, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 287.

infuriating," Halifax wrote to Phipps, "it blocks everything and frays everybody's nerves."[1] Chamberlain confirmed that "even Halifax is beginning to get impatient with them /the Soviets/ while I grow more and more suspicious of their good faith."[2] The U.S. ambassador thought the British government was disposed to tell Russia "to go jump into the Baltic Sea", and described Chamberlain as "sick and disgusted".[3]

It is evident that the difficulties of building an east European policy for Britain were proving insurmountable. With this feeling of exhaustion and despair the wisdom of the negotiations was again questioned. It was as if Henderson's warning lest the Russians "drive us in deeper than it is prudent to go"[4] was being heeded. The factors that had ensured the continuation of the negotiations in May and June - fear of the consequences of a breakdown, anxiety over Nazi-Soviet contacts, French convictions that this was the necessary course, Labour party pressure and

1. Letter from Halifax to Phipps, July 7, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 272, p. 302.
2. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 2, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
3. Kennedy to Hull, June 27, July 20, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, pp. 276, 287.
4. Letter from Henderson to Halifax, June 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, appendix I, p. 706; See also, Henderson, Failure of a Mission, pp. 250-251.

the force of public opinion - still prevailed during July. But British anxieties as well as indications of a new mood became more widespread.

On June 28 Chamberlain discussed the situation with a Labour delegation consisting of Citrine, Morrison and Dalton. The prime minister maintained his long standing scepticism as to the practical value of Russian assistance. "He said they had from many quarters poor accounts of the efficiency of the Russian Army.... Russian aid would not only be doubtful at the outset [of war], but difficult to maintain even at its initial level." Dalton suspected Chamberlain understood the danger of a breakdown, but when pressed as to his view of the consequences should this occur the prime minister replied: "'Well, I don't think that would be the end of the world.'"[1]

Chamberlain did in fact regard a breakdown in the negotiations with equanimity and as quite probable. His correspondence in early July shows him as remarkably consistent in his views on the USSR. "I am so sceptical of the value of Russian help", he wrote, "that I should not feel that our position was greatly worsened if we had to do

1. Entry of June 28, 1939, Dalton Diary. Citrine, op.cit., pp. 369-371 gives the date as June 27. He adds that Chamberlain admitted there was suspicion on the British side that Russia "would not implement any undertaking she made". See also, Entry of July 10, 1939, in Roderick Macleod and Denis Kelly, eds., The Ironside Diaries, 1937-1940 (London 1962), p. 78.

without them." He believed the government was "only spinning out the time before the inevitable break comes". He found it hard to bear the blame for the delay, because if he were not "hampered by others", he would have "closed the discussions one way or another long ago."[1] Two weeks later Chamberlain was more hopeful, but admitted that if an agreement were concluded

> I am afraid I shall not regard it as a triumph. I put as little value on Russia's military capacity as I believe the Germans do. I believe they would fail us in an extremity, and even to talk with them has already got us into trouble with our friends. I would like to have taken a much stronger line with them all through, but I could not have carried my colleagues with me.[2]

In fact, in early July several ministers doubted the wisdom of continuing the negotiations, and the cabinet was "seriously considering" the question of breaking off discussions.[3] On July 6 in a telegram to Seeds, Halifax mentioned the possibility of the failure of a comprehensive agreement and considered Britain might have to settle instead for a simple tripartite pact. In the following two weeks he twice solicited Seeds' opinion on whether it was wise to present the Soviets with an ultimatum, and

1. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 2, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
2. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 15, 1939, ibid. He also believed that Maisky was involved in the press campaign in early July to get Churchill into the government. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 8, 1939, ibid.
3. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 362.

thereby risk a breakdown in the negotiations.[1] Maisky was bluntly told that the Soviet government must begin making its share of concessions.[2]

Opinion also appeared to shift on another vital point. Negotiations with the USSR had been accepted, aside from the protection needed for Poland and Rumania, on the grounds that Hitler might thereby be deterred. Yet Henderson now began to argue that Hitler would not be intimidated by an Anglo-Soviet agreement.[3] If this was true, then the best possible course for Britain was to speedily conclude an anodyne agreement with Russia and then concentrate on reconstructing Anglo-German relations. (The Danzig week-end scare in early July and the continued militarization of the city gave this consideration extreme urgency). This view was further strengthened by what appears to have been Chamberlain's personal belief at this late state that there was no danger Russia would sign an agreement with Germany if Britain did not succeed. He thought the Russians had "made up their minds probably not to make a deal with anybody but to watch them all tear

1. Halifax to Seeds, July 6, 11, 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 253, 290, 381, pp. 278, 320, 430-431. The ultimatum appears to have been the prime minister's idea. See Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 2, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
2. Halifax to Seeds, July 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 305, p. 339.
3. Letter from Henderson to Sargent, June 28, 1939, ibid., appendix I, p. 710.

themselves apart."[1] Halifax, the foreign office and Seeds, however, still maintained the negotiations were necessary in order, among other reasons, to at least tie up Russia and thereby forestall a Nazi-Soviet deal.[2]

The shift evident in Chamberlain's opinions, described by Dirksen as a "desire ... to pass from the negativity of the encirclement front to a constructive policy vis-à-vis Germany",[3] was directly reflected in a new 'outbreak' of appeasement. This can best be seen as the British equivalent to the parallel German-Soviet secret negotiations, and a concrete manifestation of the alternative London had kept in reserve for months. During June the best time for such a development was considered to be after the conclusion of an Anglo-Soviet pact. Because of the difficulties being encountered in Moscow, it was then thought by some more opportune to engage Berlin in discussions before a possible breakdown destroyed Britain's bargaining capacity.

In early July, while on leave in London, Henderson submitted a memorandum outlining his view of a "constructive

1. Kennedy to Hull, July 20, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 288.
2. See e.g., Kennedy to Hull, July 5, 1939, ibid., p. 282; Seeds to Halifax, July 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 297, p. 332. After an interview with Halifax on July 12, Dalton noted: "Unless Halifax is a much worse hypocrite than I think, he genuinely desires to get the pact." Entry of July 12, 1939, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 254.
3. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, July 10, 1939, Documents and Materials, vol. II, no. 12, p. 66. Cf. Dirksen, op.cit., pp. 234-237.

effort for peace". It envisaged a solution of Polish-German differences and a settlement of all Britain's outstanding problems with Germany.[1] The most dramatic manifestation of this trend were the talks held by Hudson[2] and Wilson with Helmuth Wohltat, commissioner of the German four year plan, who was on a visit to London. A far-reaching Anglo-German settlement was discussed. This was to include a declaration not to use aggression in place of the guarantees; a pledge of British non-interference in east and south-east Europe; a new round of economic appeasement; and joint Anglo-German capital development of China, the colonies and Russia, "assuming that Stalin's policy develops accordingly."[3]

The initiative for the talks and the programme discussed appear to have originated partly with Wohltat,[4]

1. Letter from Henderson to Halifax, July 9, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, appendix I, pp. 711-713.
2. Hudson's participation is interesting. In March 1939 he went to the USSR anxious to secure some sort of large political deal with the Russians. In July he turned his attention to the Germans with the same aim in mind.
3. Record of a Conversation Between Hudson and Wohltat, July 20, 1939, ibid., no. 370, pp. 407-410; Record of a Conversation Between Wilson and Dirksen, Aug. 3, 1939, ibid., no. 533, p. 580; Memorandum by Wohltat, July 24, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 716, pp. 977-983. See also, Memorandum by Dirksen, Sept. 1939, Documents and Materials, vol. II, no. 29, pp. 188-189. Cf. Gilbert and Gott, op.cit., pp. 212-226.
4. See Helmut Metzmacher, "Deutsch-Englische Ausgleichsbemuhungen im Sommer 1939", Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, vol. XIV, no. 4, Oct. 1966, pp. 369-412, which also includes some additional information derived from Wohltat himself.

but was encouraged at various levels of the British government. Chamberlain's attitude was ambivalent. He very much resented Hudson's use of ideas, for example, on colonies and economic appeasement, which various departments had been discussing for months. It was not therefore the substance of the discussions, rather the "premature disclosures" which he deeply regretted. Such contacts with Germany, he wrote, should be continued and encouraged "but more discreetly". However, "the time for talk hasn't come yet because the Germans haven't yet realised that they can't get what they want by force...."[1]

Nothing concrete resulted from this episode except adverse publicity, encouragement to Germany in its belief that the British government was lukewarm towards its east European commitments, and further justification in Soviet eyes for suspicion of British intentions.[2] On July 20 Maisky intimated to Nicolson his belief that Chamberlain desired a compromise over Danzig and would then allow the Soviet negotiations to lapse. The ambassador had a "definite impression that the /British/ Government do not

1. Letters from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 23, 30, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
2. For Soviet historiography Wohltat's visit provides a veritable windfall. It exhibits decisive evidence for the accusation that, along with the negotiations in Moscow, Britain was searching clandestinely for a pact with Hitler at the expense of the USSR. See e.g., Falsifiers of History, p. 42; Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, pp. 359-370; Popov, SSSR i Angliya, pp. 483-490; "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 93.

really want the negotiations to go through."[1]

On July 6 Halifax had informed Seeds of the limit of concessions Britain was prepared to make. On two main points the government would stand firm: the unacceptability of the Soviet definition of indirect aggression, and the categorical refusal to consider the simultaneous entry into force of the political and military agreements (article 6 of the draft treaty).[2] The first problem, which was in fact never resolved, occupied the negotiators into August. The second, an essentially practical problem, was conceded by July 21.

From July 4 onwards various definitions of the concept of indirect aggression were proposed and then debated in Moscow. The Anglo-French definition, after some initial differences, finally postulated two prerequisites. There had to be a clear threat of force by another power and the obvious abandonment of independence or neutrality by the country concerned. Any other criteria, Halifax explained, would undermine Britain's moral position in Europe and confirm the worst suspicions of the Baltic states. He feared the situation where an internal political change in one of these states would justify Soviet intervention and

1. Diary Entry of July 20, 1939, Nicolson, vol. I, p. 406.
2. Halifax to Seeds, July 6, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 252, p. 276.

automatically lead to a general conflict.[1] In contrast Molotov initially wanted indirect aggression to cover an "internal coup d'état or a reversal of policy in the interests of the aggressor". He then retreated from this, and postulated instead action accepted by one of the guaranteed states "under threat of force by another Power, or without any such threat, involving the use of territory and forces of the State in question for purposes of aggression" and leading to a loss of independence or violation of neutrality.[2] He later criticized the Anglo-French proposals for being hedged round with too many reservations which would only "provide ... a formal legal excuse for evading assistance and placing the U.S.S.R. in a position of isolation in face of the aggressor."[3] Such arguments were plainly indicative of a mutual lack of confidence and the suspicion each side had of the others' intentions.

The incident arising out of a statement by Butler in the Commons was typical. Speaking on July 31, he declared the main difficulty of the negotiations was "whether we should encroach on the independence of the Baltic States."

1. Halifax to Seeds, July 6, 12, 1939, ibid., nos. 253, 298, pp. 277, 333-335.
2. Seeds to Halifax, July 4, 10, 1939, ibid., nos. 227, 281, 282, pp. 251, 311, 313. The French later accepted Molotov's definition. Seeds to Halifax, July 22, 1939, ibid., no. 405, p. 450.
3. Speech by Molotov to the Supreme Soviet, Aug. 31, 1939, quoted in Degras, vol. III, p. 364.

This evoked a strongly worded Tass communiqué and an acrimonious exchange between Seeds and Molotov. Despite Butler's having amicably explained the elliptical nature of his remarks to Maisky, the Soviet government preferred to consider the under-secretary had misrepresented the real situation.[1]

Beside these difficulties, the Moscow talks were being equally prolonged by further disagreement. As early as June 2 the Soviet government had proposed that the mutual assistance pact and the military convention should enter into force simultaneously. The object of this provision (article 6), as Maisky explained, was to avoid a repetition of the 1935 experience with the Franco-Soviet pact. That agreement was never completed by a military convention.[2]

The British government had immediately objected to the Soviet proposals on article 6.[3] Then other areas of disagreement took precedence in the discussions. The hope seems to have been that this provision would be the subject of eventual negotiations; an expectation fostered by both

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 2, 3, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 512, 525, pp. 559, 570-574; Halifax to Seeds, Aug. 3, 4, 1939, ibid., nos. 530, 544, pp. 577-578, 594-595. Cf. Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 783-784.
2. Halifax to Seeds, July 12, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 305, p.339.
3. Foreign Office Memorandum, June 12, 1939, ibid., no. 35, annex I, pp. 37-38.

Maisky and Molotov. The British government was prepared to open military talks "within the shortest possible time" after the signature of a political treaty.[1] Daladier favoured an early start.[2] But Halifax's views became more categorical: Britain could not make a political agreement dependent on a military one.

On July 9 the first extensive discussion of article 6 took place in Moscow. Besides desiring the political and military agreements to enter into force simultaneously, Molotov also insisted they be signed at the same time. Prior to this the text of the political agreement would not exist as a diplomatic instrument. The Soviet government was "unanimous" on this point. Seeds expressed his astonishment.[3] Halifax found the procedure "completely abnormal", "most offensive", and indicative of unwarranted suspicion of Britain's sincerity. The delay necessary to complete a military convention would be exploited by Germany as evidence the negotiations had broken down. It could be used by the Soviets to force Britain to accept military conditions against her better judgement.[4] On

1. Halifax to Seeds, June 12, 1939, ibid., no. 38, p. 50; Seeds to Halifax, June 16, 30, 1939, ibid., nos. 69, 182, pp. 86, 210.
2. Bullitt to Hull, June 28, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 277.
3. Seeds to Halifax, July 10, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 281, pp. 311-312.
4. Halifax to Seeds, July 12, 1939, ibid., no. 298, p. 335.

July 17 Molotov declared to the two ambassadors that what was involved was a "single Politico-Military Agreement." Unless Britain and France concurred "there was no point in pursuing the present negotiations." He then suggested the talks adjourn until agreement could be reached.[1]

In a telegram the same day to Maisky and Suritz, Molotov complained of the "swindles and unworthy subterfuges" resorted to by the western allies. He explained Soviet thinking on article 6 thus:

> This fraudulent Anglo-French proposal divides a unified agreement into two and contradicts our essential proposal on the simultaneous conclusion of the whole agreement, including both its military part, which is the most important, and the political part of the agreement. Without a perfect concrete military agreement, as is a component of all pacts, the treaty would be turned into an empty declaration.[2]

The French were just as taken aback by Molotov's demands as the British, but they were first to propose sending a high-ranking military officer to begin conversations and as a token of their sincerity.[3] They were also first to propose accepting the procedure outlined by Molotov. On July 18 Bonnet submitted a memorandum urging

1. Seeds to Halifax, July 18, 1939, ibid., no. 338, p. 376.
2. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, pp. 337-338.
3. Notes from the French Embassy, July 11, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 307, 316, pp. 340-341, 349-350. Seeds was inclined to agree with the Soviet view on article 6. Seeds to Halifax, July 12, 1939, ibid., no. 297, p. 332.

Britain to concede. A breakdown in the negotiations would entail grave consequences: the guarantees to Poland and Rumania would be compromised; the negotiations with Turkey endangered; and Anglo-French security seriously threatened. Most important the failure of an effective peace front would give Hitler a free hand in the coming decisive weeks. "En face de ce danger capital," the French argued, "les risques qu'entraînerait pour nous l'acceptation des formules soviétiques paraissent de bien moindre portée." Then in a personal appeal to Halifax, Bonnet begged him to agree to further concessions.[1]

The views of the French government were further strengthened by the conclusions reached in a letter Strang sent from Moscow. In a lucid and insightful analysis, he surveyed the entire course of the negotiations, bluntly characterizing them as a "humiliating experience." Britain had continuously taken up a position only to abandon it later. This negotiating technique had served to deepen Soviet suspicions. However, concessions on the British side were inevitable. Having assumed various obligations in eastern Europe, and being committed to building up a

1. Notes from the French Embassy, July 18, 19, 1939, ibid., nos. 346, 357, pp. 383-384, 396-397; Letter from Campbell to Halifax, July 19, 1939, ibid., no. 358 and Enclosure, pp. 397-398. See also, Gafencu, Last Days of Europe, pp. 208-209, 211-212; Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 194-201.

peace front, Britain's need for Soviet assistance was vital. On the other hand, the kremlin had two conceivable alternative policies: isolation or accommodation with Germany.

Strang did not doubt the kremlin's desire to align with Britain and France. But he did point out the negotiations were "as much an adventure for them as they are for us. If we do not trust them, they equally do not trust us." The result was therefore mutual suspicion, giving way to increasing doubt as to the wisdom of the negotiations. Soviet respect for Britain had diminished by virtue of its perpetual concessions; and in Molotov's view Britain was still an essentially capitulating power. Given this fact, the wiser course would have been to accept the Soviet draft treaty of June 2.

With these considerations in mind, Strang then turned to the immediate problem at hand. A breakdown theoretically could be arranged on either of the two outstanding issues - indirect aggression or the inseparability of the political and military agreements - or even on both. Alternatively, Britain could revert to the idea of a strict tripartite pact, or finally, concede once more and begin military talks. Despite the objection to talking military secrets with the Soviet government before being certain they would be allies, Strang suggested this was the best course. A breakdown

> would encourage the Germans to act. It might drive the Soviet Union into isolation or into composition with Germany. On the other hand, the fact that military conversations were in progress, although producing no immediate concrete results, would still probably worry Hitler. Russia would also be less likely to remain neutral or be on the wrong side in the case of war....[1]

The foreign office telegraphed to Seeds on July 21 its agreement on the simultaneous entry into force of the political and military treaties. "I do not like this", Halifax added, but conceded it was necessary to forestall a breakdown and provide evidence of continued co-operation between Russia, France and Britain.[2] Evidence of the astuteness of this move was afforded the next day. Seeds forwarded a statement, issued by the commissariat of foreign trade, announcing the resumption of German-Soviet trade and credit negotiations.[3]

Molotov expressed his "keen satisfaction" at the news regarding article 6. The problem of defining indirect aggression in his opinion would not raise "insuperable difficulties". He then suggested military conversations

1. Letter from Strang to Sargent, July 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 376, pp. 422-426. See also, his Letter to Sargent, June 21, 1939, ibid., no. 122, pp. 138-140, for further observations on the "mechanics of the negotiations" and the influence of British public opinion in undermining the government's ability to bargain with the Soviets.
2. Halifax to Seeds, July 21, 1939, ibid., no. 378, pp. 427-429.
3. Seeds to Halifax, July 22, 1939, ibid., no. 399, p. 447.

begin at once. The two ambassadors, prepared to argue definitions as usual, seemed taken aback by the sudden change in Molotov's demands.[1] On July 25 Seeds was informed of the government's concurrence. But Halifax insisted that negotiations on the definition of indirect aggression must meanwhile continue. He instructed the ambassador to take a very rigid line; with military conversations imminent, there was no danger of a breakdown in the coming critical weeks.[2]

British agreement to discuss military questions with the USSR was not only due to these inherent political factors. The increase in rearmament since Munich now made such a move possible. As Kirkpatrick explained to Dalton:

> A little while ago, owing to the nakedness of the land, they [the British government] were unwilling to have them with anyone, but now since we have many more arms, they would like to know what the Russians had and what they are prepared to do.[3]

After having communicated this decision to Molotov,

1. Seeds to Halifax, July 24, 1939, ibid., no. 414, pp. 456-460.
2. Halifax to Seeds, July 25, 28, 1939, ibid., nos. 435, 474, pp. 478, 525. Maisky was also personally informed, and cautioned to keep the information momentarily confidential. He agreed with Halifax that the deterrent value of staff conversations would be very great and would impress world opinion. Halifax to Seeds, July 25, 1939, ibid., no. 444, pp. 484-486.
3. Entry of June 14, 1939, Dalton Diary.

further difficulties developed over the Anglo-French proposal to issue a joint communiqué, announcing the despatch of the military mission. From the point of view of the British government this was necessary in order to inform parliament and give public opinion evidence of progress. Molotov, however, insisted a communiqué would be "premature and might create illusion in the mind of the public." It would give too optimistic an impression. The vital issue was "to see how many divisions each party would contribute to the common cause". Unilateral statements were undesirable, but a matter of individual concern to each government.[1]

More than at any previous time in the negotiations, the Soviet government was conducting its two sets of talks in close co-ordination. Although Hitler had ordered Nazi-Soviet economic talks suspended and a delay in political soundings, a further telegram from Schulenburg on the June 29 meeting with Molotov led to a reversal of the decision.[2] Instructions were sent to Schulenburg, giving details of a possible economic settlement originally demanded by Mikoyan in June. The Soviet

1. Halifax to Seeds, July 26, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 453-454, p. 492; Seeds to Halifax, July 27, 1939, ibid., nos. 465, 473, pp. 509-510, 521-525.
2. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, July 3, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 607, pp. 834-836.

commissar for trade received this information on July 10 "with obvious interest".[1] It followed extremely difficult meetings the previous two days with Seeds and Naggiar. No progress had been made on any of the major difficulties. Furthermore, Seeds had indicated Britain's reluctance to make a political agreement dependent on a military one. In the kremlin the German concessions were undoubtedly well received per se and as a positive indication of greater adjustments to come. Schulenburg's impression, however, was that the Soviets would not commit themselves until August, the supposedly critical month. Weizsäcker and Schnurre were even more pessimistic.[2]

The Soviet reply was delayed from July 10 to 18. During this period Molotov had threatened the Anglo-French negotiators with an adjournment unless his views on article 6 were accepted. Prior to this Babarin, the deputy trade representative in Berlin, was recalled for consultations. He was instructed to have talks with Schnurre and obtain further clarification of the July 10 German economic proposals. On July 15 Hilger was informed

1. Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, July 7, 1939, ibid., no. 628, pp. 870-871; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, July 10, 1939, ibid., no. 642, p. 889.
2. Schulenburg to Weizsäcker, July 10, 1939, ibid., no. 648, p. 895; Tippelskirch to Schulenburg, July 12, 1939, ibid., no. 661, pp. 910-911.

of this development.[1] Three days later Babarin told an astonished Schnurre that he was empowered to sign a commercial treaty in Berlin. Schnurre assumed quite rightly this last stipulation was to avoid unnecessary publicity.[2] And yet, on July 21 Moscow radio and the next day the entire Soviet press announced that commercial negotiations with Germany were in progress. The kremlin had thus taken the first decisive step in the incipient rapprochement with Germany. Between July 10 and 14 the Soviet government had clearly decided that serious commercial negotiations could provide a testing ground for German intentions and pave the way to a political agreement.

The motives behind the Soviet decision to abandon secrecy would appear to be directed at both Britain and Germany.[3] On July 17 the tripartite negotiations had almost broken down. A day later the green light was given to Berlin. Then from July 18-21 Wohltat had his secret discussions in London. It is just possible that

1. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, July 16, 1939, ibid., no. 677, pp. 928-929. Babarin returned to Berlin on the 14th.
2. Memorandum by Schnurre, July 18, 1939, ibid., no. 685, pp. 936-938. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union, p. 37, mistakenly places this interview on July 22 and, therefore, considers the period July 10 to 22 as decisive. It is thus possible to further narrow down this period. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 711, mentions July 22 as the date "les négotiations germano-soviétiques reprirent."
3. It is conceivable that the announcement was simply designed to inform Soviet public opinion in preparation for a possible future volte-face.

Maisky, given his particular network of information, obtained some indication of the content of these talks. (His remarks to Nicolson on July 20 indicate this.) Thus the decision to abandon secrecy. The kremlin may have been hoping that the announcement would warn the British government that Moscow too could play its German card.[1] It may also have been intended to hasten British agreement on article 6. A breakdown, as Molotov had threatened, would definitely not have been in Soviet interest. It would have destroyed the leverage necessary to extract concessions from Berlin and could have conceivably isolated the USSR, a danger to be resisted at all costs. Thus, too, Molotov's sudden reversal on July 23 on the question of indirect aggression, and his invitation to open immediate military conversations. On the other hand, the Germans could be assumed to have been justifiably encouraged by Babarin's remarks. An announcement from the Soviet side could further encourage them, and by such a public commitment guard against any sudden reversal. From July 22 the kremlin had merely to await the expected effects. They were indeed not disappointed.

1. Potiemkine, vol. III, p. 710, hints this may have been the case: "On avait l'impression /from the Wohltat talks/ que la diplomatie de Chamberlain-Daladier jouait double jeu. Cela obligeait, naturellement, le gouvernement soviétique à prendre ses mesures de précaution." Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, p. 378, makes a different observation: "In spite of the information from London on the Wohltat-Hudson negotiations, the Soviet government decided to undertake yet another attempt to get an agreement with Britain."

The German government was notified on July 21, through Dirksen's still reliable sources, of the British instructions to Seeds, agreeing to the Soviet interpretation of article 6.[1] The next day Schulenburg was informed of the decision in Berlin to proceed in a "markedly forthcoming manner" with the commercial negotiations. He was also instructed to pick up the threads of the political talks suspended by Berlin in late June. From this point onwards "there was suddenly a wild rush forward" on the German side.[2]

A thorough discussion of all economic and political questions affecting German-Soviet relations took place on July 26 between Schnurre, Astakhov and Babarin. Schnurre outlined to the two Russians the possibility of a comprehensive settlement, beginning in the economic sphere and including an adjustment of political problems from the Baltic to the Black Seas. He also significantly mentioned the far east; a point which would have been most welcome in Moscow. Astakhov at first reacted cautiously: "Moscow could not quite believe in a shift in German policy towards the Soviet Union." But the

1. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, July 21, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 695, p. 952.
2. Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, July 23, 1939, ibid., no. 700, pp. 955-956; Kleist, op.cit., p. 27.

substance of Schnurre's further remarks were important. Britain, he argued, could offer Russia little in exchange for a pact except participation in a European war. In contrast Germany could offer neutrality and "if Moscow wished, a German-Russian understanding on mutual interests".[1] It was such considerations which largely influenced the Soviet decision to conclude a pact with Germany. For the meantime Schnurre believed Moscow would continue its delaying tactics.

These methods were working equally well against the British. A day after the announcement on commercial negotiations in the Soviet press, Molotov was told of Britain's favourable decision on article 6. (In actual fact the decision had been reached in London by July 21.) This was followed with the information conveyed on July 27 that Britain and France were prepared to begin immediate staff talks. Molotov's refusal on this occasion to be associated with a public communiqué announcing this step is thus perfectly understandable. In light of the frank political overtures coming from Berlin, nothing need be done to ruffle German susceptibilities.

The switch in German-Soviet relations from discussions on economics to politics dates from the meeting of July 26.

1. Memorandum by Schnurre, July 27, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 729, pp. 1006-1009.

The kremlin had shown itself finally amenable on the former, but it had still to commit itself on the latter. In order to gauge the impression created by Schnurre's frank language, Schulenburg was instructed to arrange a further conversation with Molotov. If the foreign commissar abandoned his reserve, the ambassador was to amplify on some of the territorial concessions Berlin was prepared to consider.[1] The urgency of these instructions was heightened by information, this time received from France on July 28, of the imminent despatch of the joint military mission.[2] Ribbentrop eagerly pressed forward, therefore, "not only on the negative side (disturbing the British negotiations) but also on the positive side (an understanding with ... [Germany])."[3] Both he and Schnurre again approached Astakhov. The latter's reports apparently "created great interest" in the kremlin.[4] According to the Soviet record of the Ribbentrop-Astakhov conversation, the foreign minister actually "suggested signing a secret

1. Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, July 29, 1939, ibid., no. 736, pp. 1015-1016.
2. Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, July 28, 30, 1939, ibid., nos. 731, 741, pp. 1010-1011, 1021.
3. Schnurre to Schulenburg, Aug. 2, 1939, ibid., no. 757, pp. 1047-1048.
4. Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, Aug. 3, 1939, ibid., nos. 758, 760, pp. 1048, 1049-1050; Memorandum by Schnurre, Aug. 3, 1939, ibid., no. 761, pp. 1051-1052.

Soviet-German protocol to delimit the interests of the two Powers 'all along the line from the Black to the Baltic sea'." This was rejected by the narkomindel on August 7.[1]

Little encouragement did in fact come from the eagerly awaited discussion with Molotov. He agreed the economic negotiations were promising, but he still desired "proofs" of Germany's changed political attitude towards the USSR. Schulenburg concluded his report by commenting that, while prepared for improved German-Soviet relations, Moscow's mistrust of Berlin persisted. The Soviet government was "determined to conclude an agreement with Britain and France, if they fulfil all Soviet wishes."[2]

The British decision to open military conversations with the USSR was in most ways similar to all their previous concessions on major issues of principle. As a result of harassment in Moscow, Paris and London, the decision was finally but reluctantly taken, accompanied by deep reservations, and then rationalized without

1. Ministry of Defence, and Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 94.
2. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 4, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 766, p. 1062. On July 30 Izvestia and a day later Pravda attacked German policy and reiterated the need for a general peace front against aggression. Alexander Dallin, "The Month of Decision: German-Soviet Diplomacy, July 22-August 22, 1939", Journal of Central European Affairs, vol. IX, no. 1, Apr. 1949, p. 11; Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, p. 378. Cf. Pravda, Aug. 14, 1939, quoted in Dallin, op.cit., p. 20.

conviction. Halifax did not conceal his opinion. "I myself had not been enamoured of this move," he remarked, "but it seemed to offer the best chance of making progress." It would also allay the suspicions of the Soviet government.[1] The service departments likewise had objections to the despatch of the military missions.[2] In fact, little hope seems to have been held out either for the success of the talks or for a speedy conclusion. Nor was this perhaps entirely desired or considered possible. Seeds, long since having gotten over his initial enthusiasm for a Soviet alliance, and quite dejected by the course of the negotiations, was now pessimistic. He did not think the talks could be "rapidly concluded, but to begin with them now would give a healthy shock to the Axis Powers and a fillip to our friends while they might be prolonged sufficiently to tide over the next dangerous few months."[3] 'Quex', whom Admiral Drax, the head of the British military mission, consulted before his departure, "did not appear to

1. Halifax to Le Rougetel, Aug. 3, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 534, p. 584.
2. Drax, part I, p. 250; Medlicott, British Foreign Policy, p. 272. The German military attachés in London noted a "surprising scepticism" in military circles regarding the forthcoming conversations. This view was reportedly shared by the British attachés in Moscow. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 1, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 753, pp. 1034-1035; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 7, 1939, ibid., no. 779, p. 1075.
3. Seeds to Halifax, July 24, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 416, p. 461.

be optimistic as to the outcome." This problem was also discussed when Drax met with Halifax, Chatfield, the service ministers and other officials on August 2. The foreign secretary explained, in response to the admiral's question, that in case of failure it was preferable to draw out the negotiations as long as possible. During his final briefing, Drax found Chamberlain "somewhat worried and uneasy about the Russian situation" and similarly doubtful of the outcome.[1]

At Maisky's invitation, and with the approval of Halifax - who replied to Drax's query about lunching with the ambassador: "'if you can bear it I think it would be well for you to do so'" - Drax spent a singularly uninformative time at the Soviet embassy. According to 'Quex', Maisky had been fully briefed by "certain friends in London", on the admiral's biography and status in the service.[2]

It is not surprising that the attitude with which the military mission was approached should have been embodied in its composition, and the instructions prepared for its

1. Drax, part I, pp. 252-253. 'Quex' was the nickname of Admiral Hugh Sinclair, head of the British security service until 1939. Besides Drax, Air Marshal Sir Charles Burnett and Major-General T.G.G. Heywood were chosen to represent the other two services. The French mission was led by General Doumenc, General Valin and Capitaine de Corvette Willaume.
2. "Draft of Mission to Moscow", Drax Papers.

guidance.[1] The British team, according to one assessment, reflected a choice of personnel designed less to negotiate on operational measures than to gauge the fighting value of the Soviet armed forces.[2] The instructions curiously recognized Russia's desire to conclude both the political and military agreements. Nonetheless, the information and powers given to the military negotiators were more indicative of a belief in prolonged conversations than any expectation of an immediate agreement. It was a continuation of the political talks by other means. As 'Quex' told Drax: "It's an infernal shame that they should send you out to Moscow to try and clear up the mess that has been made there by the politicians."[3]

The military mission was briefed on the difficulty of conducting negotiations with the USSR in the absence of a political agreement. Until its conclusion, the delegation was to "go very slowly with the conversations" and to treat the Russians "with reserve." Information was to be carefully imparted, especially in view of the danger of possible contacts between the Russian and German general staffs. Only when the political agreement was concluded

1. For the instructions to the French mission, see André Beaufre, 1940, The Fall of France (London 1967), pp. 92-95; and the excerpts (captured by the USSR from the Germans), quoted in "Great Patriotic War", part IV, p. 131.
2. Dirksen to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 1, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, nos. 752-753, pp. 1033-1035.
3. Drax, part I, p. 252.

could the delegation pass to the second stage; that is, a military convention. Finally, any agreement ultimately reached should be confined "to the broadest possible terms." On almost all the major issues of policy the delegation was to refer to London for further instructions.

The strategic note appended to the instructions gave details of what Britain envisaged as the Soviet role. It was recognized - as indeed it had been in March and April - that the military supplies the USSR could give Poland and Rumania would be decisive in maintaining an eastern front. Furthermore, in line with all previous low estimates of the capabilities of Soviet offensive forces, strictly limited tasks were delineated for the Red army, air force and navy. Any "substantial and rapid Russian military support to Poland is out of the question."[1] The scope of the mission was thus clearly restricted by the restraints of political circumstance and the limited

1. Instructions to the British Military Mission to Moscow, Aug. 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, appendix 5, pp. 762-789. This document is the subject of extensive criticism on the part of Soviet historians. It is taken to indicate Britain's purposeful sabotage of the military negotiations. See e.g., "Great Patriotic War", part IV, p. 131; Istoriya Diplomatii, vol. III, pp. 789-790; Nekrich, Politika Angliiskogo Imperializma, pp. 379-384; A.D. Nikonov, The Origin of World War II and the Prewar European Political Crisis of 1939 (Moscow 1955), pp. 81-83. To further support this accusation reference is sometimes made to a statement, supposedly given by Vereker in 1939 to the Chicago Daily Times, to the effect that the British embassy was secretly instructed to undermine the negotiations. This seems most unlikely. See e.g., Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 463.

military demands on Soviet assistance. The USSR was in effect being asked to assume a defensive posture, almost equivalent to the neutrality envisaged for it by the foreign office in February and again in March 1939.

The time taken between the date of the decision to send the mission (July 25) and its arrival in Moscow (August 11), the choice of delegates, and their restricted powers have been constantly criticized. In normal circumstances seventeen days would not have been an unduly long period to assemble personnel, prepare instructions and arrange briefings, meet with the French team and despatch the joint mission to Moscow. Molotov apparently stated a delay of eight to ten days would suit him.[1] However, in view of rapidly deteriorating Polish-German relations the delay was unfortunate.

The unstable European situation also dictated to a degree the thorny question of transporting the mission. Apparently at the request of his government, Maisky urged the delegation should fly. It proved difficult, however, to make the necessary air arrangements.[2] A warship was also suggested, but Halifax "thought this would have the effect of attaching too much importance to the Mission."[3]

1. Bonnet, vol. II, p. 203.
2. Boothby Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Boothby, Fight to Live, p. 191; Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? p. 166; Halifax to Campbell, Aug. 1, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 500, p. 546; Drax, part I, p. 251.
3. Ibid.

A journey by rail via Germany, although favoured by Doumenc and Daladier, was considered "unnecessarily provocative".[1] Having exhausted all the possibilities, someone even suggested the mission "'might bicycle'" to Moscow.[2] Finally, it was decided to charter a merchant ship.

As for the composition of the British delegation, described by Dalton as "military, naval and air Strangs",[3] it should have been recognized that a more high-powered group was required. Even Strang himself had advised the government of the prominence given in the Soviet press to General Ironside's visit to Poland during July. Strang therefore urged the despatch of "at least one officer of high rank" in order not to offend the Soviet government.[4] Furthermore, at Maisky's request, Greenwood had written to Chamberlain along similar lines. "We had expected Gamelin and Gort", Maisky later noted. Lord Gort, according to the prime minister, was required in London.[5]

1. Campbell to Halifax, July 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 489, p. 534; Minute by Roberts, Aug. 2, 1939, ibid., no. 520, pp. 563-564; Henderson to Halifax, July 31, 1939, ibid., no. 495, p. 543. See also, Colvin, op.cit., p. 335.
2. Drax, part I, p. 251.
3. Dalton, Hitler's War, p. 119.
4. Letter from Strang to Sargent, July 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 376, p. 426. In retrospect Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 194, admits the "inadequate standing" of the mission. Ismay, op.cit., p. 97, terms it "belated and low-powered".
5. Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? pp. 164-165; Boothby Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Boothby, Fight to Live, p. 191.

The problem in actual fact was not one of personalities or even transport. The real difficulty was the fluid European political situation. Parallel developments in German-Soviet relations were soon to make a successful conclusion of the military talks quite improbable. By August 3, despite sustained pressure from Germany, the Soviet government had still not committed itself politically beyond general statements on the need for improved relations. Nonetheless, the Molotov-Schulenburg conversation had again spelled out those political concessions Germany was ready to make.[1] A decision had to be taken in the kremlin. On August 5 Astakhov told Schnurre that his government was "ready and desirous of continuing the conversations" with a view to improving relations. A credit agreement was the first important step. The questions yet to be discussed between Germany and Russia were "urgent and serious." Finally, his information was that the Molotov-Schulenburg conversation had "ended on a positive note."[2] This was clearly not Schulenburg's impression, but rather it appears the view of the kremlin. Thus August 3-4 suggests itself

1. See above, p. 388.
2. Memorandum by Schnurre, Aug. 5, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 772, pp. 1067-1068. See also, Astakhov's observations of Aug. 8, 1939, quoted in "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 94.

as the crucial period of decision.[1] Further support for this view comes indirectly from Maisky himself. He stated the Soviet Union had embarked upon political as opposed to economic negotiations in the "'first week of August'."[2]

Several further developments would also have made the Soviets receptive at this point to German offers. Firstly, Chamberlain's announcement in the Commons on July 31, naming the heads of the military mission, was not such as to convince Moscow of British enthusiasm for the next stage of the negotiations.[3] Secondly, the statement by Butler on the Baltic states was undoubtedly ill-timed, inept, and annoyed the Soviets. Finally, Molotov received the British and French ambassadors on August 2. Seeds could not confirm whether the British mission would have full powers to negotiate a military treaty. A long acrimonious discussion then ensued on Butler's remarks. Seeds' best efforts at conciliation failed; nor did further exchanges on indirect aggression exhibit any progress. Molotov refused to advance any fresh proposals. "I feel our

1. Historians have come to various conclusions as to precisely when Stalin decided to ally with Germany. Carr, part II, p. 104; and Langer and Gleason, op.cit., p. 164, place the Soviet decision at the end of July; Dallin, op.cit., p. 13, around August 2 or 3; Strang Home and Abroad, p. 195, on August 11; while Deutscher, op.cit., p. 436, is more precise; 3.15 p.m. on August 19.
2. Boothby Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Boothby, Fight to Live, p. 191.
3. H.C. Deb., vol. 350, July 31, 1939, col. 1929.

negotiations have received [a] severe set-back", Seeds telegraphed to Halifax. Assuming Britain could not agree on a definition of indirect aggression - as the French government was prepared to do - Seeds suggested a pause in the political negotiations. This proved to be the case, doubtless to the satisfaction of both London and Moscow. The talks were never in fact resumed. On August 4 Strang was instructed to return to London.[1] The kremlin could thus assume that no new political concessions were to be expected from London.

Following his remarks of August 5, Astakhov was given further "wider instructions."[2] These proved to be still non-committal. On August 10 he reiterated once more his government's desire for improved relations with Germany. Schnurre took the opportunity to hint at a possible Polish-German conflict and the benefits open to Russia should an agreement be previously reached.[3] The effect in Moscow was immediate. Two days later Schnurre was told of the desire of the Soviet government for a systematic discussion

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 3, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, nos. 525, 527, pp. 570-574, 575-576; Halifax to Seeds, Aug. 4, 1939, ibid., no. 540, p. 592. Of further significance was the approach made by the Soviet ambassador to Sükrü Saracoglu, the Turkish foreign minister, on August 4 to conclude a secret Soviet-Turkish agreement. Such a bilateral arrangement was originally suggested only in the event of a breakdown of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Halifax, Aug. 7, 1939, ibid., no. 579, p. 623.
2. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 7, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VI, no. 775, p. 1072.
3. Memorandum by Schnurre, Aug. 10, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 18, pp. 17-20.

of the major outstanding issues between the two governments - including Poland and the "old German-Soviet political treaties." Such discussions would take place "only by degrees" and preferably in Moscow.[1] Hitler's reaction on being informed was to comment that "Russia would not be prepared to pull the Western Powers' chestnuts out of the fire." This opinion he confidently repeated when addressing his generals on August 14.[2]

The tripartite military conversations opened in Moscow on August 12, the same day Astakhov notified Berlin of his government's readiness to conduct political negotiations. This decisive step having been taken by the Soviets, it is difficult to foresee what possible success the military talks could have had. The kremlin was by this time generally aware of the attractive terms Germany was prepared to concede. *In contrast, the British* still hedged on a definition of 'indirect aggression', mutual recriminations continued, and suspicion still prevailed. The delay before the arrival of the military delegations, without the senior officers obviously expected in Moscow, contrasted sharply with German persistence and offers of territorial

1. Schnurre to Schulenburg, Aug. 14, 1939, ibid., no. 50, pp. 58-59.
2. Record of a Conversation Between Hitler and Ciano, Aug. 12, 1939, ibid., no. 43, p. 49; Halder Notebook, Aug. 14, 1939, ibid., appendix I, pp. 552-555.

adjustments. Furthermore, the hints dropped by Schnurre that Germany intended shortly to settle the Polish question meant that Russia could no longer settle for ambiguous political agreements and innocuous military conventions. It would have taken a very different kind of military mission - with full negotiating power and the ability either to disregard third party sensibilities or negotiate on their behalf - to have successfully deflected the kremlin from the more attractive alternative now available in Berlin.

After extremely pleasant social preliminaries,[1] the Anglo-French-Soviet military talks opened on August 12 with the British delegation thrust into an embarrassing predicament. Following a discussion on procedure, Voroshilov produced a document appointing by name five Soviet officers "empowered to conduct negotiations ... and sign a military Convention".[2] Doumenc likewise exhibited satisfactory credentials. Only Drax had no such written powers. He immediately cabled for the necessary

1. While most members of the mission were taken in by the display of Soviet hospitality, only Drax-"'a bluff naval man'"- appeared not to trust the Russians. Brigadier Firebrace to the writer. Personal Interview. In Drax's own description he writes: "the atmosphere always seemed to savour faintly of the iron hand in a velvet glove." Drax, part I, p. 254.
2. "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", part I, p. 111. B.M. Shaposhnikov, N.G. Kuznetsov, A.D. Loktionov and I.V. Smorodinov were the other officers.

documents.[1] The general impression created by the Soviet team upon the western delegation was on the whole very favourable. The first twenty-four hours in Moscow seemed to indicate the Soviets were genuinely interested in an agreement.[2]

Once again Seeds took up the task of persuading London to abandon its reserved attitude. Referring to Drax's instructions, to the effect that military conversations must proceed slowly until a political agreement was reached, the ambassador pointed out the Russians were anxious to test British military intentions. In such circumstances, talks conducted according to the original restrictions would only arouse Russian fears of British insincerity and indifference to concluding a concrete agreement. The French instructions were more in tune with Soviet desires. Seeds, therefore, asked for information on whether the government intended merely "vague generalities" until the solution of the indirect aggression problem. "I should deeply regret", he concluded, "if that were the actual decision of His Majesty's Government as all

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 12, 14 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series vol. VI, nos. 638, 649, pp. 674, 683; Joseph Doumenc, "The Inside Story of the Moscow Talks, 1939", Tribune, July 11, 1947 (trans. from the French in Carrefour, May 21, 1947), p. 8. For a detailed Soviet criticism of the British documents on the negotiations and the policy pursued, see Popov, "Burzuaznaya Istoriografiya", pp. 109-163.
2. Drax, part I, p. 254; Campbell to Halifax, Aug. 16, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol.VII, no. 27, p. 25.

indications so far go to show that Soviet military negotiators are really out for business."[1] On August 15 the British delegation was officially authorized to bring the military talks to a speedy conclusion. The original severe restrictions were drastically relaxed.[2] However, the possibility of progress in Moscow had already been impeded.

The second day of the talks, August 13, had again exhibited further signs of Voroshilov's emphasis on concrete issues. Aside from procedural discussions, the Soviet defence commissar had insisted the previous day on the need for Britain and France to explain their military plans for mutual defence. He did admit Soviet defence plans were "sketchy". Drax and Doumenc were prepared to establish "an agreement on the general principles of common action", and thereby avoid imparting confidential information. On the 13th Voroshilov again rejected any discussion of principles and reiterated his previous demands. In order "to show confidence" in their counterparts, the Anglo-French mission proceeded to give a general outline of allied policies. (This was information likely

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 13, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 647, pp. 682-683. The French had the same impression. Bullitt to Hull, Aug. 12, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 213.
2. Halifax to Seeds, Aug. 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, nos. 6, 8, pp. 8, 9-10.

to be already known in Berlin.) Before adjourning for the day, the marshal indicated he would be willing to discuss Soviet plans for defence of the eastern front. But first he must know the details of what the Anglo-French mission envisaged as the role for Soviet forces in case of aggression, either against France and Great Britain, Poland and/or Rumania, or Turkey. The USSR, having no common border either with the allies or Germany, could only act on the territory of others. Voroshilov repeated his remarks three times.[1] These words proved a gentle hint of more explicit demands which were to follow. Their meaning was undoubtedly quite clear to both Drax and Doumenc. But the ability of the allied mission to deal with this question was, of course, already precluded.

August 14 proved to be the decisive day of the military talks. In line with instructions similar to the British, Doumenc indicated that assistance to Germany's eastern neighbours should only be rendered when requested. The initial eastern front would be that of the Polish and

1. "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", part 1, pp. 112-118; Doumenc, op.cit., p. 8; Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 12, 13, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, pp. 563-570; Drax, part I, p. 261. Drax commented retrospectively on the meeting of the 13th thus: "It was probably decided to make an agreement with France and Britain if we conceded all the points that the Soviet desired to gain ... and, failing that, to step across quickly into the German camp." Ibid., p. 259.

Roumanian armies. Soviet troops should therefore be concentrated at certain points on the western frontier of the USSR and intervene only when considered desirable and convenient. However Voroshilov was not to be deterred. Abandoning the niceties of diplomatic conversation, he bluntly asked:

> Do the British and French General Staffs think that the Red Army can move across North Poland, and in particular the Wilno Salient, and across Galicia in order to make contact with the enemy? Will Soviet troops be allowed to cross Roumanian territory?

Voroshilov stated that "without an exact unequivocal answer continuance of the military conversations would be useless." Nor could he recommend to his government "to take part in an enterprise so obviously doomed to failure." Moreover, the USSR itself would not seek a reply directly from the governments of Poland and Rumania. Pending a solution of these difficulties, he consented to allowing the negotiations to continue.[1]

The point about Soviet tactics during the meeting of

1. Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, pp. 570-575; "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", part I, pp. 119-123. Both Doumenc, op.cit., p. 9; and Beaufre, op.cit., p. 118, make much of a faux-pas committed by Drax. He is alleged to have admitted that without Soviet aid Poland and Rumania could not survive as independent nations. Its importance was not lost on Voroshilov, intent as he was on achieving maximum security for the USSR. He used Drax's admission to further justify the request for passage rights. Cf. Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, p. 573.

the 14th was that Voroshilov's demands were obvious and had been previously anticipated. The problem was the familiar one of passage rights for the Red army. No solution had been reached in 1938 when the Soviets had also refused to negotiate with either Poland or Rumania. France had given a military undertaking to Poland in May 1939[1] without settling this problem in advance. In fact, the whole character of the final stage of the tripartite negotiations had been conditioned by the complexities of Polish-Soviet relations. And this difficulty had remained substantially unresolved, despite the continuation of the negotiations with the Soviet Union.

On July 20 Strang had explicitly warned the foreign office of the difficulty of successfully concluding a military pact, if Poland and Russia did not agree on the problem of passage. He was not optimistic as to this being easily achieved.[2] Then, in reply to an enquiry from Halifax, Seeds advised London to exclude the question of Poland from the military talks and wait to see whether Molotov would bring it up.[3] Thus the instructions drafted

1. See above, p. 328.
2. Letter from Strang to Sargent, July 20, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 376, p. 425.
3. Halifax to Seeds, July 25, Aug. 1, 1939, ibid., nos. 432, 504, pp. 476-477, 548; Seeds to Halifax, July 26, 1939, ibid., no. 456, pp. 493-494.

for the mission recognized Polish and Rumanian hesitations at allowing their territory to be used by the Red army. Suggestions for passage rights were to be "handled with considerable tact" and immediately referred back to London.[1]

The French had approached the problem in a similar manner. Before the departure of their mission, General Musse, the French military attaché in Warsaw, had urged Marshal Smigly-Rydz, Inspector-General of the Polish Armed Forces, to accept military collaboration with the USSR, but this had been refused. As a result Doumenc had been advised by Gamelin to avoid allowing the Russians to raise the subject.[2] This had not proved possible. The problem in the case of both Britain and France was not one of shortsightedness, but rather of an overly sanguine approach. Both allies were seeking a military agreement conditioned by a whole complex of political considerations. The Soviets, on the other hand, seemed intent on a convention capable in the final analysis of defeating Germany outside the borders of the USSR.

Voroshilov's demands were not just another routine exercise illustrating the lack of a common Anglo-German

1. Instructions to the British Military Mission, Aug. 1939, ibid., appendix V, pp. 764, 772, 783.
2. Noël, op.cit., pp. 422-423; his testimony in Les événements, vol. IV, p. 903; Reynaud, op.cit., I, p. 342.

frontier. The Soviet government was familiar with Poland's attitude. On May 11 Molotov received Grzybowski who stated bluntly that Poland could not assume any unilateral obligations towards the USSR.[1] Despite some improvement in Polish-Soviet relations during the following months, there was nothing to indicate that Warsaw had changed its long-standing policy on the question of passage. Rather Voroshilov's gesture was an unmistakable challenge to the western allies to come to grips with this concrete issue and thereby make a convention possible, or else face the consequences.

The question of passage rights for the Red army, an obvious political problem as Voroshilov himself had admitted, was referred back to London and Paris. Seeds, Naggiar and the heads of the mission agreed that the Soviet negotiators were justified in putting on Britain and France the onus of finding a solution. They pointed out that without this no further progress was possible in Moscow. The British mission telegraphed its views on the "apparent sincerity" of Voroshilov who appeared "genuinely desirous of military operations outside Soviet territory."[2]

1. See Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 336; Final Report by Grzybowski, Nov. 6, 1939, Polish White Book, no. 184, p. 208; Falsifiers of History, p. 37.
2. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 1, pp. 1-3, and fn. 3; no. 2, pp. 3-5. Cf. Reynaud, op.cit., p. 214.

On the allied side there was suddenly complete unanimity as to the necessity of obtaining an affirmative reply from Warsaw. After consultation between the British and French governments, a joint approach to Beck on the question of passage was agreed upon on August 16. This démarche was to be supported with separate soundings of the Polish general staff by Sword, Musse, and Valin. The latter was familiar with Polish military circles.[1] In a despatch to Kennard, instructing him to support Noël's representations, Halifax reasoned as follows:

> Without early and effective Soviet assistance, neither Poland nor (still less) Roumania can hope to stand up to a German attack on land or in the air for more than a short time. The supply of arms and war material is not enough. The Soviet forces can only collaborate effectively on Polish or Roumanian soil.... The conclusion of an agreement with the Soviet Union is the best way to prevent war breaking out, or to secure a successful conclusion if war comes. Unless the required co-operation of Poland and Roumania is secured, negotiations for such an agreement will break down. The effect of this on Soviet policy cannot be foreseen, but the possibility of a policy of accommodation with Germany should not be excluded. In that event Russia might either share the spoils with Germany at the expense of Poland and

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 1, pp. 2-3, fn. 3; Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 16, 1939, ibid., no. 30, p. 28.

> Roumania, or remain neutral and constitute the chief menace when the war was over.[1]

None of these arguments affected Beck or Polish military circles who remained "absolutely obdurate." Halifax again telegraphed to Kennard in even more outspoken terms:

> If the reply is negative, the conversations [in Moscow] will in all probability break down altogether and the attempt of Great Britain and France to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union will have failed. I am convinced that such failure must encourage Herr Hitler to resort to war.... On the other hand I fully believe that the conclusion of a politico-military agreement with the Soviet Union would be calculated to deter him from war.... I fully appreciate the disadvantages and risks of allowing Soviet troops on Polish soil; but these risks would seem to be preferable to the risk of the destruction of Polish independence for lack of their assistance, however unwelcome this may be....

The ambassador did not consider it useful to present these further arguments, as Beck had already given on August 19 the considered reply of his government. Nothing could induce Warsaw to modify its objections towards co-operation with the USSR. "Passage of Russian forces", Kennard remarked, "has been the rock on which every proposal for a collective alliance in Eastern Europe has ... foundered."[2]

1. Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 17, 1939, ibid., no. 38, p. 39. These arguments were based on considerations advanced by British military authorities.
2. Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 20, 1939, ibid., no. 91, pp. 88-89; Kennard to Halifax, Aug. 19, 20, 21, 1939, ibid., nos. 70, 87-88, 90, 94, 108, pp. 69-70, 84-86, 87-88, 91-92, 101; Letter from Kennard to Cadogan, Aug. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 119, pp. 112-113.

The most recent attempt appeared similarly doomed.

The French, although more desperate than the British and more pervasive in their efforts, could report little progress. Forceful representations were made in Paris to Lukasiewicz, and to Beck and the Polish general staff in Warsaw. Beaufre, who had replaced Valin, was sent on a special mission from Moscow to Warsaw to give first-hand evidence.[1] But all efforts had proved by August 21 to be completely unavailing. Beck replied with "un non categorique."[2] The arguments Polish officials used against granting passage rights included: fears of a possible communization among Poland's minorities, scepticism as to Soviet motives in desiring passage particularly through the Vilna gap, and doubts as to the good faith of the USSR. Two further long-standing considerations also explain Polish obstinacy. They neither believed the USSR, weakened by the purges, could mount an effective offensive; nor did they believe a Nazi-Soviet agreement was possible.[3]

1. Kennard to Halifax, Aug. 18, 1939, ibid., nos. 52, 60, pp. 53-54, 61; Campbell to Halifax, Aug. 16, 19, 1939, ibid., nos. 27, 80, pp. 25-26, 77-78; Minute by Strang, Aug. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 114, pp. 105-106; Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 275-283; Noël, op.cit., p. 423; Beaufre, op.cit., pp. 119-126; Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, pp. 206-208.
2. Bonnet, vol. II, p. 282.
3. Letter from Kennard to Cadogan, Aug. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 119, pp. 112-113; Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 2, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 521, p. 566. See also, Biddle to Hull, Dec. 7, 1938, F.R.U.S., 1938, vol. I, pp. 108-109; Beck, op.cit., pp. 202-203; Entries of July 21, Aug. 18, 1939, Szembek, op.cit., pp. 485, 489.

By this time, however, Anglo-French efforts to sway the Poles were quite futile. Astakhov's communication of August 12 consenting to political discussions had delighted Berlin. Two days later further instructions were given to Schulenburg to be used during an interview arranged with Molotov for August 15. Besides once again repeating what Germany could offer Russia in the political sphere, Ribbentrop asked for a "speedy clarification" of relations. To this end he proposed to visit Moscow and give Stalin personally the benefit of Hitler's views. In any case, he asked that Stalin be kept informed.[1]

Molotov received this latest information "with greatest interest", adding that Russia now believed in Germany's sincere intentions. He hedged on a visit from Ribbentrop, but instead asked whether the German government still were interested in three proposals: - a non-aggression pact, help in improving Soviet-Japanese relations, and a possible joint guarantee of the Baltic states - as had reportedly been the intention of Berlin.[2] Molotov's sudden confidence in German intentions may have been derived from a report sent by Astakhov, which described

1. Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, Aug. 14, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 56, pp. 62-64.
2. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 16, 1939, ibid., nos. 70, 79, pp. 76-77, 87-90. The report was based on a conversation in June between Ciano and Léon Helfand, the Soviet charge d'affairés in Rome. Ibid., p. 88, fn. 6.

Berlin as "prepared ... to make declarations and gestures which, half a year ago, would have appeared completely out of the question."[1]

These proposals clearly reflected the growing Soviet concern for security in face of a deteriorating international situation. The first covered the case of a German attack on Poland; the second reflected Soviet anxiety over the far east where fighting was again in progress; and the third was an attempt to gain satisfaction on a point which Britain had so far refused to concede. The general import of the three proposals was as yet not expansion, but security. Schulenburg was surprised by the moderation of Molotov's demands. For the first time the ambassador was genuinely optimistic as to Germany's chances of achieving success in Moscow.[2]

Berlin's response to Schulenburg's report of this conversation was immediate. The German government was prepared to consider favourably all three points raised by

1. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 94.
2. Schulenburg to Weizsäcker, Aug. 16, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 88, pp. 99-100. Cf. "Great Patriotic War", loc.cit. During August Laurence A. Steinhardt, the new U.S. ambassador to Moscow, was repeatedly impressed in his interviews with Soviet leaders by their profound concern with the far east situation and relative indifference to European events. Langer and Gleason, op.cit., pp. 162-164; Steinhardt to Hull, Aug. 16, 1939, F.R.U.S., Soviet Union, pp. 775-779. Cf. Foreign Policy Archives of the USSR, quoted in Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, pp. 340-341.

Molotov. In fact, Ribbentrop was ready to come to Moscow any time after August 18 and sign the appropriate treaties.[1] This information was given on August 17 to Molotov who had with him a prepared statement on the procedure his government wished to follow. A trade and credit agreement as a first step would be followed by a non-aggression pact, "with the simultaneous conclusion of a special protocol defining the interests of the contracting parties in this or that question of foreign policy...." The Soviet government was "gratified" by Ribbentrop's proposed visit, Molotov stated, especially in contrast to that of an official such as Strang who had been sent by London. But such a step required thorough preparation. Meanwhile both sides could work out drafts of a non-aggression pact.[2]

If the Russians were prepared to wait or yet hesitate, the Germans were not. The decision to take action against Poland made it imperative for Berlin to conclude a prior agreement with Moscow.[3] After urgent instructions from Ribbentrop, Schulenburg was twice received by the foreign commissar on August 19. During the course of these

1. Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, Aug. 16, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 75, pp. 84-85.
2. Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 18, 1939, ibid., no. 105, pp. 114-116. Here in fact is the protocol the Soviets were supposed to have rejected on August 7. See above, pp. 387-388. According to "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 95, the special protocol was again offered by the German side and declined once more by Molotov.
3. See Robertson, op.cit., pp. 177-180.

interviews, Molotov handed him a draft non-aggression pact and agreed to receive Ribbentrop on August 26 or 27.[1] Then, with the aid of a personal telegram from Hitler to Stalin, the Soviets finally relented and set August 23 as the date for the visit. The German foreign office's "original aim of hampering the Anglo-French encirclement negotiations in Moscow" had succeeded.[2]

The military conversations had continued in Moscow during parallel developments both in Nazi-Soviet relations, and the approaches to Warsaw on the problem of passage. On August 14, after having expounded the Soviet position, Voroshilov agreed to continue the negotiations. To have broken them off at this point, before Germany's reply to Astakhov's August 12 communication, would have been unnecessary and possibly dangerous. Discussions therefore continued on August 15 with the marshal giving a "rosy picture" of Soviet military forces and receiving in turn details of Anglo-French naval plans.[3]

The following day the Soviet representatives heard an exposition of Anglo-French air strength. Then Doumenc

1. Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, Aug. 18, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 113, pp. 121-123; Schulenburg to German Foreign Ministry, Aug. 19, 1939, ibid., nos. 125, 132-133, pp. 134, 149-151.
2. Ribbentrop to Schulenburg, Aug. 20, 1939, ibid., no. 142, pp. 156-157; Schulenburg to Ribbentrop, Aug. 21, 1939, ibid., nos. 157-159, pp. 167-168; Weizsäcker Circular, Aug. 22, 1939, ibid., no. 180, p. 189.
3. Drax, part I, p. 261; Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 15, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, pp. 575-581; "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", part II, pp. 106-109.

suggested that a partial draft agreement be drawn up. Voroshilov brusquely turned this down. The delegations "should not waste time on meaningless declarations". The "cardinal point" of the right of passage for Soviet troops had still not been solved. The Soviet mission, Voroshilov warned, could not carry on the discussions much longer.[1] After this meeting Drax, Burnett and Heywood sent reports to London, pointing out that without Polish acquiescence the negotiations would fail. Drax, less optimistic than his colleagues, foresaw a variety of further difficulties barring a successful outcome. He was especially worried over the demand that Britain and France should obtain from the Baltic states permission to use bases on their coasts for naval operations.[2]

1. Ibid., pp. 110-115; Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 16, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, pp. 581-584. In a letter to the Soviet historian, V.I. Popov, Drax observed that the question of securing passage rights for the Red army had been put "time and again" to him during the military talks. "We suggested that it was possible to find another more moderate solution: for example, we could have agreed that in case of an unprovoked attack against Poland, Britain and Russia would undertake immediate consultations with the Polish government on the best way of rendering it assistance". Letter from Drax to Popov, May 30, 1958, [retranslated], quoted in Popov, SSSR i Angliya, p. 479.
2. Letter from Drax to Chatfield, Aug. 16, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 34, pp. 32-34; Letter from Burnett to Newall, Aug. 16, 1939, ibid., appendix II, pp. 599-600; Letter from Heywood to War Office, Aug. 16, 1939, ibid., p. 602.

August 17 was crucial for Russia's two sets of negotiations. Two days earlier Molotov had broached the subject of a possible non-aggression pact with Schulenburg. On the 17th the foreign commissar was told of Ribbentrop's readiness to visit Moscow and sign a treaty at once. The same day the military missions were initially occupied with hearing details of the Soviet air force. Then Voroshilov insisted the discussions definitely adjourn until a reply had been received from Warsaw. In the meantime the Anglo-French delegations could "amuse themselves by seeing the sights of Moscow." Both Drax and Doumenc protested and urgently requested a meeting be fixed for August 20 or 21. Voroshilov finally relented and at Drax's suggestion August 21 was agreed upon.[1]

Drax personally seems to have been intensely annoyed by Soviet tactics at this point. After this meeting, he conjectured Voroshilov was in no hurry to conclude an agreement. Instead, he appeared content to "sit on the fence and remain neutral while the remainder of us cut one another's throats." On the 18th Drax drafted a very frank statement to be submitted to the Soviet delegation,

1. Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 17, 1939, ibid., pp. 584-588; "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", part II, pp. 115-118. Ponomaryov, Gromyko and Khvostov, vol. I, p. 348, comment: "... the course of the negotiations with the military missions of Britain and France, particularly during three days (15-17 August) convincingly confirmed the hopelessness of the attempt to conclude an alliance with them."

asking them to state "'what they were playing at.'" His colleagues, however, considered the gesture undiplomatic and it was dropped.[1]

By August 20 no reply had come from the western capitals and Drax proposed the next meeting should be deferred from the 21st to the 24th. *Voroshilov insisted* on convening the scheduled session - the last full one of the military conversations.[2] The reason for his gesture soon became obvious. A German-Soviet trade and credit agreement, signed in Berlin on August 19, had been announced in the press on the 21st. Commenting on this agreement, Pravda noted it could "prove to be an important step in the question of further improving not only economic but also political relations between the U.S.S.R. and Germany." This hint, rather than the agreement itself, evoked "considerable apprehension" among Anglo-French circles in Moscow.[3] At about the same time, the Soviet press began publishing reports designed to portray the British government as seeking a new Munich-type settlement without the

1. Letter from Drax to Chatfield, Aug. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 34, p. 35; Drax, part II, pp. 404-406.
2. Ibid., p. 406. Drax notes the re-convening of the negotiations suited the British mission, "for our main objective was to play for time and avoid a complete breakdown." Ibid.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, nos. 103, 105, 499, pp. 98, 99-100, 383.

Soviet Union. In actual fact, Halifax had already noted that any future conference would have to include the Russians.[1]

It was against this background that the military negotiators met on the 21st. Drax presented his credentials which had arrived from London. Voroshilov then suggested the talks be indefinitely adjourned. If the replies to the question put on August 14 were not received, there would be no purpose at all in re-convening. The Anglo-French delegation put on record their disappointment at the reasons which had compelled the Soviets to raise "difficult political questions", thereby involving considerable delays. The reply from the other side was equally blunt. The Soviet military mission could not picture to itself how Britain and France had despatched negotiators without "directions on such an elementary matter" as the passage of Soviet troops.[2]

At approximately the same hour as this session adjourned sine die, Schulenburg was informed that Stalin had agreed to the arrival of the Reich foreign minister. A Tass communiqué of August 22, announcing this visit,

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 21, 1939, ibid., no. 104, pp. 98-99. Halifax to Loraine, Aug. 19, 1939, ibid., no. 79, p. 76.
2. Minutes of Meetings, Aug. 21, 1939, ibid., appendix II, pp. 589-593; "Military Negotiations, Soviet Record", part II, pp. 119-122; Drax, part III, pp. 57-58. The Soviet version of this meeting omits mentioning that Drax stated a reply to the political questions would be received by the 27th. This is intended to show Britain was responsible for the delay.

stated that an exchange of views had confirmed the "desire of both parties to relieve the tension in the political relations between them, to avert the danger of war, and to conclude a Pact of Non-Aggression."[1]

Despite Poland's categorical refusal to consider favourably any co-operation on the question of passage, Anglo-French efforts continued unabated. This frantic persistence had been stimulated by factors other than the Moscow complications. Telegrams on German military preparations and meetings between the Axis leaders poured into the foreign office. Also, with agreement between Berlin and Moscow imminent, Weizsäcker hinted to both Henderson and Coulondre of a possible new division of Poland.[2] Reports of a conversation between Burkhardt and Hitler circulated, indicating the same forecast of events.[3] Finally, details of Molotov's crucial August 15 conversation with Schulenburg reached the central department of the foreign office on the 22nd, via the well-informed American embassy in Moscow.[4] It therefore seemed imperative in Paris, slightly less so in London, to go to the limit in

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 128, p. 118.
2. Henderson to Halifax, Aug. 16, 1939, ibid., no. 32, p. 31; Coulondre to Bonnet, Aug. 15, 1939, Livre Jaune Français, no. 194, pp. 270-274.
3. Minute by Makins, Aug. 14, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VI, no. 659, p. 692.
4. Lindsay to Halifax, Aug. 17, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 41, pp. 41-42. See also, Langer and Gleason, op.cit., pp. 124-125, 160-161, 185-186; Hull, vol. I, pp. 656-657.

pressing the Poles.[1] On August 21 the French government approved a suggestion from Naggiar and Doumenc to disregard Polish objections and give Voroshilov an "affirmative answer in principle". The foreign office felt compelled not to disavow the unilateral French move, but apparently reached no decision on associating themselves with it.[2] Voroshilov saw Doumenc alone on the 22nd only to say that the French reply was no substitute for Polish-Rumanian assent. In any case, the marshal continued, discussions could not be resumed until "everything has been cleared up." The British and French had "allowed the political and military discussions to drag on too long. That is why we must not exclude the possibility, during this time, of certain political events."[3]

And events did indeed overtake the military conversations. On the night of August 23-24 a non-aggression pact of ten years duration was signed by Germany and the USSR. It

1. See Daladier's interview with Lukasiewicz on August 21, described in Les Evénements, vol. I, p. 47; Débats, July 18, 1946, p. 2881; Campbell to Halifax, Aug. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 125, p. 117.
2. Bonnet, vol. II, p. 284; Minute by Strang, Aug. 21, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 115, pp. 106-108 and fn. 1; Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 22, 1939, ibid., no. 130, p. 119 and fn. 3.
3. Record of a Conversation Between Voroshilov and Doumenc, Aug. 22, 1939, ibid., appendix II, pp. 609-613. This record, supplied afterwards by Voroshilov, is not included in the Soviet version of the talks. See also, Doumenc, op.cit., p. 9; Les Evénements, vol. I, pp. 47-48.

entered into force immediately upon signature. A secret additional protocol delineated both countries' spheres of interest in eastern Europe.[1]

The first news of the impending agreement was treated on foreign office and quai d'orsay instructions with "calm and reserve".[2] Seeds maintained the Soviet government might be willing to resume negotiations with the Anglo-French delegations. Steinhardt found him "apparently oblivious to the gravity and portent" of Ribbentrop's visit.[3] Drax himself requested permission to remain in Moscow and await developments.[4] Thus it was considered in London and especially in Paris that, pending the receipt of fuller details, latitude for further efforts still remained. Kennard was therefore instructed to support Noël in a final appeal to Beck. This succeeded in producing a compromise formula authorizing Doumenc to say "'that in the event of common action against German aggression collaboration, under technical conditions to be settled subsequently between Poland and U.S.S.R., is not

1. Text in D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 228, pp. 245-247.
2. Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 137, p. 122; Minute by Strang, Aug. 22, 1939, ibid., no. 135, p. 121.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 23, 1939, ibid., no. 187, pp. 154-155; Steinhardt to Hull, Aug. 24, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 343.
4. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 23, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 164, p. 141.

excluded.'"[1] Drax was this time also requested, at French insistence, to support Doumenc in presenting the formula in Moscow.[2] It was never in fact used and would probably not have satisfied Voroshilov.

By August 24, however, the military missions considered their presence in Moscow "most undesirable."[3] The publication of the terms of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact the same day confirmed the lack of the 'escape clause'; that is, a provision rendering the pact voidable should either of the contracting parties resort to aggression against a third. The result of separate interviews on August 25 between Drax, Doumenc and Voroshilov on the one hand, and Seeds, Naggiar and Molotov on the other, made it obvious the Soviet government did not desire the negotiations to continue in view of the changed political situation.[4] On the evening of August 25 the Anglo-French military missions departed.

As soon as news of Ribbentrop's visit had began to circulate, the governments involved in the tripartite

1. Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 22, 1939, ibid., no. 150, p. 130; Kennard to Halifax, Aug. 23, 1939, ibid., no. 176, pp. 149-150; Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 289-290; Beck, op.cit., pp. 203-304.
2. Campbell to Halifax, Aug. 23, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 193, p. 158. Minute by Roberts, Aug. 23, 1939, ibid., no. 204, pp. 166-167; Halifax to Seeds, Aug. 23, 1939, ibid., no. 198, p. 161.
3. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 24, 1939, ibid., no. 218, p. 184.
4. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 25, 1939, ibid., nos. 277, 291, pp. 225, 237. For further details of these interviews, see below,pp. 427-429.

negotiations had started to register their reactions. The British cabinet issued a statement after a meeting on the 22nd, declaring that the reported German-Soviet agreement in no way affected Britain's obligations to Poland.[1] These had been assumed without Soviet approval and were to be implemented without Soviet assistance. The French were more reluctant to accept the course of events in Moscow. A meeting, presided over by Daladier and attended by the service ministers and military personnel, was held on August 23 at the ministry of war. After considerable discussion and little enthusiasm, the meeting ended in a reaffirmation of France's obligations to Poland.[2]

In the view of the Moscow press, the pact with Germany accorded with the principles of Soviet foreign policy and would strengthen the cause of world peace.[3] The Soviet embassy in London busily disseminated information arguing that a Russo-German pact would in no way be incompatible with a defensive alliance between Britain, France and the USSR.[4] The Polish government, adopting an optimistic

1. Text in Halifax to Kennard, Aug. 22, 1939, ibid., no. 140, fn. 3, p. 124.
2. Maurice Gamelin, Servir, vol. I, Les Armées Françaises de 1940 (Paris 1946), pp. 29-43; Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 301-304; Noël, op.cit., p. 427; Hore-Belisha Papers, p. 216.
3. Leading articles in Pravda and Izvestia described in Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 24, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 240, p. 197.
4. Johnson to Hull, Aug. 22, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 305.

front, simply considered the news of little importance. They professed to have never believed in the bona fides of the Soviets.[1]

The reactions of individuals concerned with the negotiations were naturally more outspoken and effusive. The views then expressed have provided the basis on which discussions of these negotiations have centred ever since. On the British side the main feeling was a mixture of astonishment and petulance that Berlin could have succeeded where London had failed, and outraged indignation at the secretive methods which earned Russia Hitler's friendship. While not unprepared for an eventual Soviet retreat into isolation, and aware of a possible German-Soviet rapprochement, specific information had been lacking. Thus the agreement made a very deep impression. However, having expected little from the Soviet Union, to have achieved nothing was not considered calamitous. Accusations of bad faith and double-dealing quickly gave way to a mood of philosophical indifference.

Chamberlain personally was not shaken by the Nazi-Soviet pact. Like many of his colleagues he was indeed surprised, but he considered the USSR would act "as she

1. Kennard to Halifax, Aug. 22, 24, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, nos. 123-124, 252, pp. 115-116, 204-205.

thinks her own interests demand".[1] In a letter on August 27, he added that the hope the "Russians treachery ... would destroy the peace front was disappointed and as time goes on ... this Coup which occasioned such joy in Berlin will be found to have been a boomerang."[2] The main effort for peace, in his opinion, still rested in Berlin and Warsaw.

At first Halifax found it hard to credit the reports from Moscow which, he declared, constituted an "act of bad faith".[3] After further reflection, the foreign secretary adopted the more laconic attitude of his colleagues. In his opinion Russia would opt for neutrality because she had no desire to augment German strength, her forces were incapable of an effective offensive, and because the USSR "wishes to be able eventually to throw in her weight on the winning side." Moreover, several distinct political benefits had accrued to Britain: Japan had been slighted by Germany; Catholic Spain would be less likely to support the axis; while the cynicism of Germany and the USSR had produced a "healthy reaction" in western Europe and the

1. Macleod, op.cit., p. 273; Feiling, op.cit., p. 425. Chamberlain told Greenwood he had had "no prior information at all about [the] German-Russian Pact." Entry of Aug. 22, 1939, Dalton Diary.
2. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Aug. 27, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX:(C)II.
3. Halifax to Seeds, Aug. 22, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 136, p. 122.

USA.[1] Turning once again to these events in 1941, Halifax added this afterthought: "I am pretty clear that if circumstances had permitted us to make a firm alliance with Russia, ignoring all considerations that made this difficult, they would not improbably have come down on that side. It was a mistake...."[2]

Drax's final report on the military mission was largely consistent with his previous circumspection. The Soviets, he argued, "can probably be relied on for shiftiness in negotiating a treaty and dishonesty in executing it." Therefore, in the long run it was fortunate Germany and not Britain had allied herself with Moscow. The military missions

> no doubt achieved less than their Governments hoped, but the circumstances were such that there was really no prospect of achieving more. We at least succeeded in unmasking a plot which had been maturing for weeks and probably for months.[3]

In retrospect Drax noted that the military negotiations were the "last chance of averting the impending war." But he still considered any Anglo-Soviet agreement would have been of little permanent value.[4]

1. Halifax to Knatchbull-Hugessen, Aug. 26, 1939, ibid., no. 340, pp. 275-276. Various other members of the foreign office shared this view. See Entry of Aug. 24, 1939, Nicolson Diary Transcript, Gilbert Archives.
2. Entry of Dec. 24, 1941, Halifax Diary, Hickleton Papers, A.7.8.3; Birkenhead, op.cit., p.440.
3. Final Report by Drax, Aug. 28, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, pp. 608-609.
4. Drax, part II, p. 412.

For Seeds personally the German-Soviet pact came as a nasty shock. Since March 1939 he had firmly believed in the necessity of an agreement with the USSR. At various crucial points during the negotiations, his advice had been accepted in the foreign office and concessions to the Soviet view had ensued. He had also continually advised against a breakdown. Despite this enthusiasm for an agreement, he had not failed to warn London that the kremlin might seek an agreement with Berlin. Unfortunately, he did share the general feeling that, while this move was possible, it was also most unlikely. The August 23 treaty was thus a serious blow to the ambassador. He was pleased when Halifax gave him permission to accuse Molotov of 'bad faith'.

It was almost a week later that Seeds offered some considered reflections in a tone of veiled bitterness and weak self-justification. He firstly pleaded the difficulties foreign ambassadors in Moscow faced in gathering information, having mainly to rely on the press.[1] Although he was never optimistic about a successful outcome of the military talks, Ribbentrop's visit "came as a veritable bombshell".

1. On this problem, which was quite real, see Maclean, op.cit., pp. 22-23, 26-27; Dirksen, op.cit., pp. 135-136; Coulondre, op.cit., pp. 104-107; Davies, op.cit., pp. 220-221; George F. Kennan, Memoirs, 1925-1950 (London 1968), pp. 58-86.

> The possibility - nay, the probability - that the Soviet Government would eventually drop the negotiations in view of the very serious difficulties with which we were faced, had never been absent from our minds; we had, indeed, of late rather been working only with the hope that conversations could be carried on for a period long enough to tide over a critical period in European history; we were, in short, prepared for an eventual decision of Soviet neutrality; but I must frankly confess that I did not contemplate that the Soviet Government, having reached the stage of military conversations which contemplated an attack by Soviet troops on Germany through Poland and Roumania, could have the duplicity to reach out the hand of friendship to the prime mover in the anti-Comintern and, what might be called, aggression front.[1]

In contrast to the mood and response of British personalities, Soviet government officials immediately began laying the foundation for the future justification of the pact with Germany. While details had later to be changed because of the German attack of June 1941, the fundamental Soviet interpretation of the events of 1939 has remained substantially unmodified.

As early as August 22 Molotov was already accusing the British and French of insincerity during the negotiations, particularly as the military missions arrived in Moscow "empty-handed" and unprepared to deal with the fundamental

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 29, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, no. 499, pp. 383-385.

point of passage for Soviet troops. The Anglo-French missions had only been "'playing'" with the USSR. The kremlin had finally been forced to accept Germany's proposals for a pact. On the 25th Molotov added that the lack of a positive reply from Poland and Rumania had caused the failure of the negotiations.[1] During their meeting with Ribbentrop, both Stalin and Molotov again commented that the military mission had "never told the Soviet Government what it really wanted."[2]

The above themes of Anglo-French insincerity and Polish obstinacy were further developed by Voroshilov. In a press interview, he blamed Poland's refusal to accept the necessity of passage rights for Soviet troops as having rendered military co-operation with the western powers impossible. The negotiations were therefore broken off not because of the Russo-German pact, but because the military conversations had reached a deadlock. In a final rebuke to the original objectives pursued by Britain and France during the negotiations, Voroshilov pointed out that the question of supplying Poland with military material was not discussed during the talks. Such a problem was an appropriate subject for a commercial agreement, not a

1. Seeds to Halifax, Aug. 23, 25, 1939, ibid., nos. 165, 291, pp. 142, 237. For Naggiar's account of his interviews with Molotov, see Bonnet, vol. II, pp. 290-291, 295-296.
2. Record of a Conversation, Aug. 24, 1939, D.G.F.P., Series D, vol. VII, no. 213, p. 226.

military convention.[1]

The Soviet defence commissar was much more blunt in his final interviews with the leaders of the military missions. He told Doumenc that if the Soviets had been presented with concrete and clear proposals the convention could have been signed "in five or six days". Later, in what Firebrace described as a "genuine outburst of Russian hatred for the Poles", Voroshilov exclaimed: "'Were we to have to conquer Poland in order to offer her our help.... The position was impossible for us.'"[2] To Palasse he added: " We could not wait until the Germans smashed the Polish army and attacked us, beating us piecemeal while you stood guard on your frontier and contained some 10 German divisions...."[3]

The news of Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow had surprised Maisky almost as much as western opinion. In the later stages of the tripartite negotiations, he appears to have been kept poorly informed, often having to ask Halifax for details of current proposals. On August 22 he contacted the Soviet embassy in Berlin to obtain information on the

1. Izvestia, Aug. 27, 1939, quoted in Degras, vol. II, pp. 361-362.
2. Records of Conversations, Aug. 22, 25, 1939, D.B.F.P., 3rd Series, vol. VII, appendix II, pp. 609-614.
3. Ministry of Defence Archives of the USSR, quoted in "Great Patriotic War", part V, p. 93.

impending pact.[1] After visiting the ambassador at the Soviet embassy, Dalton concluded that Maisky knew nothing of what was going on and was "as much surprised as the rest of us by the latest turn." However, the ambassador was still able to advance most of the arguments and criticisms used by his colleagues in Moscow. He also complained that Britain had always treated the USSR "'like poor relations'."[2] In conversation with Benes the following day, he claimed war would not break out: "'Probably there will be a second Munich'."[3] On the 24th Maisky was a conspicuous absentee from his usual place in the diplomats' gallery in the Commons. In the following days, although he continued to expound the principles of Soviet foreign policy to those English contacts who would still listen,[4] it was quite clear the Nazi-Soviet pact had placed him in a most embarrassing position.

1. Kirk to Hull, Aug. 22, 1939, F.R.U.S., 1939, vol. I, p. 338.
2. Entry of Aug. 22, 1939, Dalton Diary; Dalton, vol. II, p. 256. See also, Entry of Aug. 23, 1939, Inskip Diary, File 2.
3. Benes, Memoirs, pp. 138-139.
4. See e.g., Notes of a Conversation with Maisky at the Soviet Embassy, Oct. 3, 1939, Lloyd George Papers, G/130; Boothby Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1939, Dalton Papers; Strabolgi Memorandum, Sept. 20, 1939, ibid.; Dalton , vol. II, pp. 270-271. At about this time Maisky circulated among his acquaintances a long memorandum outlining the course of the negotiations. Diary of Anglo-Soviet Negotiations, Lloyd George Papers, G/130. See also, his Letter to the Editor, The Times, Feb. 2, 1967, where he distinguishes between a state's "fundamental interests of long-standing importance" and "transient interests arising from changing conditions

It was in very measured tones and with a clear eye for future self-justification that Molotov addressed the supreme soviet on September 1. He reviewed the course of the tripartite negotiations, then discussed the German pact. As for the former, Molotov offered several criticisms: Poland had declared Soviet aid to be "unnecessary and an intrusion"; the Anglo-French approach to indirect aggression would have isolated the USSR; and finally, the western powers were "extremely dilatory" and not serious in sending "individuals of secondary importance who were not invested with adequate powers." The reason for this "frivolous attitude" was that the British and French governments feared a mutual assistance pact would strengthen the USSR, which was contrary to their interests.

The pact with Germany, Molotov then pointed out, was intended to eliminate the danger of a Russo-German war, thereby upsetting the "intrigues of west European politicians who were trying to set Germany and the Soviet Union at loggerheads." In future Russia would pursue its own independent policy, guided only by self-interest. In a final admonition to Britain and France, Molotov declared:

> This pact (like the unsuccessful Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations) proves that no important questions of international relations, and still less questions in eastern

> Europe, can be settled without the active participation of the Soviet Union; that any attempt to shut out the Soviet Union and decide such questions behind its back are doomed to failure.[1]

This statement applied not only to the dramatic events of 1939, but also to the whole course of Anglo-Soviet relations since March 1938.

1. Quoted in Degras, vol. III, pp. 363-371.

CONCLUSION

The Munich conference of September 29-30, 1938 and the German-Soviet non-aggression pact of August 23, 1939 have been eloquently defended, savagely criticized and minutely analyzed. All the arguments have by now become celebrated clichés. The final word has not been said, nor will it probably ever be. It is not of direct relevance in this context to enter into the wider issues and endless debates involved. Both these events, however, are significant in various respects for the history of Anglo-Soviet relations.

The central problem, looked at from the period March to September 1938, is whether Soviet foreign policy offered Chamberlain an 'alternative to appeasement', whether it was viable or not, and why was it rejected. The critics of the Munich settlement, both Soviet and western, allege that it was a defeat which could have been avoided; supporters of the settlement disagree. The Soviet alternative essentially proposed a general programme of diplomatic action. The stage was never reached where details could be discussed. It envisaged a united front of powers whose opposition to a German resort to force would be publicly declared, either in a conference, or through the presentation of a joint note in Berlin, or both. The nearest approximation was the May crisis. It was also envisaged that military talks would take place to strengthen this front. The assumption behind these suggestions was that such a policy would either deter

Hitler from using force, or the combined strengths of the three powers would be sufficient to defeat Germany should war nonetheless ensue. On at least five occasions Litvinov presented such proposals in various forms to Britain and France. As has been amply illustrated, this policy had substantial support among critics of appeasement in all parliamentary parties and from a section of British public opinion. The exclusion of the USSR from the Munich conference decisively illustrated the Anglo-French rejection of this alternative.

The reasons for this decision have been previously elaborated. But to summarize briefly they included specific arguments relating to the USSR and general considerations of appeasement diplomacy. The former category includes: distrust of Soviet assurances of assistance; disbelief in the Red army's capacity to intervene effectively in central Europe, on the grounds of the damage caused by the purges and the difficulties over transit; the assumption that no Anglo-French-Soviet combination could save Czechoslovakia, let alone defeat Germany; suspicion that Stalin was secretly fomenting an Anglo-German confrontation; disinclination to gamble over what was considered the element of bluff in Litvinov's proposals; and anxiety that too close association with the USSR would unduly annoy Hitler. In the latter category belong: the belief that to fight Germany over Czechoslovakia would be a preventive war which was anathema; the view that Hitler had a very good case as

regards the Sudeten Germans; the principle that Britain should not be bound by obligations in eastern Europe, or involved indirectly by French commitments there; the need to avoid war because of insufficient British military strength and suspicions of French disinclination to fight; the necessity to direct German expansionism into legitimate channels, preferably of an economic sort, in an eastwards direction; and, finally, Chamberlain's personal desire to seek a peaceful solution and his intense belief that 'grand alliances' do not prevent war, but lead to war.

All of these considerations, based on information then available and the demands of appeasement, militated against the acceptance of the Soviet alternative. British policy towards Russia thus becomes understandable and consistent. Indeed, the Munich settlement can be seen as a successful diplomatic exercise quite in accordance with Chamberlain's views and aims. A major revision of the Versailles treaty had been peacefully negotiated. An embryonic four power pact had been established which could continue this work. The Anglo-German declaration pledged Hitler to diplomatic as opposed to blitzkrieg techniques. And France's commitments in eastern Europe, so annoying to the British prime minister, had been drastically weakened. That the Soviet Union was excluded and snubbed in the process was an embarrassing, though inevitable, side-effect.

But Chamberlain's position to this point does invite scrutiny and criticism. Appeasement ultimately proved an

ineffective policy in preserving the peace. In relation to Russia, it was particularly myopic. Little overt attention was paid to the Soviet aspect of appeasement; that is, the position the USSR was to occupy in relation to a supposedly pacified Germany. There was apparent instead a dubious 'understanding' of Hitler's anti-bolshevik propaganda. If the führer preferred to regard himself as the bulwark of western civilization against international communism, then the attitude in London appears to have been that nothing need be done to discourage this. There is also abundant evidence that the British government and its diplomats shared the very widely-held opinion that the only state to benefit from an Anglo-German war would be Bolshevik Russia. She would fill the vacuum created by the collapse of Nazi Germany. This consideration would have had some influence on policy towards the USSR.

To ignore Stalin and leave Germany to deal with him, as seems to have been the feeling in 1938, may have been temporarily expedient, but proved ultimately dangerous. There is an element of irresponsibility (if not connivance) in the willingness to watch an unprecedented accumulation of German political and economic power on the continent, tempered only by the hope that it would be put to peaceful purposes. If Russia was as weak as Chamberlain imagined did he really expect German expansion to stop at Czechoslovakia? Hitler's argument that Germany should have the continent while Britain took the seas was attractive. Only a

lingering concern with the morality of the proposition prevented its adoption. Finally, one can suggest that the information then available on Russia, that which we know of, was too tenuous and circumstantial to have warranted such an irrevocable rejection of the Soviet alternative. The proposal for military collaboration with Russia was submitted in March 1938 to the chiefs of staff who rejected it. No further information or change of circumstance could alter Chamberlain's views. No further attempt was made to initiate a sustained re-examination of the practical aspects of Russian military aid. On September 14 the chiefs of staff merely reiterated that Moscow was unpredictable and could not be relied upon to aid Czechoslovakia. Except for one occasion - September 23 in Geneva - the prime minister was content to leave the exploration of the Soviet aspect of affairs to the French.

The whole question of Britain's assessment of the USSR was governed as much, if not more, by political as opposed to military considerations. Only a certain prior ideological distrust of Russia can explain this attitude. Only a strong predisposition to come to terms with Germany can explain the actual course of Anglo-Soviet relations. The "Western Powers", Strang has observed, "thought in 1938 that it was a better and more hopeful policy to try to satisfy Germany than to call in the Soviet Union against her."[1]

1. Strang, Home and Abroad, p. 153.

On the other hand, an assessment of Soviet policy and motives in this particular period is more difficult. The nature of discussion within the kremlin remains unknown. Nonetheless, certain factors are clear. Litvinov was the most outspoken advocate of collective security. The Soviet Union had promised full and effective aid to Czechoslovakia, in fulfilment of its treaty obligations. It is unlikely that after such public commitment and extensive private pledges Stalin would have reneged. Common Slav affinity with the Czechs, the chance for spoils on the Soviet western frontier, and the apparent awareness that a Drang nach Osten was always on the cards in Berlin, buttress this contention. Soviet national interest in 1938 would appear to dictate that it was better to fight Hitler with possible western help than be left facing him alone at some future date. There was as yet nothing like the four months of secret negotiations with Berlin in 1939 which could have made an alternative policy feasible.

The extent and manner of Soviet assistance to Czechoslovakia, in view of uncertainty over the effects of the purges and the difficulties of troop transit, remain an open question. The Czechs themselves seemed unworried. They counted on aid from the Soviet air force and not on the use of the Red army. Transit via Poland was out of the question; Rumania was more amenable. A minimum to be thrown into the balance, therefore, was Soviet aviation

assistance to Czechoslovakia and a restraining hand on Poland, if not an actual invasion. Only Litvinov's insistence on leaving a solution to the passage problem in Bonnet's hands, legally correct, but diplomatically open to misrepresentation, casts doubt on Soviet enthusiasm to aid Czechoslovakia.

As far as the narkomindel's efforts to explain or publicize their policies in Britain, some qualification must be expressed. After Litvinov's conference proposal was rejected in March 1938, no further attempt was made to approach the British government directly. Nor was Chilston apparently instructed to make any overtures. In fact, the Soviets were given no encouragement with the one exception at Geneva. Maisky's lobbying techniques in London up to the Munich conference must be assessed as a failure. They were effective in publicizing the Soviet point of view and in permitting very informed criticism to be made of Chamberlain's policy towards the USSR. The net result was only to further alienate government opinion and confirm official aloofness.

It has been argued that Stalin suspected Britain and France would abandon Czechoslovakia in the cause of German appeasement. (Litvinov readily admitted this to his trusted journalist acquaintances at Geneva.) This would then explain Moscow's readiness to declaim its loyalty to Czechoslovakia. However, this does not take into account

the basic Soviet belief that fascism was essentially aggressive, and hence the chance of war breaking out despite the democracies' best efforts to pacify Hitler. The one possibility Stalin would have most wanted to avoid, particularly in view of anxieties over Japanese threats in the far east, was that where Russia would have been left alone to support Czechoslovakia against Germany. (This forces one to view with reserve Soviet offers of unilateral aid to Prague.) This would also explain what has been criticized as the excessive caution and 'passivity' of Soviet policy. Litvinov had no intention to make unilaterally the grand gesture of defiance against Germany. He went only so far as expediency dictated and the French permitted.

The view adopted by Chamberlain and that put forward by Litvinov each demanded a different policy towards Hitler. The former position dictated appeasement; the latter, resistance. Britain and Russia pursued different but parallel policies in 1938. Then the USSR was the power intent on stopping Hitler, and Britain seeking to treat with him. A year later the roles emerged almost reversed: the Soviets had made their peace with Hitler, while Britain was left to resist him.

The three months following the Munich conference are of particular interest in terms of the Soviet aspect of appeasement. They provide a very concrete picture of British policy in eastern Europe; important for its relation

to the thorny dilemma of the 'free hand' for Germany and for the position the USSR was to occupy in a pacified Europe. For during this time the British government pursued the logical sequel to the long hoped for German agreement: désintéressement in eastern Europe. In 1938, as earlier, there had been some discussion in government circles as to the feasibility of giving Germany an economic free hand in the states of central, east and south-east Europe. This immediately raised the question in parliament as to the political use Germany might put such a prize. But on this issue the government retained a discreet silence.

The Munich conference dramatically raised the question from hypothesis to practical politics. The logic of the separate Anglo-German and Franco-German agreements pointed to a western disengagement from eastern Europe. The disruption of the French alliance system created a political and economic vacuum into which Germany could not but penetrate. On three vital issues - the proposed guarantee to Czechoslovakia, Franco-Soviet relations, and the Ruthenian question - London pursued a careful policy designed to extricate any remaining Anglo-French interests from eastern Europe. Military intelligence that Germany's next move would be eastwards strengthened this development. This by no means implied any proposition to encourage a Soviet-German military confrontation as was, and is, alleged by the Russians. There is also little support for the related

consideration that Britain was prepared to see Germany fill the gap left by a hypothetical break-up of the Soviet empire. The British embassy in Moscow was by 1939 optimistic as to the long-range chances of survival for Bolshevik Russia, and only slightly less so in case of war. The embassy further warned London to expect a successful Soviet resistance to Germany's post-Munich encouragement of Ukrainian nationalism.

Direct evidence to support either of these contentions is not of the kind that is normally left behind in writing by either politicians or diplomats. Nor does it appear that any will come to light. Chamberlain clearly hoped for peace on the European continent. But it is common sensical to suggest, and must have been privately assumed until January 1939, that if Hitler was not to be satisfied then Anglo-French security would be better served by hostilities beginning in eastern rather than western Europe. The opposite case no doubt held true for Stalin. Such considerations, at least in British policy, disappeared with the commitments later given to Poland and Rumania.

The effect of Anglo-French policy upon the USSR was to underline the latter's political isolation in post-Munich Europe. Moscow reacted with a mixture of petulence, bravado and practical politics, in an attempt to make the best of a bad situation. Its diplomats alternated declarations of self-sufficiency and warnings of complete

isolation with assurances to the contrary. The Soviet government condemned British appeasement, yet expressed interest in vague foreign office declarations that London desired to maintain contact with Moscow. In fact, wherever further diplomatic openings appeared, these were eagerly cultivated. Thus commercial negotiations with Germany were tentatively renewed and relations with Poland improved. The lesson was obviously not lost on the kremlin that the result of any lasting Anglo-German settlement was not to its benefit. A policy of disengagement in eastern Europe by the western powers posed a danger to the USSR, if prior arrangements could not be negotiated.

In early January 1939 an important modification in British policy towards the Soviet Union took place. It is in fact from this time, with the appointment of Seeds to succeed Chilston, that the Anglo-Soviet negotiations can be traced. For the attempt then initiated to include the Russian factor in British policy, in marked contrast to 1938 and earlier, was to an increasing extent responsible for the character of events up to the outbreak of war. The forms these efforts assumed varied considerably: détente was followed by proposals for limited collaboration, plans for consultation were in turn succeeded by alliance negotiations.

In January and February 1939 policy towards the USSR was precise and well-defined. Since early in the new year the foreign office was perturbed by reports of a possible

German move westwards and by various indications of a developing Russo-German rapprochement. The exact form the latter could take was unknown. An alliance between Stalin and Hitler was at first considered very remote; a Soviet retreat into isolation - quite possible. It was therefore with the intention of ensuring the benevolent neutrality of the USSR in case of war that attempts were made to improve Anglo-Soviet relations.

The desire to block any get-together between Hitler and Stalin remained a constant element in British policy, whatever the strategy adopted. In the later stages of the tripartite negotiations, it sometimes appeared that the major reason for continued concessions to Moscow was the apprehension that a breakdown would be followed by an agreement between Germany and the USSR. There are no indications so far that the British government had the detailed intelligence on Nazi-Soviet contacts which the Americans had. What was available to London - from Seeds, Henderson, the French government and probably other sources - were warnings that Germany and the USSR were in contact and that these soundings had political implications. The fact, however, that London still viewed the Soviets essentially in ideological and not political terms, led them to underestimate the ultimate ability of the two totalitarian states to overcome impediments to an alliance. But it was also the fact that in the earlier stages of the negotiations any permanent Nazi-Soviet agreement was considered unlikely, which partly explains the

relatively low price London was prepared to pay for Soviet friendship. As Kirkpatrick aptly observed: "At the beginning our Government thought they were inviting the Russians to join the Turf Club and that they would fall over themselves with delight. The Russians, on the other hand, felt that they had a valuable oriental carpet to sell and were dissatisfied with the price offered!"[1]

The reaction of the Soviet government to British attempts to improve relations was not encouraging. Several years of the famous 'cold-shoulder', culminating in the Munich conference, led them to regard such a move with suspicion. But the response was not one of total rejection. In his March 10, 1939 speech, Stalin offered his government's assistance to victims of aggression. What was more interesting was that he publicly tempered the narkomindel's dogmatic espousal of collective security with a more pragmatic attitude. His policy began to move closer to his protagonists west of Germany. He appeared to think less of waging a war against Hitler's Germany and more of avoiding any conflict in which the Soviet Union might be involved. Britain and France likewise sought to avoid war; but one in which they would be involved.

On first glance it is tempting to consider the period from March to August 1939 as one wherein the alternative to

1. Entry of June 14, 1939, Dalton Diary.

appeasement, so decisively rejected until 1939, at last became official policy. While ostensibly this may have appeared to be the case, at the time and subsequently, this is a misreading of policy as conceived by Chamberlain himself. It is this divergence between the policy public opinion, the parliamentary opposition and, to a degree, the kremlin itself assumed was being pursued, and the policy as conceived specifically by the prime minister, which explains the character of the tripartite negotiations and the reasons for the failure of the political and military agreements.

In March 1939 central Europe seemed on the verge of collapse with all possibilities open to Hitler for further expansion in east and south-east Europe. At this crucial moment, in contradiction to previous efforts of avoiding commitments in eastern Europe, and with unseemly haste, the Chamberlain government stepped in to shore up the tottering Versailles settlement which it had helped to weaken. This strategy could serve two ends: either to preserve the status quo; or to ensure that treaty revision in eastern Europe, particularly as regards Poland, would proceed by negotiation and not by force. The initial endeavour seems to have been the former; but the final goal would have had to be the latter. In either case, the lessons of previous attempts at security east of the Reich, the abortive eastern Locarno negotiations and France's alliance system, were

completely forgotten. Once again Britain had to be wary of the encirclement argument; once again Poland refused to join a triple entente giving Russia a principle position; once again the 'hornet's nest' of east European politics proved too complex for western diplomacy.

Beginning with its concern for the reported threat to Rumanian independence, the British government approached the USSR in an attempt to secure its support against German aggression. This limited step, logical from both the political and military points of view, failed. In response to a further request, the Soviet indicated their readiness and obviously considered it in their better interests, despite reservations, to join in a multi-power declaration of intent to consult in certain circumstances. The British government then took the unprecedented decision of unilaterally guaranteeing the political independence of two east European states. It would appear that Chamberlain intended this gesture to be taken, not in a military sense, but rather as an indication to Berlin of Britain's concern over new techniques of aggression. The aim was to deter and thus preserve the peace; not to ensure the military defeat of Germany.

That the guarantees to Poland and Rumania were given without a prior commitment from the USSR proved in the final analysis to be a major tactical error. It tied the hands of London, but freed those of Moscow. It condemned the

subsequent negotiations to failure. Having already been granted a British pledge of assistance, Poland and Rumania felt no compulsion to assist agreement on an Anglo-Soviet treaty where this conflicted with their interests. Nor was there any urgency in London to compel these states to compromise. Consequently, in the subsequent talks London, Paris and Moscow finally agreed to render each other assistance in case of direct attack and to negotiate a military convention. But it was one issue which partly concerned the border states - the definition of 'indirect aggression', and one issue directly - transit for Soviet troops, on which the political and military negotiations respectively broke down. At the same time, having acquired without obligation the security of a British defensive presence on its western frontier, the Soviet Union was able to point inter alia to the supposed intransigence of its neighbours as precluding cooperation with the western allies.

Chamberlain's new policy of a deterrent front immediately came under severe criticism. To British public opinion, the parliamentary opposition and the quai d'orsay, the guarantees began to be understood as embryonic alliances intended to deter or defeat Germany. Thus their logical argument became the military one. Britain could only make her position credible and secure the defence of Poland and Rumania if the military potential of the USSR were thrown

into the balance. They naturally wanted to avert war, but intended being first sure of winning one. Chamberlain also considered the military argument as vital, though in an opposite sense. He intended to avert war by delaying it. The essence of his thought and policy was perfectly set out in this letter of July 23, 1939:

> ... the longer the war is put off the less likely it is to come at all as we go on perfecting our defences and building up the defence of our allies. That is what Winston and Co. never seem to realise. You don't need offensive forces sufficient to win a smashing victory. What you want are defensive forces sufficiently strong to make it impossible for the other side to win except at such a cost as to make it not worth while. That is what we are doing, and though at present the German feeling is it is not worth while yet they will presently come to realise that it never will be worth while....[1]

A constituent of these 'offensive forces' no doubt included the USSR.

With such considerations in mind, Chamberlain's policy towards the Russians in 1939 becomes comprehensible. In view of his distrust of, and deep personal antipathy towards the Soviet Union, the very poor opinion he held of their military capabilities, and his confidence in Britain's growing strength, he saw the Soviet factor in his new armed appeasement as of little real value. Under certain specified conditions Moscow could add its questionable

1. Copy of Letter from Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, July 23, 1939, Templewood Papers, XIX: (C)II.

weight to the deterrent front. If this could not be honourably achieved, the loss was not of great importance and possibly of some benefit. The depth of his feelings on the subject is adequately characterized by his threat in May to resign if an Anglo-Soviet alliance were concluded.

It is a tribute to the force of the prime minister's critics which eventually enabled them, with the help of cabinet opinion, to compel him to explore a different policy towards the USSR. It is indicative also of the fact that what gave British policy in 1938 its sense of undeviating singleness of purpose, the prime minister's obstinate nature, had lost some of its sureness.

The negotiations with the USSR in March and April 1939 began on the British side again with strictly defined aims. The intention was to secure from Moscow a commitment to aid Poland and Rumania via the provision of military supplies. Troops would only be furnished if specifically requested. This would bolster the defensive capacity of the guaranteed states and ensure Moscow's benevolent neutrality. Nowhere in this original restricted conception was any consideration given to the possibility of concluding a 'politico-military' alliance with the USSR.

What forced the hand of the foreign office was the Soviet proposal in mid-April for precisely such an agreement. The objections to an alliance with the USSR, from the British point of view, were abundant, seemingly pressing, and have

all been discussed above. It is interesting to note, however, the remarkable degree of consistency in Chamberlain's conception of foreign affairs. Most of the reservations advanced during 1938 were considered equally compelling in 1939. But the two deepest appear to have been London's fear of being drawn into a war provoked by Russia on an issue of little concern to the western allies and, secondly, the anxiety that an alliance with Moscow would be interpreted as anti-German, and thus end any hopes of an Anglo-German settlement. The protests of the border states against being guaranteed, which received much publicity at the time, were eventually overruled.

Despite the various, supposedly insuperable, obstacles and under a virtual plethora of pressures, the Chamberlain government moved inexorably towards acceptance of a mutual assistance pact as dictated from the kremlin. By August 2 when the last session of the political talks took place a comprehensive agreement had been reached. Only the definition of indirect aggression was left unsolved. On this point the foreign office would have gone a long way to meet the Soviet position. Unfortunately, the reluctance with which each issue of principle was finally conceded to Moscow could not but have diminished in the kremlin and, not least, in Berlin the credibility of Britain's commitment to an alliance policy.

At this stage the negotiation of a military convention took precedence over the finalizing of a political agreement.

In the foreign office's initial conception of these talks, the same limited defensive posture was solicited from Moscow in a military capacity as had motivated the original request for political cooperation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Soviet negotiators once again rejected the role being cast for them from London; a role for which Moscow had no desire, which could leave it in possible danger, and which it considered humiliating for a major European power. The Russians forced a solution of the one difficulty the Anglo-French mission wanted most to avoid - passage for Soviet troops across Poland and Rumania. On this particular issue the military negotiations broke down.

There proved in the final analysis to be three factors which upset Chamberlain's calculations. The first was his belief in the ultimate pacific intentions of Nazi Germany. The second was his underestimation, shared by many of his colleagues, of the likelihood of a German-Soviet agreement on the fate of eastern Europe. German expansion eastwards could be achieved either at the expense of, or in collusion with the USSR. The third was the Anglo-Soviet negotiations themselves. Their very continuance was a glaring contradiction to the long term aims he had in mind. It was this inability to harmonize his final objective - Anglo-German pacification, with short-term methods - a deterrent front including Russia, which worked against him.

Turning from the character and causes for failure of the negotiations as viewed from London, to the same factors

as viewed from Moscow, one of the most striking aspects is the similarity in the policies of both countries. By 1939 Britain and the USSR, troubled by the problem of dealing with Nazi Germany, began to suspect the bankruptcy of policies previously pursued: appeasement and collective security respectively. Both countries began to explore alternative measures, but without entirely abandoning prior ones. Britain gave territorial guarantees and then negotiated for alliances, while leaving open an option to Berlin should circumstances permit. The USSR, in line with its previous exhortations, supported a collective defence pact with Britain and France, while at the same time exploring the possibilities of an agreement with Nazi Germany. In early April 1939 both sides were evenly matched in their relations with Berlin: both were equally estranged. By July the focus of policy in London and Moscow, ostensibly directed towards each other, was in actual fact tuned in to Germany. But it remained for the latter power to choose its friends and enemies. This placed the USSR in a more favourable position and led to the German-Soviet pact. Thus, this diplomacy of alternatives ultimately favoured the Soviet Union. In 1938 it was the British government which gave priority to the task of avoiding war, rather than to the securing of allies. In 1939 the USSR finally adopted the same strategy. Both countries at different times made their peace with Nazi Germany and both were disappointed.

This is not to suggest that Russia's aims remained constant throughout the negotiations. Counsels appear to have been divided within the kremlin, with a foreign minister having to be dismissed. Rather on the British issue the situation was clear. In light of previous experience, the Chamberlain government could not be trusted. Therefore its new resolution was suspect. The obvious test was to propose a comprehensive political and military pact. This would represent the minimum and maximum expected. The British reply proved to be another declaration proposal which, beside sealing the fate of Litvinov, determined subsequent policy. Nevertheless, despite the increasing tempo of contacts between Soviet and German officials, it was primarily to an Anglo-Soviet agreement which Moscow was forced to give priority. By late July a tripartite mutual assistance pact had been agreed upon, yet negotiations with Germany had just reached the political stage. It was only in early August, when Germany began to hint at an impending opening of hostilities and to suggest a possible understanding on mutual areas of interest, that the last attraction of a triple alliance vanished for the Soviet government. The Anglo-French military missions probably had no chance of deflecting Moscow's decisions.

While it is of course difficult to analyze Stalin's thinking on the tripartite negotiations with the same facility as Chamberlain's, the factors which influenced his

final choice are obvious. Indeed, they were stated, as previously indicated, with remarkable candour by Soviet leaders in late August when justifying the non-aggression pact.[1] The June 1941 attack against the USSR forced some modifications. When questioned subsequently on his motives for signing with Hitler in 1939, Stalin adduced many of the original arguments. He also stated that it was the Munich conference which drove him towards Germany, that he was no longer convinced in 1939 that a diplomatic front could deter Hitler, that France and Britain were neither resolved nor capable of going to war in Poland's defence and, finally, by gaining almost two extra years he had secured a respite to strengthen Russian defences. For Soviet historians, who now have to contend with the debate as to whether Stalin bought peace or time, and if the latter, why it was not better utilized, the German attack proved an embarrassment. This forced a more defensive posture to be taken towards the Nazi-Soviet pact. As the massive post-1945 documentation dealing with the origins of the war became available, they countered the accusation that Russia had been secretly negotiating with Germany, (which was excused), by equally alleging that from March to August 1939 Britain had never ceased its efforts for an anti-Soviet, Anglo-German alliance.

1. See above, pp. 427-432.

Assessing these various considerations of Soviet foreign policy on the eve of the war, the primary concern was apparently the necessity to avoid isolation: a position Britain's initial proposals both in the political and military negotiations could have imposed. Moscow's fear of a four power pact which could then leave the USSR to contend alone with Germany in eastern Europe weighed most heavily. A commitment to one of the two western blocs was imperative. The German alternative finally proved more attractive. The strategic aspect was also of paramount importance. The prospect of a war in Europe added to the recurrent clashes with the Japanese in the far east must have been daunting. The Soviets had little faith in the western allies' resolve to fight for the guaranteed border states, nor did they believe a deterrent front could be securely based on these states. Potemkin's April tour in eastern Europe and Anglo-French tactics during the negotiations would have shaped this view. The information Maisky forwarded from London, given the particularly anti-Chamberlain circles which he tapped, would have confirmed these beliefs. In this sense the Soviet ambassador performed a disservice to his government. He clearly underestimated British resolve to honour her obligations. In August 1939 he was convinced there would be a new Munich. Furthermore, whatever the damage caused by the purges, an additional respite to strengthen Soviet defensive

capabilities would have been welcome. A triple alliance, on the other hand, could have entailed immediate hostilities in defense of Poland. The Russians, unfortunately, had little military regard for their neighbour and considerable antipathy. Critics of Soviet foreign policy have also adduced the argument of Russian imperialism as a further motive for the German pact. As will be seen below, this played its part. But to accuse Stalin of hoping to intervene at the last moment in a European struggle and emerge as the tertius gaudens is to attribute to him powers of foresight denied to most individuals. It is significant, however, that the common factor behind all these considerations was the imperative of security, both for the territorial integrity of the USSR and the safeguarding of the bolshevik revolution. The prerequisites of national interest and ideology, at least in the short-term, perfectly converged.

All of these arguments, whether viewed individually or collectively, provide in an objective sense adequate justification for a policy decision leading to the German-Soviet non-aggression pact. But the course and character of the tripartite negotiations was only one of several pressing reasons which made the German alternative preferable. They have subsequently been used, unfairly, as the major pretext for the pact with Hitler. It is thus legitimate to question, as have most British and French officials connected with the conduct of these negotiations,

whether it was in Moscow's interest in 1939 to ally with the west? Formulated perhaps in another way, would an immediate Anglo-French acceptance of Litvinov's alliance plans in mid-April have embarrassed the USSR, as much as their receipt embarrassed London? The answer appears to depend on a matter of timing. If the intention was to tie down Russia and thus restrict her freedom of manoeuvre, as was stated in the May 22, 1939 foreign office memorandum, then a positive response in April would have tested, for the first time, Soviet intentions and forced a commitment from her. Thereafter, as the tripartite negotiations continued their troubled course, with Berlin showing interest in Moscow's overtures, and the European situation progressively deteriorating, alliance with Britain and France held fewer attractions. Moreover, the rationale for risking Soviet security in defence of Poland and Rumania, against both of whom the USSR had revisionist demands, must have seemed unconvincing.

The Soviet decision of August 23 in one sense conformed to British long-term conceptions of the usefulness of the USSR. As already suggested, since February 1939 London had been seeking to ensure the benevolent neutrality of the USSR in case of war. The Soviets themselves opted for this role, though in a manner not to London's liking and, unfortunately, at the expense of Poland.

The Soviet aspect of appeasement diplomacy in 1938 and 1939 ultimately concerned the fate of eastern Europe. The

success of appeasement during the Czech-German crisis, from Chamberlain's point of view, was that he had helped to negotiate a revision of the Versailles treaty in central Europe. This trend could only be maintained if Britain refrained from political commitments east of the Reich, and if further concessions to Germany in eastern Europe were condoned. Economic Lebensraum was largely conceded. Provided that such revisions were peacefully negotiated, Chamberlain was prepared to continue the policy. A prerequisite for its successful prosecution, however, was the further ignoring of the Soviet Union. Insofar as appeasement was directed towards Germany, it was open to interpretation as an anti-Soviet policy: not by design, but by implication.

In 1939 doubts as to Hitler's intentions should have been supplemented by a total change in policy. For besides Germany, eastern Europe had another dormant revisionist power, the Soviet Union. If the policy of concessions to Germany were to stop, a policy of concessions to the USSR should have followed. If Britain had not contracted obligations on the Soviet border, and with a change in attitude to that country, then Moscow could have become the focus for the new appeasement. This would have forced the border states to make adjustments. But having taken in 1939 a moral and political stand on the territorial integrity of small states, not having altered fundamental attitudes toward the USSR, and not having abandoned the hope of pacifying Germany, Britain no longer had the freedom of

manoeuvre previously available. The crux of Anglo-Soviet relations at the onset of the second world war thus concerns the contentious free hand in eastern Europe. Throughout the 'thirties British government and social circles debated the problem of German Lebensraum. In late 1938 a solution seemed to have been found. Then in 1939, dramatically and by force of circumstance rather than choice, Britain went to war because of a commitment given to an east European state.

Possibly above and beyond all these considerations lies the problem of Hitler's aims. Were these legitimate, limited and satiable, or was he intent on continental domination? Would the prospect of a grand alliance have deterred him? Or was he irrevocably committed to a solution of his grievances against the Czechs and Poles to the point of war if necessary? If one takes the view of Hitler's essential rationality and limited ambitions, then a triple alliance arranged before the May crisis might have restrained him. Thereafter, with his prestige involved, and with the Soviet Union ignored, the proposition is debatable. Hitler did not believe France and Britain would fight for Czechoslovakia. Russia, he assumed, would offer military aid though not to the point of posing a formidable obstacle. Anglo-French hesitations would relieve him of the problem of a war on two fronts. He gambled on these assumptions and was proved right.

Whether a triple alliance would have checked Hitler in 1939 is a more pressing speculation. By mid-April he had

not yet publicly commented on his most recent negotiations with Poland, nor was a final decision yet taken for military action. The German foreign office followed the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations with interest and apprehension. Then during a staff conference on May 23, Hitler stated that should a triple alliance be concluded, he would be forced to attack in the west as well. This does not appear to be an idle boast. The question therefore concerns the intervening period, particularly before April 28 when Hitler denounced the Polish-German declaration of 1934 and the Anglo-German naval treaty. If the fear of a war on two fronts meant anything to the German military, as it must have, and if Berlin would have been faced with the fait accompli of a triple alliance announced in mid-April, then it is possible to suggest that Hitler would have been restrained. But the British government responded to the Soviet alliance proposal with another suggestion for a declaration - the third. The continued difficulties these negotiations exhibited, and Moscow's overtures to Berlin encouraged the führer. His confidence in the lack of common purpose among his potential protagonists was once again well placed.

On the other hand, if one considers Hitler as personally unstable and intent on European hegemony, then a triple alliance would simply have had no effect. The justification for its conclusion in this latter case would have been

military: Russian collaboration was needed to prevent a German victory.

So long as the debate on the inevitability of the second world war continues interest will centre on the proposition of the grand alliance. That it was rejected and ignored in 1938 ipso facto strengthens the case in its favour. That changed circumstances made a freely negotiated triple alliance difficult in 1939 leaves this alternative to appeasement an attractive, if untried and untested hypothesis. In this sense Chamberlain's order of priorities is to be regretted.

APPENDIX

Letter from Sir Laurence Collier to
Martin Gilbert, February 12, 1968

... As regards the anti-Russian attitudes in the British Cabinet in the 1930s, I think there is no doubt of the ideological anti-Russian bias of Hoare and Halifax. They were both High Churchmen with a theological outlook on the world, which came out strongly in Hoare during the Spanish Civil War. There is a passage in Eden's memoirs showing Hoare, then First Lord of the Admiralty, admitting, when there was a question of using the Navy to prevent German and Italian arms coming into Spain, that he wanted Franco to win because of his hatred and fear of Communism. Simon was anti-Russian because he had had experience of Soviet ruthlessness and duplicity in the famous Metro-Vickers case (in which I was involved) - as for Chamberlain, he certainly had no theological bias, being (if anything) a Unitarian, but it was rumoured at the time that his wife, though generally regarded as a silly woman, had some influence with him and shared Hoare's and Halifax's views. (I don't know how true this was, but it was a widespread story.)

It is true, of course, that the usual assessment of Russian military strength at that time was not favourable. I myself saw some war office reports of low morale after the army 'purges', and it was not until the Russians had

inflicted a resounding defeat on the Japanese at No-mon-han in Mongolia in August, 1939 (for details see F.C. Jones' "Japan's New Order in East Asia") that they changed their tune. On the other hand I had the definite impression throughout this period that Chamberlain and his friends did not want to consider the possibility of Russian military aid at all. At one time (I think it must have been in 1936) Wavell, who, as I expect you know, talked Russian, went out to the Russian manoeuvres (I met him in the F.O. before he left and he made a considerable impression on me); and after his visit there was a proposal (I forget where it started) for us to send a regular military mission to the next manoeuvres. I supported it and induced my chief, Oliphant, to put it up to Halifax; but Halifax (and, I suppose, Chamberlain) turned it down on the ground that it would displease Hitler - so we lost the opportunity of getting a full close-up estimate of the value of the Soviet army - (The papers about this must now be available in the Record Office).

The truth was, of course, that Chamberlain, whatever he thought of the Russians, was, in any case, determined to try for an agreement with Hitler; and, being a man with a one-track mind, he would not seriously consider any alternative so long as he had the slightest hope of it. Even if he had been given the most favourable reports possible

of the Soviet army, he would not, on that account, have changed his policy. The motives for that policy may have been mixed, but doubts about Soviet strength were certainly not among them.

Letter from Sir William Seeds
to Martin Gilbert, February 12, 1968

Apart from the question of British policy towards Hitler, the great outstanding factor in our attitude to Russia was that in 1939 public opinion in all classes including the Government was one of revulsion and suspicion. (The Revolution with its horrors had happened only some 20 odd years before: the cynical and artificial Great Famine: the terrible tyranny of Stalin in full blast in the 30s). This must never be forgotten when appraising the situation in 1939: it far outweighed the quite unimportant activities of extremists like the Webbs on the Left or Maisky's bugbear - "the Cliveden Set" - on the Right. And Chamberlain and Halifax were not the men to be unaffected by this revulsion. The negotiations began in that spirit of gingerly apprehension felt by a traveller who has been lured into playing with 3-card-trick operators in a railway carriage, and the Russians did nothing during the talks to remove the suspicion. Quite the contrary. (Of course the Russians were suspicious too....)

Russia's alleged military weakness was not a major factor. It was certainly urged by some soldiers, but few Britons - lay or politicians - have much respect for military opinions, and there could be no doubt that if Hitler could be manoeuvred into wasting his strength pounding the Russian bolster it would be a Good Thing.

The above are my very generalised but considered opinions on a matter to which I have naturally given much thought.

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