

# Soviet Diplomacy and Intelligence Efforts to Facilitate Finland's Withdrawal from the 1941–1944 War: Insights from Russian Archives<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** In early 1941, Moscow learned through its intelligence channels and diplomatic efforts about the growing rapprochement between Berlin and Helsinki that consisted of increased German–Finnish military collaboration, the deployment of German troops and military equipment in Finland, the recruitment of Finnish volunteers for SS units in Germany, the construction of fortifications along the Soviet border, and the massing of Finnish forces near the Soviet border. Despite initially maintaining neutrality after Germany's invasion of the USSR, Finland declared war on the Soviet Union on June 26, 1941. The Finnish side got the better of the Soviet Union during the early phase of operations on the Soviet–Finnish front from July to December 1941. This was followed by a “positional war” that continued from late December 1941 until summer 1944, with little change to the front line. During this period, Stockholm emerged as a key geopolitical hub where Soviet diplomats, led by Alexandra Kollontai, and intelligence officers navigated the complex task of encouraging Finland to engage in peace talks with the Soviet Union and withdraw from the war. Sweden's neutrality in the conflict and its traditionally strong ties with Finland positioned it as an effective mediator in these negotiations. Additionally, Moscow successfully lobbied Washington to exert diplomatic pressure on Helsinki to initiate negotiations, which gradually began to yield positive results. The multifaceted efforts of Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers, coupled with Kollontai's active involvement in this diplomatic endeavour, led to two rounds of Soviet–Finnish negotiations in Moscow in March and September 1944. While the March talks faltered due to the positions taken by the Finnish delegates and politicians, the September negotiations succeeded in persuading Finland to agree to a truce and cease hostilities. This diplomatic victory contributed to the gradual disintegration of the anti-USSR coalition led by Germany, with Finland becoming a crucial component to exit this alliance.

**Keywords:** Alexandra Kollontai, Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, Risto Ryti, Juho Kusti Paasikivi, B. Yartsev, Erik Boheman, Soviet intelligence

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For an inexperienced researcher, distinguishing between the activities of Soviet diplomats and intelligence agents abroad can be a challenging task. This difficulty arises because both groups address similar objectives, albeit through distinct approaches and techniques. Often, Soviet intelligence officers operated under diplomatic or consular cover. Both diplomats and intelligence personnel actively sought to gather crucial political information, occasionally resulting in interagency competition. By unveiling the secrecy surrounding intelligence work and introducing archival documents from Soviet secret services into academic discourse, we shed light on some lesser-known aspects of Russian history.

Our research aims to analyze, using newly accessed original documents from Russian departmental archives and recent scholarly studies, the efforts of Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers to persuade Finland to exit World War II between 1941 and 1944. Additionally, we focus on existing challenges in their coordination and potential solutions.

### Historiography and sources

Historians from Russia, Finland, and the United States have extensively studied the Soviet-Finnish confrontation during 1941-1944, producing hundreds of monographs and scholarly articles since the end of World War II. Among Finnish scholars, notable contributions were made by M. Jokipii (1999) and O. Manninen (2006), who examined the circumstances leading to the war between the USSR and Finland. L. Westerlund, drawing on personal documents, such as diaries of Finnish volunteers, and archival sources, analyzed the activities of the Finnish battalion within German SS units in Ukraine and the Caucasus from 1941 to 1943 (Westerlund, 2019; Khristoforov, 2021). Finnish historians H. Meinander (Meinander, 2014, p. 71-98, 247-256) and K. Rentola (2020) focused on the 1944 armistice negotiations between Helsinki and Moscow, paying particular attention to Soviet diplomatic efforts, especially those of A.M. Kollontai,<sup>2</sup> and the role of Soviet intelligence officers in Stockholm in preparing these talks. A key strength of their work lies in the detailed study of Finnish Foreign Ministry's materials and personal documents from Finnish politicians and diplomats. However, Meinander and Rentola lacked access to Soviet special services' archives, limiting their ability to fully assess the influence of Soviet intelligence on the preparation and conduct of the Soviet-Finnish negotiations in March and September 1944. The attempts by American and British diplomats to influence Finland's withdrawal

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai (1872–1952) was a Soviet stateswoman and diplomat who served as Minister Plenipotentiary and Ambassador to Sweden from 1930 to 1945.

from the war are explored in works by S. Vorobyov and V. Shtol, such as “The Image of the Enemy in the Foreign Policy of England and the USA” (Vorobyov, Shtol, 2023), as well as by H. Oinas-Kukkonen.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that foreign and domestic scholars hold differing interpretations regarding the circumstances that led to the Soviet-Finnish War. In foreign historiography, Soviet air raids on Finnish territory and the bombing of Finnish cities are often cited as the cause of the conflict. However, Russian historians, while not denying these air raids, clarify that the targets were Finnish military airfields where German Air Force aircraft were stationed. They contend that the true motivation for the Finnish leadership initiating the war against the USSR was the aspiration to reclaim territories lost in 1940 and to ensure regional security (Bishop and McNab, 2005).

In Russian academic literature, the historiography of the Soviet-Finnish War has been significantly advanced by the works by G.A. Kumanev (2006) and N.I. Baryshnikov (2008). Kumanev, whose perspective is shared by the author of this article, suggests that Soviet historiography was generally monotonous, lacked in-depth research, and did not extensively cover documentary sources, primarily focusing on Finland's entry into the war against the Soviet Union and its collaboration with Nazi Germany.

Research into scholarly works on Soviet diplomacy during the Great Patriotic War reveals that the covert efforts of Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers to persuade Nazi Germany's satellite states – Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland – to exit the war are only partially addressed.<sup>4</sup>

In major Russian publications on the history of World War II and the Great Patriotic War, military operations on the Soviet-Finnish front receive limited attention, and the role of the special services is entirely overlooked (History of the Second World War, 1975).

Russian historians such as N.I. Baryshnikov (2010) and V.N. Baryshnikov (2016), A.A. Komarov (1995), E.N. Kulkov (2009), M.Yu. Myagkov (2008), and A.B. Shirokorad (2007), while studying Soviet-Finnish relations, emphasize Helsinki's responsibility for initiating the war alongside Germany and Finland's aim to reclaim lost territories. They focus on the fighting in Karelia, its outcomes, and the war's concluding phase. However, these works largely neglect the activities of Soviet diplomacy and intelligence during the war years, a gap largely attributable to restricted access to national intelligence and counterintelligence archives.

<sup>3</sup> Oinas-Kukkonen, H. 2020. “*Prezident Finlyandii v gody Vtoroy mirovoy predlagal SShA okkupirovat' ego stranu*”. *Finskiy istorik o sekretnoy igre Finlyandii vo 2-y mirovoy* [“The President of Finland during World War II proposed that the USA occupy his country.” A Finnish historian on Finland's secret game in World War II]. *Realnoe Vremya*. URL: <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/176310-finskiy-istorik-o-sekretnoy-igre-finlyandii-vo-2-y-mirovoy?ysclid=llpeilny43782848675> (accessed: August 4, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Ivanov A.G. 1999. *Ocherki diplomaticheskoy istorii Evropy (1918–1945 gg.)* [Essays on the Diplomatic History of Europe (1918–1945)]. Krasnodar. P. 128-150 (in Russian); *Istoriya vneshney politiki SSSR 1917–1975* [History of the Foreign Policy of the USSR in 1917–1975]. 1976. In two volumes. Vol. 1, covering 1917-1945. Moscow: Nauka. P. 461-464 (in Russian); Sipols V.Ya. 1985. *Na puti k velikoy Pobede: sovetskaya diplomatiya v 1941–1945 gg.* [On the Path to Great Victory: Soviet Diplomacy in 1941–1945]. Moscow: Politizdat. P. 248-252 (in Russian).

It was only in the early 20th century that studies emerged on the secret war waged by the special services of the Soviet Union, Germany, and Finland, focusing on the efforts of Soviet counterintelligence agents to combat enemy intelligence operatives and saboteurs. These works were based on archival materials from Arkhangelsk, Moscow,<sup>5</sup> Murmansk, Omsk, Petrozavodsk,<sup>6</sup> and St. Petersburg.<sup>7</sup>

Among the leading researchers of national intelligence and counterintelligence during the war are scholars from Petrozavodsk, including S.G. Verigin (2018), E.P. Laidinen (2008), G.V. Chumakov (2007), and others. They have examined the organization and operational characteristics of Finnish intelligence and sabotage units that operated actively and covertly in Karelia, as well as in the Leningrad and Murmansk regions (Laidinen, 2008).<sup>8</sup>

The history of various aspects of the Soviet-Finnish war, particularly the activities of the special services and the foreign ministry, has been explored in several scholarly works by the author of this article (Khristoforov, 2008, 2015, 2018, 2020a, 2020b; Khristoforov, Cherepkov, 2014).

For this research, documents of a personal nature hold significant value, including the memoirs of Soviet military leaders K.A. Meretskov<sup>9</sup> and V.I. Platonov,<sup>10</sup> the diaries of Finnish President R. Ryti,<sup>11</sup> as well as those of prominent Finnish politicians J.K. Paasikivi<sup>12</sup> and V.A. Tanner.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the memoirs of Finnish statesman and military figure C.G. Mannerheim<sup>14</sup> offer numerous new and previously unknown

<sup>5</sup> *Organy gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voine* [The State Security Organs of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War]. 2003. Collection of Documents. In two books. Vol. 3. Moscow (in Russian).

<sup>6</sup> *Neizvestnaya Kareliya. 1999. Dokumenty spetsorganov o zhizni respubliki. 1941–1956 gg.* [Unknown Karelia. 1999. Documents of the Special Agencies on the Life of the Republic. 1941–1956]. Petrozavodsk (in Russian).

<sup>7</sup> Lomagin N.A. 2004. *Neizvestnaya blokada* [The Unknown Blockade]. Documents, Appendices. Book 2. St. Petersburg: Neva Publishing House (in Russian); *Shchit i mech blokadnogo Leningrada* [The Shield and Sword of Leningrad during the Blockade]. 2010. Documentary essay about the officers of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs Office (UNKVD) and People's Commissariat for State Security Office (UNKGB) in the Leningrad region. 1941–1944. St. Petersburg (in Russian); see also (Khokhlov, 2006, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Neizvestnaya Kareliya. 1999. Dokumenty spetsorganov o zhizni respubliki. 1941–1956 gg.* [Unknown Karelia. 1999. Documents of the Special Agencies on the Life of the Republic. 1941–1956]. Petrozavodsk (in Russian); *Partizanskaya voyna v Karelii* [The Partisan War in Karelia]. 2005. Collection of Articles and Materials. Petrozavodsk (in Russian); Chumakov G.V., Remizov A.N. 2007. *Brigada: Istoriya 1-y partizanskoy brigady Karel'skogo fronta* [Brigade: History of the 1st Partisan Brigade of the Karelian Front]. Petrozavodsk (in Russian).

<sup>9</sup> Meretskov K.A. 1984. *Na sluzhbe narodu* [In the Service of the People]. Moscow (in Russian).

<sup>10</sup> Platonov V.I. 1991. *Zapiski admirala* [Admiral's Notes]. Moscow (in Russian).

<sup>11</sup> Risto Heikki Ryti (1889–1956) was a Finnish politician who served as Prime Minister from 1939 to 1940 and as President of Finland from 1940 to 1944. In 1940, he signed the Berlin Pact, committing Finland to participate in military actions against the USSR alongside Germany. In 1946, a Finnish court sentenced him to 10 years in prison for collaborating with the Nazis, but he was released in 1949 due to health reasons.

<sup>12</sup> Juho Kusti Paasikivi (1870–1956) was a Finnish politician who held the office of Prime Minister in 1918 and again from 1944 to 1946 and served as President of Finland from 1946 to 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Väinö Alfred Tanner (1881–1966) was a Finnish politician and leader of the Social Democratic Party. He served as Prime Minister of Finland from 1926 to 1927, Minister of Finance from 1937 to 1939 and again from 1942 to 1944, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1939 to 1940, and Minister of Trade from 1940 to 1942. In 1946, he was sentenced to five and a half years in prison but was granted amnesty in 1948.

<sup>14</sup> Mannerheim C.G. 1999. *Memuary* [Memoirs]. Moscow (in Russian).

insights into the history of Soviet-Finnish political and diplomatic relations, alongside the military conflict between the two nations.<sup>15</sup>

### Cause and pretext for Finland's attack on the Soviet Union

Archival evidence and related academic research indicate that the convergence of military and political objectives between Berlin and Helsinki in late 1940 and early 1941 led not only to active military collaboration but also to the development of coordinated plans for an attack on the USSR (Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 2010; Meinander, 2020, p. 224). Finnish researchers highlight that Finland's motivation to prepare for an attack on the USSR stemmed from the military and political leadership's hopes for a Soviet defeat in the forthcoming war with Germany, which they believed would enable Finland to reclaim territories they considered unjustly lost (Jokipii, 1999, p. 133, 139).

By the summer of 1941, Finland's war preparations had reached their final phase. On June 9, President R. Ryti informed the Finnish government about the arrival of German troops in Northern Finland and the necessity of partial mobilization. Emphasizing the necessity and lack of choice in cooperating with Germany due to the looming war, Ryti stated that Germany was Finland's only reliable ally. The following day, Finnish forces began deploying to border positions. The momentum toward conflict was irreversible. On June 14, Helsinki approved a schedule for conscript mobilization and preparations for the offensive against the USSR. By June 20, all Finnish military units were on alert, positioned in shelters, and awaiting the order to commence hostilities.

Helsinki was merely waiting for the right opportunity and seeking a justified pretext to invade Soviet territory. Both the German Army Norway and the Finnish Karelian and Southeastern armies were fully prepared for the assault. The Finnish military apparatus was set in place; all that remained was to pull the trigger.

During the first half of 1941, the USSR received reports from the Finnish capital through diplomatic and intelligence channels, which disclosed close military and economic cooperation between Finland and Germany. These included interactions between the generals of both armies, the arrival of German troops and military equipment in Finland, the deployment of Finnish volunteers to Germany for SS recruitment, the construction of fortifications along the Soviet border, and the concentration of Finnish forces along the Soviet frontier and the Hanko Peninsula.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Paasikivi J.K. 2004. *Dnevnik. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. St. Petersburg (in Russian); Tanner V. 2011. *Unohdetut päiväkirjat. Toim. Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L.* Helsinki; Ryti R. *Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940-1944*. Helsinki.

<sup>16</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 3 os., List 8, File 57, Sheets 1520-1524; File 65, Sheets 88-89, 105; Fond 14 os., List 1, File 14, Sheets, 224-226; *Archives of the Russian Federal Security Service Office in the Republic of Karelia*. Counterintelligence Unit Fond, List 1, File 76, Sheets 38-44.

Soviet intelligence reported to Stalin and Molotov on June 4 and 13, 1941, about Germany's and Finland's military preparations, including Finland's mobilization and the buildup of German forces in the country. A Helsinki-based agent indicated that these actions were intended to exert psychological pressure on the Soviet Union but also acknowledged the possibility of a direct German attack on the USSR with Finnish support.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, while the Soviet foreign intelligence service was aware of Helsinki's military preparations, the conflicting nature of the information hindered effective decision-making in preparing to counter a potential enemy assault.<sup>18</sup>

### **Finland enters the war against the USSR**

On June 22, 1941, Hitler announced the attack on the USSR and revealed the existence of German-Finnish military plans along the northern borders, highlighting the military cooperation between the two nations.<sup>19</sup>

Although the Finnish government declared its neutrality, this stance lasted only three days, until June 25. During this period, Finland was actively preparing to invade Soviet territory, bolstered by Hitler's promises of full support for Finnish people and the military.

Moscow was anxiously awaiting Helsinki's next move. On June 23, Molotov attempted to dissuade Finland from joining Germany against the USSR by communicating through the Finnish chargé d'affaires, P. Hynninen.

Meanwhile, morale in Helsinki was high. Mannerheim believed that the German offensive was progressing successfully. The Red Army struggled to mount effective resistance, suffering from a severe shortage of experienced senior officers due to pre-war purges.<sup>20</sup>

On June 25, 1941, Soviet forces launched extensive air raids targeting airfields on Finnish soil that were used by both German and Finnish combat aircraft.<sup>21</sup> On the same day, during an emergency session of the Finnish Parliament, Prime Minister J. Rangell announced that the country could no longer guarantee its security and called for a decisive choice in the ongoing war. At this meeting, Moscow was accused

<sup>17</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 3 os., List 8, File 57, Sheets 1746-1747; File 58, Sheets 1861-1862.

<sup>18</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 3 os., List 8, File 58, Sheets 1847-1852.

<sup>19</sup> *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voina – den' za dnyom: po materialam rassekrechennykh operativnykh svodok General'nogo shtaba Krasnoy armii* [The Great Patriotic War – Day by Day: Based on Declassified Operational Reports of the General Staff of the Red Army]. 2008. Vol. 1: *Vtorzhenie, 22 iyunya – 30 sentyabrya 1941 g.* [The Invasion, June 22 – September 30, 1941]. Moscow. P. 546-547 (in Russian); *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 3 os., List 8, File 9, Sheets 139-140.

<sup>20</sup> Paasikivi J. K. 2004. *Dnevnik. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. P. 93-94 (in Russian).

<sup>21</sup> *Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*. Fond 28 (16), List 1071, File 1, Sheets 39-40, 60.

of wrongdoing related to the allegedly unfair 1940 Soviet-Finnish peace treaty. Rangell strongly asserted that Moscow aimed to annihilate the Finnish people. The Finnish Parliament faced a crucial choice between declaring war or remaining neutral.

In reality, the Finnish political and military leadership had little doubt about their stance. This is demonstrated by Finnish President Ryti's declaration of war on the Soviet Union on June 26. Officially, Helsinki justified its entry into the war as a defensive measure that necessitated an offensive. While the Soviet air raids on Finnish territory served as the immediate cause of the conflict, Finland's underlying motive, as noted earlier, was the desire to reclaim lost territories (Bishop, McNab, 2005, p. 39).

The invasion of Soviet territory by Finnish and German forces (operating from Finland) commenced on June 29, following Mannerheim's call for a "holy war of liberation" against a longstanding adversary. The attacking force comprised 17 Finnish divisions, the German Army Norway, and units from Germany's Luftflotte 5 (Air Fleet 5). Under Mannerheim's overall strategic command, the offensive targeted the Murmansk, Kandalaksha, Kexholm, and Vyborg sectors. Finnish and German troops aimed to conduct "defensive battles" to capture a segment of the railway toward Murmansk and disrupt rail traffic.<sup>22</sup>

Despite suffering heavy casualties, Soviet forces succeeded in halting the offensive, preventing the fall of the city and port of Murmansk, and securing the Kirov Railway section from capture.<sup>23</sup>

The plan for the Finnish East Karelian campaign was developed in coordination with the German military command, with the timing of the Finnish offensive synchronized with Wehrmacht leadership (Meinander, 2014, p. 229).

Hitler's persistent demands demonstrate that Berlin's military strategy focused on the rapid capture of Leningrad. He insisted on the linking up of German and Finnish forces, firmly believing that Leningrad had to be taken (Mainander, 2014, p. 551).

However, the front developed differently than planned.

Finnish forces, enjoying numerical superiority, made significant advances into Soviet territory. By September, they had reached the 1939 state border and captured Vyborg; in October, they took Petrozavodsk; and by December, Medvezhyegorsk was occupied. The Finnish advance then stalled. Approximately two-thirds of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic was under Finnish control, with the frontline situated about 30 kilometers northwest of Leningrad (Myagkov, 2008, p. 151). What followed on the Soviet-Finnish front was a prolonged "positional warfare."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mannerheim C. G. 1999. *Memuary* [Memoirs]. Moscow. P. 379 (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> For more detailed information on the casualties, see: *Velikaya Otechestvennaya bez grifa sekretnosti. Kniga poter* [The Great Patriotic War Without a Secrecy Stamp. Book of Casualties]. 2009. The Latest Reference Edition. Moscow. P. 81-83 (in Russian).

<sup>24</sup> Meretskov K.A. 1984. *Na sluzhbe narodu* [In the Service of the People]. Moscow. P. 364 (in Russian).

## Foreign policy maneuvers around Finland in 1941–1942

The hostilities on the Soviet-Finnish front were accompanied by intense behind-the-scenes rivalry involving diplomats and intelligence agents from the USSR, the United States, Great Britain, Sweden, and Germany. These actors sought to influence Finnish politicians and involve Finland in their countries' foreign policy agendas.

Starting in August 1941, Moscow pursued diplomatic efforts, urging London to sever diplomatic ties with Finland and pressing Washington to encourage Finland to negotiate with the USSR.

On August 4, 1941, Stalin requested Roosevelt's mediation in talks with the Finns, indicating that Moscow was willing to offer "some territorial concessions to Finland."<sup>25</sup> Between August and October 1941, the U.S. repeatedly proposed through diplomatic channels that Finland halt its offensive on Soviet territory and initiate peace negotiations with Moscow. However, Finnish leaders, asserting that "the fate of Finland is linked to the fate of Germany,"<sup>26</sup> remained confident in their victory over the USSR and hoped to claim a share of the spoils. Finland's responses to U.S. proposals in 1941 were negative, and withdrawing from the war was deemed unfeasible.

For Finnish politicians, the occupation of East Karelia and Petrozavodsk represented a valuable bargaining chip for future peace talks with Moscow. Mannerheim believed these gains created the conditions to eliminate threats to Finland's security and secure lasting peace, reinforced by the outcomes of a successful war.<sup>27</sup>

Hitler's unexpected visit to Suomi in 1942 to celebrate Mannerheim's anniversary, followed by Mannerheim's return trip to Germany, risked causing a break in diplomatic relations between the United States and Finland. Finnish politicians and diplomats worked tirelessly to prevent such a rupture, recognizing Washington as a crucial lifeline for Helsinki in the West and a key factor in preserving Finnish independence.<sup>28</sup> For an extended period, Finland successfully convinced the U.S. government of the importance of maintaining diplomatic ties and continuing bilateral dialogue.<sup>29</sup>

On September 25, 1942, U.S. Ambassador A. Schoenfeld<sup>30</sup> delivered a note to Finnish President Ryti urging Finland not to engage in offensives at Berlin's behest. In response, Ryti assured the ambassador that Finnish foreign policy was focused on

<sup>25</sup> *Perepiska Predsedatelya Soveta ministrov SSSR s prezidentami SShA i premier-ministrami Velikobritanii vo vremya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voiny 1941–1945 gg.* [Correspondence of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR with the Presidents of the USA and Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945]. 1957. Vol. 2. Moscow. P. 9 (in Russian).

<sup>26</sup> Paasikivi J. K. 2004. *Dnevnik. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. P. 102 (in Russian).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121, 127.

<sup>28</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 3 os., List 9, File 16, Sheet 284.

<sup>29</sup> Paasikivi J. K. 2004. *Dnevnik. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. P. 172, 208 (in Russian).

<sup>30</sup> Hans Frederik Arthur Schoenfeld (1889–1952), American diplomat, U.S. Ambassador to Finland (1937–1942).

defending the nation's independence and protecting it from Moscow's aggression. He also argued that Soviet propaganda had misled the American public about Finland's intentions.<sup>31</sup>

Finnish politicians placed great hopes in the Atlantic Charter, which declared that the countries involved would renounce territorial expansion after the war.

However, the arguments presented by Finnish diplomats failed to convince, and in 1942 the United States withdrew its ambassador from Helsinki, reducing diplomatic relations but maintaining a presence.

Diplomatic efforts by London to persuade Finland to exit the war between August and November 1941 were unsuccessful, leading Great Britain to declare war on Finland on December 6, 1941.

Meanwhile, ongoing contacts between Soviet and British diplomats and intelligence officers produced positive outcomes, with London recognizing in December 1941 the legitimacy of the border established by the USSR with Finland in 1940.<sup>32</sup>

During the war years, Sweden emerged as an active regional player, making significant efforts to convince Finland to exit the war. Swedish politicians, diplomats, businessmen, bankers, journalists, and publishers all sought various means to influence the Finnish political elite. For instance, Marcus Wallenberg Jr.,<sup>33</sup> a prominent Swedish businessman and banker, held secret meetings in Stockholm with J. Paasikivi in late December 1941 and early January 1942. During the meetings, they discussed the necessity of establishing communication channels between Helsinki and Moscow. However, in 1941–1942, the Finnish side largely ignored these Swedish initiatives, considering proposals for contact with Moscow inappropriate.<sup>34</sup>

### Cooperation between Finnish and German intelligence services

Cooperation between Finnish and German intelligence services began in 1936 with the signing of a formal agreement (Laidinen, Verigin, 2013, p. 200–201).<sup>35</sup> This

<sup>31</sup> «Käymme omaa erillistä sotaamme»: Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940–1944. 2006. Helsinki. P. 212; Mannerheim C. G. 1999. *Memoirs* [Memoirs]. Moscow. P. 437–438 (in Russian).

<sup>32</sup> *Organy gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voine* [The State Security Organs of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War]. 2003. Collection of Documents. Vol. 3, Book 2: *Ot oborony k nastupleniyu. 1 iyulya – 31 dekabrya 1942 g.* [From Defense to Offense. July 1 – December 31, 1942]. Federal Counterintelligence Service of the Russian Federation, Academy of the Federal Counterintelligence Service of the Russian Federation; Head of group of authors V.P. Yampolsky. Moscow: Rus'. P. 71–73 (in Russian).

<sup>33</sup> Marcus Wallenberg Jr. (1899–1982) was a Swedish financier who became CEO of Stockholms Enskilda Bank, one of Sweden's largest banks, in 1946. He was the great-uncle of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat renowned for saving Jews in Budapest during World War II. Along with his brother Jacob, Marcus served on the boards of nearly 50 Swedish companies.

<sup>34</sup> Paasikivi J. K. 2004. *Dnevnik. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. P. 144–149 (in Russian).

<sup>35</sup> *Organy gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voine* [The State Security Organs of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War]. 2003. Collection of Documents. Vol. 1, Book 1. Moscow. P. 146 (in Russian).

collaboration encompassed the exchange of delegations and intelligence, joint operations against the USSR, and gathering information on the Soviet Union's military and economic capabilities.<sup>36</sup>

On the orders of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris,<sup>37</sup> chief of the Abwehr (German military intelligence service), a division of the Abwehr-Ausland – Kriegsorganisation Finnland (KOF), or Bureau Cellarius<sup>38</sup> – was established in Finland on the eve of World War II.

During the war years, Finnish military intelligence consisted of the 2nd Department of the Finnish Army General Staff and intelligence offices located in Rovaniemi, Kajaani, Petsamo, and Salla. It also included the reconnaissance and sabotage unit, or separate partisan battalion, which was organized into several companies: two based in Kajaani conducting operations in the northern sector of the Karelian Front; one stationed near Petrozavodsk in the southern sector of the Karelian Front; and one in Rovaniemi, operating in the Kandalaksha direction and the Petsamo area of the Murmansk region.<sup>39</sup>

The ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk were key targets for Finnish and German intelligence services, which from August 1941 monitored the arrival of transport vessels carrying military equipment, weapons, supplies, and food from Great Britain and the United States.<sup>40</sup>

Intelligence agents focused on gathering information about Murmansk's port infrastructure, including the condition of the berths, the number of ships docked, security measures, air defense systems, the state of Kola Bay and its fairway, as well as the positions of the trawling fleet. Additionally, they collected data on the deployment of Soviet military units, airfields, and warehouses, along with reports on the impact of German air raids on Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, the ports, and surrounding areas.<sup>41</sup>

Well-trained and well-equipped enemy reconnaissance and sabotage teams, ranging from 5 to 30 members and operating up to 150 km behind Red Army lines, were deployed to gather intelligence. They visually observed the movement of trains on railways and vehicles on highways, including army and NKVD troop movements,

<sup>36</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. File N-21105.

<sup>37</sup> Wilhelm Franz Canaris (1887–1945) was an Admiral and the chief of the German military intelligence and counterintelligence agency, the Abwehr, from 1935 to 1944.

<sup>38</sup> The Bureau Cellarius was a division of the Abwehr operating in Finland and Estonia, named after Captain Alexander Cellarius, who led it from 1941. It was established in Helsinki in 1939 and later moved to Tallinn following the occupation of Estonia.

<sup>39</sup> For more details on the activities of the Finnish special services, see (Khristoforov, 2018, p. 91–164).

<sup>40</sup> Platonov V.I. 1991. *Zapiski admirala* [Admiral's Notes]. Moscow. P. 194 (in Russian).

<sup>41</sup> *Organy gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voine* [The State Security Organs of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War]. 2003. Collection of Documents. Vol. 3, Book 1: *Krushenie «blitzkriga» (1 yanvarya – 30 iyunya 1942 goda)* [The Failure of the "Blitzkrieg" (January 1 – June 30, 1942)]. Federal Counterintelligence Service of the Russian Federation, Academy of the Federal Counterintelligence Service of the Russian Federation; Head of group of authors V.P. Yampolsky. Moscow: Rus'. P. 471–472 (in Russian); Platonov V.I. 1991. *Zapiski admirala* [Admiral's Notes]. Moscow. P. 194–195, 212 (in Russian).

conducted covert photography of military facilities and fortifications, attempted to capture prisoners for intelligence interrogation, and carried out sabotage on railway lines. Finnish intelligence agents gathered detailed information on the condition and capacity of railway tracks, security systems of cities, stations, and bridges, air defense installations, and the situation at stations such as Belomorsk, Sumposad, Njuhtša, Maloshuyka, and Vonguda. They also monitored the deployment of military units, warehouses, bases, anti-aircraft batteries, and airfields, the capacities of the Belomorsk and Onega ports, and the presence of steamships in these areas (Khristoforov, 2018, p. 113).

### **Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers in Stockholm**

From 1941 to 1944, the primary sources of information on Finland's political, military, and economic situation were the Soviet diplomatic missions in London and Stockholm, along with the intelligence officers operating under diplomatic cover within these missions. This reliance arose because the Soviet diplomatic mission in Helsinki and Soviet undercover intelligence agents in Finland ceased operations in late June 1941, following the declaration of war on the Soviet Union and the expulsion of Soviet diplomats.

Military intelligence was received in Moscow by P.M. Fitin,<sup>42</sup> head of the 1st Directorate of the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) of the USSR, from the intelligence branches of the NKVD/NKGB in the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic, the NKGB/NKVD offices in the Leningrad region, and the military counter-intelligence of the Northern Fleet.<sup>43</sup>

In the latter half of 1941 and throughout 1942, Soviet intelligence reported that the Finnish leadership – confident in Germany's impending victory – was unwilling to negotiate with the USSR. Finnish politicians and diplomats deemed negotiations with Moscow inappropriate, while the Finnish military remained assured of their own success.<sup>44</sup>

The Soviet undercover agents in London gathered intelligence on Finland by leveraging its connections within British special services. For instance, in September 1942, they received information indicating that the Finnish General Staff predicted the war between Germany and the USSR would not end in 1942. Consequently, the Finnish

<sup>42</sup> Pavel Mikhailovich Fitin (1907–1971) was a senior Soviet security official and Lieutenant General (from 1945). He began his career in the security agencies in 1938 and served as head of the 1st Directorate of the NKGB of the USSR from February 26 to July 31, 1941; then as head of the 1st Directorate of the NKVD of the USSR from July 31, 1941, to May 12, 1943; and subsequently as head of the 1st Directorate of the NKGB/MGB (Ministry of State Security) of the USSR from May 12, 1943, to July 15, 1946.

<sup>43</sup> *Archives of the Russian Federal Security Service Office in the Republic of Karelia*. Counterintelligence Unit Fond, List 1, File 76, Sheets 9–14, 22–26, 28–36.

<sup>44</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 3 os., List 8, File 15, Sheet 58; List 9, File 7, Sheet 167; Fond 40, List 19a, File 1, Sheet 166.

command's strategy focused on defensive combat operations, minimizing personnel losses, and maintaining occupied territories. In October 1942, Soviet intelligence first learned of emerging sentiments among some Finnish politicians favoring an exit from the war, although they sought to understand Moscow's conditions for such a move.<sup>45</sup>

From July 1941, the main source of Soviet intelligence on Finland was a station disguised as part of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Stockholm. The Soviet Foreign Intelligence Service resident stationed in Stockholm was B.A. Yartsev,<sup>46</sup> officially accredited as an adviser to the Soviet diplomatic mission in Sweden.

Despite Yartsev's covert role, the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the foreign diplomatic community in Sweden were well aware of the status of Soviet diplomats and their influence in Moscow. This was evident from the attention Yartsev received from foreign diplomats and journalists. For example, the Finnish envoy to Sweden, J.A. Wasastjerna,<sup>47</sup> closely monitored all individuals in contact with Yartsev, investigated their backgrounds, and reported to Helsinki on the Soviet diplomat's proposals regarding armistice negotiations.<sup>48</sup>

It was nearly impossible to hide the intelligence affiliations of embassy staff. As L.V. Shebarshin, head of the First (Intelligence) Directorate of the KGB of the USSR, observed, even the non-intelligence personnel at an embassy were well aware of the backgrounds of intelligence officers, including where they studied and worked. This exposure is unavoidable as long as intelligence agencies worldwide continue to use diplomatic posts as cover.<sup>49</sup>

On November 7, 1942, the Soviet diplomatic mission in Stockholm held a celebratory reception attended by many guests. Among them was R. Lindström, editor-in-chief of the Swedish newspaper *Social-Demokraten*, who offered to act as an intermediary between Soviet and Finnish representatives regarding peace negotiations.

Seeing potential in this contact, Yartsev sought Moscow's permission in November and December 1942 to continue communications with Lindström to better understand Finland's political situation and the prospects for Finnish-Soviet peace talks. However, Moscow advised against further meetings with Lindström.<sup>50</sup>

The author of this article believes that Moscow's negative response was influenced by rivalry between the foreign policy and intelligence agencies. The People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs feared that Soviet intelligence officers might gain significant

<sup>45</sup> Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia. Fond 3 os., List 9, File 15, Sheet 108; File 16, Sheet 113.

<sup>46</sup> Boris Arkadyevich Yartsev (real name Rybkin) (1899–1947) was a Soviet intelligence officer and diplomat who served as Soviet intelligence resident in Stockholm from 1941 to 1943, operating undercover as an adviser to the Soviet diplomatic mission in Sweden.

<sup>47</sup> Jarl Axel Wasastjerna (1896–1972) was a Professor at the University of Helsinki from 1925 to 1940 and again from 1943 to 1946 and served as Finnish Envoy to Sweden between 1940 and 1943.

<sup>48</sup> Tanner V. 2011. Unohdetut päiväkirjat. Toim. Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L. Helsinki. P. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Shebarshin L.V. 1992. *Ruka Moskvy: zapiski nachalnika sovetskoy razvedki* [Notes by the Head of Soviet Intelligence]. Moscow: Center-100. P. 49 (in Russian).

<sup>50</sup> Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia. Fond 3 os., List 9, File 18, Sheet 84.

credit for organizing negotiations and thus overshadow the diplomatic corps. Molotov's subsequent decisions aimed to prevent intelligence officers from taking the lead in preparing peace talks.

In February 1943, Swedish diplomat Söderblom<sup>51</sup> contacted Yartsev, noting that Swedish politics hoped the USSR would adopt a prudent stance to preserve the independence of all countries after the war.<sup>52</sup>

American diplomats also showed interest in Yartsev and sought to meet with him. For instance, Green, an adviser at the U.S. Embassy in Stockholm, emphasized to Yartsev the importance of Moscow demonstrating initiative and generosity in offering peace to Finland.<sup>53</sup>

The U.S. Charge d'affaires to Finland, R.M. McClintock, who frequently visited Stockholm, regularly sought opportunities to meet with Soviet diplomats, especially Yartsev, whom he referred to as "Soviet mission's expert on Finnish issues." McClintock assured Yartsev that Washington was prepared to mediate negotiations with Finland, argued that Mannerheim and Ryti were not supporting the German offensive on Leningrad, and maintained that the Finnish leadership recognized Germany's impending defeat.<sup>54</sup>

McClintock persistently proposed organizing a meeting in Stockholm between Finnish peace movement supporters and Soviet diplomats – such as A.M. Kollontai, B.D. Vinogradov, or Yartsev – to discuss negotiation terms. He believed the Finns were "pursuing a foolish policy" by refusing to initiate talks with the USSR and was surprised they failed to acknowledge the setbacks of the German army and the strength of Soviet forces.<sup>55</sup>

Z.I. Yartseva<sup>56</sup>, a Soviet intelligence officer in Stockholm working under the cover of a press attaché, also attracted attention. In mid-August 1943, Severin, editor of *Aftontidningen* newspaper, invited her to meet with Brotherus, the Finnish press attaché, to discuss the conditions for initiating negotiations between the USSR and Finland. Severin believed that an exchange of views and preliminary talks could take place "between the lesser officials of diplomatic missions" without involving higher-ranking envoys.<sup>57</sup>

However, Molotov was firmly against intelligence agents taking the lead in contacts with the Finns. On August 17, 1943, he instructed Yartseva to avoid engaging in Finnish-related matters.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Staffan Söderblom was a Swedish diplomat who served as Swedish envoy to Moscow from 1944 to 1946.

<sup>52</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 85, Sheets 184-185.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, Sheets 173-172.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, File 87, Sheets 165-163.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, File 90, Sheets 4-9.

<sup>56</sup> Zoya Ivanovna Yartseva (real name Voskresenskaya, married name Rybkina) (1907–1992) was a Soviet intelligence officer and children's writer. She was awarded the USSR State Prize in 1968 and held the rank of Colonel in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

<sup>57</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 90, Sheet 20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, Sheets 21, 31-34.

Interdepartmental rivalry was evident within the Soviet diplomatic mission in Stockholm itself. The Soviet intelligence resident, stationed within the mission, operated independently, without informing Kollontai about his contacts with foreign representatives, the intelligence gathered, or planned activities. Kollontai was frustrated by Yartsev's actions but lacked the authority to influence him. She often complained that intelligence officers were conducting negotiations behind her back. Conversely, Kollontai did not share the details of her own efforts to persuade Finland to exit the war with Yartsev or the intelligence station staff in Sweden.

Mutual distrust and secrecy hindered effective coordination, occasionally causing tense situations and strained relations within the diplomatic mission. For example, in May 1943, People's Commissar for State Security V.N. Merkulov informed Stalin that the intelligence station in Stockholm had covertly seized materials from Kollontai's personal archive. This archive included her diaries from 1911 to 1935, personal letters, manuscripts on various topics, copies of business correspondence during her overseas work from 1925 to 1938, and photographs.<sup>59</sup> At the time, Kollontai was ill and unaware of the archive's seizure.

The secret operation by Soviet intelligence to confiscate Kollontai's archive was justified as a measure to safeguard the documents. Only after Kollontai's recovery did deputy intelligence resident E.T. Sinitsyn, who arrived in Stockholm in August 1943 and was not involved in the operation, inform her about the fate of the seized materials. In 1946, following Stalin's instructions, the archive was returned to her.<sup>60</sup>

Soviet intelligence officers played a significant role in efforts to bring Finland out of the war, but the leading contribution came from the distinguished Soviet diplomat Alexandra Kollontai.

To ensure smooth cooperation between intelligence officers and diplomats despite their different departmental affiliations, it is essential to establish a personal relationship of trust between the Soviet ambassador to the host country and the intelligence resident.<sup>61</sup> Without this trust, mutual suspicion and accusations are likely to arise, undermining the effectiveness of both diplomats and intelligence personnel.

### Struggle for Finland's withdrawal from the war (1943–1944)

The positional fighting of 1942–1943 held little strategic importance for either side. Both Moscow and Helsinki had their own reasons for avoiding escalation along the front. The Soviet Union lacked the strategic reserves needed for a major offensive

<sup>59</sup> *Pochemu Stalin pomogal Kollontai i ne dal khoda donosam na neyo* [Why Stalin Supported Kollontai and Did Not Act on the Accusations Against Her]. Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2015. URL: <https://rg.ru/2015/02/11/rodina-kollontay.html?ysclid=lkwt87w5je206013220> (accessed: August 4, 2023) (in Russian).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> For more details on the confidential relationship between a Soviet ambassador and an intelligence resident, see: Shebarshin L.V. 1992. *Ruka Moskvy: zapiski nachalnika sovetskoy razvedki* [Notes by the Head of Soviet Intelligence]. Moscow: Center-100. P. 48–49 (in Russian).

against Finland, as its resources were tied up in intense and costly battles on the Soviet-German front throughout 1942 and 1943. Major engagements such as the Battles of the Caucasus, Stalingrad, and Kursk demanded the full focus of the Red Army. Only after the decisive Soviet victory at Kursk, which marked a turning point in the Great Patriotic War, was the Soviet Supreme High Command able to turn its attention to the Karelian front and intensify operations there.

In Finland, the prospect of negotiating with the USSR was first seriously considered in early February 1943, following the defeat of the German army and its allies at Stalingrad.

On February 3, 1943, during a meeting at Mannerheim's Headquarters, Finland's top leaders – Ryti, Rangell, Witting, Tanner, Walden, and Mannerheim – discussed for the first time a new strategic objective: securing Finland's honorable exit from the war and establishing acceptable relations with the Soviet Union. However, a major challenge persisted due to Nazi Germany's ongoing political, military, and economic influence over Helsinki.<sup>62</sup>

Finland began to see Sweden as a potential mediator in negotiations with the USSR. The terms for Finland's exit from the war became a central topic of discussion among diplomats in both Stockholm and Helsinki, including debates about whether it was wise to emphasize ideological differences between the communist East and the democratic West. However, this approach was soon deemed unproductive, as the USSR and the major Western powers – the United States and Great Britain – were united in their fight against Nazi Germany and its allies.<sup>63</sup>

Following the Red Army's victory at the Battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943, Finnish politicians sought to learn the Soviet Union's preliminary conditions for opening negotiations. The Kremlin, however, viewed this initiative with suspicion, and in August 1943, the Swedish Foreign Ministry was notified of this stance through Kollontai.

Despite challenges, Stockholm continued its efforts to facilitate Soviet-Finnish negotiations, with E. Boheman, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Sweden,<sup>64</sup> playing a key role. Upon approval by Prime Minister P.A. Hansson, Boheman effectively acted as an intermediary between Moscow and Helsinki. In mid-November 1943, during discussions about an armistice with Kollontai, Boheman conveyed Helsinki's willingness to negotiate. On 20 November, after receiving a positive response from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) of the USSR, Kollontai informed Boheman that the Finns could send a delegation to Moscow.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Tanner V. 2011. *Unohdetut päiväkirjat. Toim. Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L. Helsinki; Ryti R. Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940-1944. Helsinki*. P. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Paasikivi J. K. 2004. *Dnevnik. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. P. 268-269 (in Russian).

<sup>64</sup> Erik Carlsson Boheman (1895–1979) was a Swedish diplomat who served as Cabinet Secretary from 1938 to 1944, and later as Ambassador to France (1945–1947), the United Kingdom (1947–1948), and the United States (1948–1958).

<sup>65</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 90, Sheets 41-42.

A few days later, Helsinki officially notified the Swedish Foreign Ministry of its readiness to begin peace talks. The Finns stressed that ceding cities and other territories vital to Finland would not be negotiable. They proposed using the Finnish-Soviet border of 1939 as the starting point for negotiations, allowing for discussion of certain possible adjustments.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, the Soviet government suggested using the 1940 border as the basis for talks.

### The Finnish “swing” of 1943

During the spring and summer of 1943, Helsinki experienced a period of indecision, oscillating between leaning towards the United States and reverting to Germany. Before initiating secret negotiations with Soviet representatives, the Finnish leadership thoroughly weighed all the pros and cons.

Helsinki faced a challenging geopolitical dilemma: it needed to inform Berlin that continuing the war was no longer feasible and to negotiate the withdrawal of German troops from Finnish territory. Equally pressing was the economic issue. Finland had to find a new source of food supplies to replace those previously provided by Germany. On March 27, 1943, Minister for Foreign Affairs C. Ramsay<sup>67</sup> met with his German counterpart, Ribbentrop, and informed him about a U.S. proposal to mediate peace talks between Finland and the USSR. Ribbentrop responded very negatively, insisting that Finland sign a political alliance with Germany, which would require both parties to commit not to make a separate peace with the enemy.<sup>68</sup> Between April and June 1943, the German Foreign Ministry continued to press this demand, but the Finnish side consistently avoided giving a direct response. The German Ambassador to Finland, von Blücher, repeatedly urged President Ryti to agree to the treaty. Ryti, however, explained that such a bilateral agreement could not be presented to the Finnish Parliament because it would become public knowledge, leading to accusations that Germany was pressuring Finland and that Helsinki's foreign policy was dependent on Berlin. He warned that parliamentary debates and public speeches by deputies would harm relations between the two countries.

Finland emerged victorious from the prolonged diplomatic deadlock when, in June, the Finnish envoy in Berlin was informed that the German government no longer insisted on the treaty and had dropped the demand for Helsinki to commit to refraining from a separate peace with the Soviet Union.

Throughout 1943, the United States continued to apply political and diplomatic pressure on Helsinki, aiming to persuade Finland to exit the war. However, the Finnish leadership remained cautious about Washington's mediation efforts, fearing they might provoke a hostile response from Berlin.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, Sheets 51-53.

<sup>67</sup> Carl Henrik Wolter Ramsay (1886–1951), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland (1943–1944).

<sup>68</sup> Tanner V. *Unohdetut päiväkirjat*. Toim. Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L. Helsinki; Ryti R. *Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940-1944*. Helsinki. P. 22–24.

On March 20, 1943, the U.S. Charge d'affaires in Finland, R. McClintock,<sup>69</sup> met with Finnish President Ryti and presented a memorandum from the U.S. government offering mediation services once again. It appeared that the diplomatic momentum was shifting back toward Washington, where there was hope that the new Finnish government would be willing to accept American assistance (Kulikov, 2009, p. 70-84).

On March 22, President Ryti convened a meeting with Linkomies, Mannerheim, Ramsay, Walden, Reinikka, and Tanner, where they decided to request that the Americans obtain the Soviet preliminary conditions for initiating peace negotiations. Although the Finns continued to waver between options, they still placed greater hope on Berlin.

On April 8 and 10, American notes were sent to Ramsay warning against further concessions to German demands. In response, Helsinki maintained that there was no justification for ending the "defensive war."

Viewing Finland's stance on the war and its negotiations with the USSR as unacceptable and pro-German, the U.S. State Department decided to recall all American embassy personnel from Finland. On April 21, McClintock received a coded telegram in Helsinki instructing him to arrange the urgent evacuation of embassy staff to Stockholm. The diplomats began their departure on April 23, but on the morning of April 25, new orders arrived from Washington to cancel the evacuation. This reversal was prompted by Moscow's announcement of the severance of Soviet-Polish diplomatic relations over the "Katyn affair." The United States chose to postpone addressing the Finnish issue to avoid overlapping it with the Polish crisis.<sup>70</sup>

McClintock remained in Helsinki until November 1943, when, following agreements made at the Moscow Conference concerning the Axis powers,<sup>71</sup> Washington authorized a reduction in the level of its diplomatic representation in Finland.<sup>72</sup>

### Exploring the possibility of negotiations and reconciliation

In late July 1943, the Belgian envoy in Stockholm, R. de Croÿ,<sup>73</sup> who maintained extensive contacts within Swedish diplomatic circles, the General Staff, and the Foreign Ministry, informed V.S. Semyonov,<sup>74</sup> counsellor of the Soviet Embassy, that the Finns were seeking an exit from the war. In response, the Soviet diplomat requested

<sup>69</sup> Robert McClintock (1909–1976), Chargé d'Affaires of the United States in Finland (1943–1944).

<sup>70</sup> Tanner V. *Unohdetut päiväkirjat. Toim.* Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L. Helsinki; Ryti R. *Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940–1944*. Helsinki. P. 32; Paasikivi J. K. 2004. *Dnevniki. Voina – prodolzhenie. 11 marta 1941 – 27 iyunya 1944* [Diaries. The Continuation War. March 11, 1941 – June 27, 1944]. P. 259 (in Russian).

<sup>71</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 89, Sheet 165.

<sup>72</sup> Subsequently, he was replaced by Vice Consul West, the third secretary of the U.S. mission. West (born 1911, date of death unknown) served as Vice Consul in Budapest and then, for three months in 1942, as third secretary in Helsinki. He worked in the press bureau of the U.S. mission and headed the Baltic sector. In 1943, he made several trips as a diplomatic courier between Stockholm and Helsinki.

<sup>73</sup> Prince Réginald Charles Alfred de Croÿ (1878–1961), Belgian diplomat, Envoy of Belgium to Sweden (1941–1945).

<sup>74</sup> Vladimir Semyonovich Semyonov (1911–1992), senior counsellor of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Sweden (1942–1945).

clarification on the conditions required to begin negotiations. After analyzing the information provided by the Belgian envoy, Moscow concluded that the initiative likely originated from Washington, which was applying pressure on the Finnish side.<sup>75</sup> On June 30, a reply was sent to the Belgian envoy stating that the Finns could discreetly communicate the preliminary terms for a peace agreement.

During a meeting on August 11 between R. de Croÿ and Semyonov, the Belgian envoy relayed Helsinki's response: the war was being fought solely to safeguard Finland's independence, and the Finnish government reaffirmed its interest in pursuing peace. In Helsinki, only Ryti, Ramsay, and Gripenberg were aware of the proposal to initiate negotiations with Moscow. The Finns expected Soviet representatives to maintain strict confidentiality.<sup>76</sup>

### **The 1943 Moscow Conference: is Finland an Axis Country?**

From October 19 to 30, 1943, the Foreign Ministers of the USSR, Great Britain, and the United States convened for a conference in Moscow.<sup>77</sup> However, none of the conference's final documents mentioned Finland, which disappointed the Finnish and Swedish public.

Washington, which maintained diplomatic relations with Helsinki, took a firm stance. U.S. Secretary of State C. Hull declared: "The Finns should not expect the United States to support them under any circumstances. Nothing is more dangerous for them than to harbor illusions that America will defend their interests if they do not break ties with Germany and demonstrate genuine goodwill."<sup>78</sup> Hull stressed that Finland's pro-German policy was mistaken, criminal, and no longer acceptable.

Meanwhile, Moscow was initially divided on how to address Finland in light of the Moscow Conference's decisions. On November 9, 1943, Molotov issued instructions to Kollontai, noting that the Declaration on General Security applied equally to Hungary, Romania, and Finland. Molotov's position was informed by Roosevelt's message to the U.S. Congress dated September 17, 1943, in which the U.S. President classified Finland alongside Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania as Germany's satellite countries.<sup>79</sup>

Two weeks after the Moscow Conference concluded, Molotov issued new instructions to Kollontai to inform Helsinki – via Swedish diplomats – that the demand for unconditional surrender did not apply to Finland. This decision reflected the Soviet leadership's intention to initiate peace negotiations with Finland.

<sup>75</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 90, Sheets 1-2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, File 90, Sheets 11-15.

<sup>77</sup> *O Moskovskoy konferentsii ministrov inostrannykh del SSSR, SShA i Velikobritanii* [On the Moscow Conference of the Foreign Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, the USA, and Great Britain]. *Bessmertnyi polk [Immortal Regiment] web site*. URL: <https://polk.press/news/stranicy-istorii/o-moskovskoj-konferencii-ministrov-inostrannykh-del-sssr-ssha-i-velikobritanii?ysclid=lkwnxg7bpl661375960> (accessed: August 4, 2023).

<sup>78</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. PF-10055, Folio 1a, Sheet 462 (back page).

<sup>79</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 26, File 206, Sheet 99.

The prolonged diplomatic silence was broken in November 1943 when Kollontai, through Boheman, conveyed that the Finns could begin preparing proposals outlining the conditions for starting negotiations. Kollontai advised that Finland's response should be brief, amicable, and transparent. She emphasized that Finland should avoid making territorial claims beyond its rightful borders and reassured that the USSR had no plans to strip Finland of its independence.<sup>80</sup>

At the end of November 1943, a verdict was anticipated in the case of the so-called "Russian spy" Hella Wuolijoki,<sup>81</sup> with a possible harsh sentence, including the death penalty. This situation was sensitive for Kollontai, who maintained friendly relations with Wuolijoki. Considering these circumstances, the Finnish authorities decided to postpone the sentencing.

In reply, the Finnish Foreign Ministry suggested using the border line established by the Treaty of Tartu as the basis and emphasized the importance of guaranteeing Finland's sovereignty and allowing it to retain key defensive positions under its control.

Moscow responded favorably to Helsinki's proposal but insisted that acceptance of the border adjustments outlined in the 1940 agreement be a prerequisite for beginning negotiations, with other matters to be addressed later.

However, Finnish politicians were unwilling to negotiate on the Soviet government's terms. On December 31, 1943, the foreign affairs commission formally approved a negative response to the Soviet Union, effectively halting the initiation of negotiations.<sup>82</sup>

### **On the brink of the armistice (February–April 1944)**

In January 1944, the forces of the Leningrad, Volkhov, and 2nd Baltic Fronts launched a major offensive against the German Army Group North, culminating in the decisive lifting of the siege of Leningrad. The German defeat near Leningrad and Novgorod had a significant impact on the strategic situation on the Karelian Isthmus. In February 1944, to pressure Finland into commencing negotiations, Soviet air forces carried out bombing raids on military targets across the country, including Helsinki (Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 2010, p. 248).

In February 1944, through the mediation of M. Wallenberg, Kollontai met in Stockholm with the Finnish representative J.K. Paasikivi, who, although not holding any official government position at the time, acted on behalf of the Finnish government. During their meeting, Kollontai presented Paasikivi with the Soviet demands known as the "six points" (Khristoforov, 2018, p. 202).

<sup>80</sup> Tanner V. *Unohdetut päiväkirjat. Toim. Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L.* Helsinki; Ryti R. *Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940-1944.* Helsinki. P. 60–67.

<sup>81</sup> Hella Wuolijoki (1886–1954) was a Finnish writer. During the Soviet-Finnish War, she was under covert surveillance by the Finnish counterintelligence, which suspected her of spying for the USSR. In 1943, she was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. After the end of the Soviet-Finnish War, she was released.

<sup>82</sup> Tanner V. *Unohdetut päiväkirjat. Toim. Rautkallio H., Lehtinen L.* Helsinki; Ryti R. *Risto Rytin päiväkirjat 1940-1944.* Helsinki. P. 64–67.

The first three points required Finland to sever ties with Germany and intern German troops; to restore the 1940 Soviet-Finnish treaty and withdraw Finnish forces to the 1940 border; and to repatriate Soviet and Allied prisoners of war, as well as Soviet citizens detained in Finnish concentration camps.

The remaining three points (4, 5, and 6) addressed the demobilization of the Finnish army, compensation for damages inflicted on the Soviet Union during military operations and occupation of Soviet territory, and the status of the Petsamo region. These issues were proposed to be discussed further during negotiations.

On February 23 and 24, a meeting of the Finnish government's foreign affairs commission was held in Helsinki, attended by Ryti, Linkomies, Mannerheim, Ramsay, Walden, and Tanner. At the meeting, Paasikivi reported that while the Soviet demands were very harsh for the Finnish government, they were still considered acceptable. He recommended beginning negotiations, given the worsening military situation.<sup>83</sup>

However, the Finnish leadership disagreed, and a negative response was sent to Moscow through Stockholm.

Despite this, Boheman continued his mediation efforts, holding meetings alternately with Kollontai and Finnish representatives. The Swedish mediators urged the Finns to resume negotiations and formally request an armistice from Moscow. On March 18, Molotov sent a telegram to Stockholm stating that the Soviet government had no objections to Finnish government representatives coming to Moscow to discuss the Soviet terms of the armistice. Moscow also expressed its appreciation for Stockholm's mediation, with Molotov instructing Kollontai to convey thanks to the King of Sweden, the Swedish government, and personally to Boheman for their contributions to the peace process.<sup>84</sup>

On March 26, 1944, a Finnish delegation comprising J.K. Paasikivi, C. Enckell,<sup>85</sup> and G. Enckell<sup>86</sup> arrived in Moscow. Molotov and V.G. Dekanozov held three meetings with the Finnish representatives.

Among the Finnish delegates, J. K. Paasikivi and C. Enckell held differing views on negotiation tactics, the current situation, and the urgency of reaching a truce. Paasikivi advocated accepting the Soviet terms and concluding a ceasefire. In contrast, Enckell believed Finland should press for more favorable conditions and reject the borders established by the 1940 peace treaty. He also found the proposed demobilization terms for the Finnish army humiliating. Enckell expressed distrust toward the Soviets, warning that peace could be jeopardized if they were trusted prematurely. He suggested waiting until the outcome of the Soviet-German war became clearer before deciding to begin negotiations.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 4 os, List 2, File 2, Sheets 1040-1041.

<sup>84</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 12, Folder 27, File 155, Sheet 10.

<sup>85</sup> Carl Johan Alexis Enckell (1876–1959) was a Finnish politician and diplomat. He served as Finland's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1918–1919, 1922, 1924, and from 1944 to 1950.

<sup>86</sup> Georg Enckell, a Finnish civil servant and vice-judge. Son of Oskar Enckell. During the negotiations, he acted as interpreter and secretary.

<sup>87</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 4 os, List 2, File 2, Sheets 996-998.

The Finnish government, parliament, and public all responded negatively to the Soviet armistice terms. The press expressed that Finland aspired to remain an independent nation and live freely, but the Soviet conditions left no room for such aspirations. Newspapers claimed that “the entire peaceful discussion has become completely unnecessary and meaningless” (Khristoforov, 2018, p. 202).

Consequently, on April 18, the Swedish Foreign Ministry received a rejection of the Soviet armistice terms from Helsinki. Boheman reluctantly conveyed the Finnish government’s response to Kollontai. The spring of 1944 failed to bring a resolution to this challenging issue.

To pressure the Finnish government into a more conciliatory stance, the Karelian Front army launched an offensive on June 9, 1944, breaking through Finnish defensive lines. It was only with substantial support from German air forces that the Finns managed to halt the Red Army’s advance by mid-July.

### **Helsinki’s dilemma: continue the war or seek peace (August–September 1944)**

The potential consequences of the Soviet offensive were clear to the Finnish government. G.A. Gripenberg<sup>88</sup> reached out to Boheman, expressing Finland’s willingness to cease hostilities and seek peace. However, at 9 a.m. on June 23, Stockholm received a coded telegram from Moscow stating that the Soviet government no longer trusted Helsinki’s verbal assurances and demanded written commitments – a demand the Finns understood as a call for unconditional surrender.<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile, German Ambassador Blücher and Ribbentrop, who arrived in Helsinki on June 22, actively pressured President Ryti to pledge that Finland would not pursue a separate peace with Moscow and would instead align with Germany.

Confronted with opposing demands from Moscow and Berlin, Helsinki faced a stark dilemma: whether to continue the war or to seek peace. A decisive choice had to be made. After consulting with legal advisors, Ryti decided and on June 26 signed a personal pledge committing Finland to continue the war in alignment with Germany’s foreign policy. In return, Germany provided military and technical support. As a result, Finland lost the Soviet Union’s trust, and on June 30, 1944, the United States officially cut off diplomatic ties with Finland.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Georg Achates Gripenberg (1890–1975) was a Finnish diplomat who served as envoy to the United Kingdom (1933–1942), the Vatican (1942–1943), and Sweden (1943–1956).

<sup>89</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 12, Folder 19, File 108, Sheet 217; (Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 2010, p. 251).

<sup>90</sup> The United States reestablished diplomatic relations with Finland following the end of World War II. The U.S. diplomatic mission in Helsinki was reopened on March 1, 1945, and full diplomatic relations were officially restored on September 1, 1954.

Moscow declared that it would no longer engage with President Ryti and that the Soviet-Finnish negotiations were effectively closed. Finland found itself on the brink of a severe political, economic, and military crisis. After prolonged internal political debates, Mannerheim agreed to assume the presidency following Ryti's resignation (Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 2010, p. 255).

On August 17, W. Keitel, head of the Wehrmacht High Command, arrived in Finland on behalf of Hitler. His mission was to ascertain Mannerheim's intentions as the new president. Mannerheim made it clear that he did not consider himself bound by Ryti's personal commitments not to initiate peace negotiations with the USSR without Germany's consent (Meinander, 2020, p. 256).

Helsinki intensified its efforts to secure an armistice by sending a note verbale to Moscow, in which the President and Government requested that Moscow receive a Finnish delegation to negotiate terms for ending hostilities between Finland and the Soviet Union.

In response, Moscow set forth several conditions for the Finnish side: they were to publicly announce the severance of ties with Germany, ensure the withdrawal of German troops from Finland by September 15, and halt all military actions by 6 a.m. on September 4. If Finland agreed to these terms, the remaining matters could be addressed during subsequent negotiations.<sup>92</sup>

Helsinki accepted the terms, and on September 7, a Finnish delegation led by Prime Minister A. V. Hackzell<sup>93</sup> arrived in Moscow. That same day, around 5:30 p.m., Molotov received Hackzell. The initial meeting was emotionally reserved; Molotov asked numerous questions and assured that formal negotiations would commence once the Soviet side received a response from the Allies regarding the proposed agreements.

A lengthy pause followed before the official talks began. During that week, the Finnish delegation members anxiously sought to understand the delay but were unable to influence the situation.

One of the reasons behind the delay in the start of Soviet-Finnish negotiations was the armistice talks with Romania, held in Moscow from September 10 to 12, 1944. The negotiations involved representatives from the USSR (including V.M. Molotov, A.Ya. Vyshinsky, I.M. Maisky, and others), the United States (Ambassador W.A. Harriman), and Great Britain (Ambassador A.K. Kerr), on one side, and a Romanian government delegation (comprising Minister of Justice L. Pătrășcanu, General D. Dămăceanu, and politicians B. Știrbey and G. Popp), on the other. On September 12, an armistice agreement was signed, stipulating that Romania would effectively cease

<sup>91</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 12, Folder 28, File 172, Sheets 263-265.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, List 12, Folder 27, File 155, Sheets 47-49.

<sup>93</sup> Anders Werner Hackzell (1881–1946) was a Finnish politician. He served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1932–1936) and Prime Minister (August 8 – September 21, 1944).

military operations against the USSR across all theaters of war as of August 24, 1944. The Romanian government and military command also committed to disarming and interning German and Hungarian forces stationed on Romanian soil.

On the afternoon of September 14, Hackzell announced his intention to return to Finland. The leadership of the NKID responded quickly: around 6:30 p.m., Hackzell was invited to attend negotiations with representatives of the Soviet and British governments scheduled for 11 p.m. (Khristoforov, 2018, p. 219-220).

The prolonged emotional strain took a toll on the Finnish delegation leader's health. Having awaited these negotiations for so long, Hackzell was overwhelmed, and his body gave way to a nervous breakdown. At 7:20 p.m., the NKID received a phone call reporting Hackzell's deteriorating condition and urgently asking for a doctor. Within 20 minutes, a physician arrived, diagnosed right-sided paralysis, and prescribed absolute rest along with a consultation with a neurologist.

Despite this setback, the first round of negotiations commenced at 11 p.m. on September 14 at the NKID mansion, with Molotov, Kerr, and the Finnish delegation present. The Finnish delegation was temporarily led by Minister of Defense K.R. Walden.

The negotiations progressed rapidly. On September 15, a draft armistice agreement was flown to Finland, and the Finnish government reviewed it the following day. That evening, the new head of the Finnish delegation, Foreign Minister C. Enckell, arrived in Moscow.

At 10 p.m. on September 16, the second meeting took place between the Soviet delegation (comprising V.M. Molotov, K.Ye. Voroshilov, A.A. Zhdanov, V.G. Dekanozov, M.M. Litvinov, General S.M. Shtemenko, and Rear Admiral A.P. Alexandrov), the British delegation (represented by Ambassador A. Kerr), and the Finnish delegation (including C. Enckell, O. Enckell, Walden, Heinrichs, Nykopp, and G. Enckell).<sup>94</sup>

Molotov stated that Finland was disarming German forces in the northern part of the country too slowly, while also emphasizing that German troops and Finnish authorities maintained close cooperation. He rejected Enckell's request to alter the 1940 Soviet-Finnish border in certain areas, insisting that after three years of war, no border adjustments were possible.

On September 18 at 5 p.m., Molotov met again with the Finnish delegation. The meeting was brief and emotional, lasting only 15 minutes. When Enckell said that the Finnish Parliament's approval was needed before signing an armistice, Molotov sharply retorted that Finland had attacked the USSR in 1941 and was responsible for the siege and shelling of Leningrad. Molotov issued an ultimatum stating that if the Finnish delegation did not sign the armistice, they could return home, which would result in Finland's occupation – a situation for which the Soviets were already prepared (Khristoforov, 2018, p. 227).

<sup>94</sup> *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 12, Folder 19, File 109, Sheets 224-225.

Following the meeting, C. Enckell was deeply disheartened. He urgently sent a telegram to Helsinki, highlighting the “need to take urgent measures” and requesting immediate authorization to sign the treaty.<sup>95</sup>

In March 1944, C. Enckell was opposed to agreeing to more lenient armistice terms with the USSR. However, by September, he recognized that signing the agreement was the only way to prevent a potential invasion of Finland by the Red Army.

On September 19, around 12:30 p.m., Soviet representatives signed an armistice agreement<sup>96</sup> between the USSR, Great Britain, and Finland on behalf of the Allied command at the NKID mansion. The Soviet Union was represented by A.A. Zhdanov, while C. Enckell signed on behalf of Finland.

Thanks to the efforts of Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers – despite occasional contradictions and interdepartmental rivalry – significant progress was made both diplomatically and covertly. Finland ceased hostilities against the USSR and withdrew its troops behind the 1940 Soviet-Finnish border. The Finnish military command also began sharing information about German forces with the Soviet military leadership, and arrangements were made for the transfer of Soviet and Allied prisoners of war, as well as interned and forcibly abducted Soviet and Allied citizens.

Finland severed all diplomatic, consular, and other ties with Germany and Hungary, including postal, telegraph, and telephone communications. The Soviet-Finnish Peace Treaty of 1940 was reinstated, albeit with certain modifications.

After Romania, Finland also ceased hostilities against the USSR, enabling the Red Army to concentrate its efforts on combating Nazi Germany. The coalition of countries opposing the USSR under German leadership continued to break apart. An armistice agreement was signed between the USSR, the USA, Great Britain, and Bulgaria on October 28, 1944, and another with Hungary on January 20, 1945.

## Conclusions

In conclusion it should be noted that Finland’s decision to join the war against the USSR alongside Germany was no coincidence. Almost immediately after the peace treaty was signed in March 1940, Finnish politicians and military leaders began planning to reclaim the territories they had lost. This ambition formed the foundation of military cooperation between Berlin and Helsinki, preparing both for joint operations against the Soviet Union and ultimately motivating Finland’s entry into the conflict. The pretext for the war was the Soviet bombing of Finnish airfields that housed German military aircraft.

<sup>95</sup> *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. Fond 4 os, List 2, File 7, Sheet 4667.

<sup>96</sup> The peace treaty between the USSR and Finland was signed on February 10, 1947, in Paris.

From the very beginning of Germany's invasion of the USSR, Soviet diplomacy sought to keep Finland neutral. After Finland entered the war, Soviet diplomats and intelligence agents employed every possible strategy to initiate peace negotiations. Moscow, Washington, and Stockholm all played active roles in the delicate diplomatic efforts aimed at persuading Finland to withdraw from the conflict.

Thanks to the persistent efforts of Soviet diplomats, led by A.M. Kollontai, and intelligence officers, peace talks were held in March and September 1944. Ultimately, Finland accepted Moscow's terms and signed an armistice agreement.

Undoubtedly, Soviet diplomats – primarily, A.M. Kollontai – took the lead in organizing the negotiations, while intelligence officers, leveraging their unique skills and methods, provided crucial support throughout the process. However, competition between the intelligence and diplomatic agencies sometimes bred mistrust, resulting in misunderstandings and challenges in accomplishing shared objectives. To overcome these issues and reduce interdepartmental rivalry in the work of diplomats and intelligence officers abroad, close collaboration at the high level is essential, along with regular information exchange – while respecting secrecy protocols – and coordinated joint actions.

Despite these challenges faced by Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers in Stockholm, they successfully fulfilled their primary mission: facilitating peace negotiations that ultimately led to Finland's withdrawal from the war.

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