

The Asia-Pacific on the Eve of and during the Second World War. Soviet Policy and Diplomacy in the Region¹

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Abstract. This article offers an in-depth analysis of Soviet policy and diplomacy in the Far East during the tumultuous period spanning from the 1920s to the 1940s. These policies were profoundly shaped by two key factors: first, the ideological considerations rooted in the political framework established in the USSR following the 1917 Revolution, and second, the geopolitical dynamics reflecting the evolving global and regional political landscape in the Far East. The ruling Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government faced formidable challenges as they sought to safeguard the nascent Soviet Republic amid mounting international tensions, both globally and within the Asia-Pacific region.

This study aims to present a comprehensive and integrated examination of Soviet policy and diplomacy during this era, which can be split into four distinct time periods, each with its unique features, priorities, and challenges. At the same time, these periods are united by the overarching goal of consolidating the Soviet Union's position in the Far Eastern region and the broader Pacific theatre. The four discernible stages in Soviet policy and diplomacy in the Far East encompass:

1. The period spanning from 1927 to 1932, which was marked by an initial deterioration in relations between the Soviet government and the Kuomintang administration following the 1927 split between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China (CPC). This phase also witnessed the 1929 conflict on the Chinese Eastern Railway and culminated in the reestablishment of Sino-Soviet relations, all set against the backdrop of escalating Japanese aggression in Northeastern China (Manchuria). This phase demanded adroit diplomacy that balanced strength and strategic statecraft.
2. The 1930s, which, especially in the aftermath of Japan's aggressive incursions into China, saw limited interaction and collaboration between the USSR and the Republic of China. This period featured cautious Soviet-Japanese interaction and included significant events such as armed clashes at Lake Khasan and the KhalkhinGol River, as well as the signing of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact.
3. The era of the Great Patriotic War from 1941 to 1945, during which the Soviet Union's foremost objective was the defeat of the German Nazi aggressor. During this period, Soviet diplomacy was primarily focused on relations with its

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Dubinin Y.A. 2023. Politika i diplomatiya SSSR na Dal'nem Vostoke v kanun i v gody Vtoroj mirovoj vojny. *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. No. 16 (6). P. 92-123. DOI: 10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-92-123

Anglo-American allies, with particular emphasis on the contentious issue of opening a second front. Consequently, Far Eastern and Pacific policy concerns assumed a somewhat marginalized role within the realm of Soviet diplomacy.

4. Finally, the period spanning from the winter to the summer of 1945. During this time, the Soviet Union intensified its political, diplomatic, and military involvement in the Far East, all against the backdrop of preparations to enter the war against Japan. Diplomatic endeavours reached their zenith during this critical phase.

Keywords: international relations, USSR diplomacy, the Tripartite Pact, conflicts on Lake Khasan and the KhalkhinGol River, Second World War, allied conferences: Yalta, Potsdam, the Sino- Soviet Treaty of 1945, the surrender of Japan

This article focuses on examining the USSR's policy and diplomacy in the Far East during the 1920s through the 1940s, a period marked by several challenging phases shaped by a rapidly evolving international and regional environment. The objective is to explore comprehensively the internal and external factors that influenced the Soviet Far Eastern policy and diplomatic strategies throughout these decades. The study proposes a framework dividing the subject into distinct phases and analyzes the distinctive characteristics of each phase, along with the diplomatic approaches employed to tackle the relevant challenges. The primary research method involved a critical analysis of documents detailing the state of international relations and the foreign policies of the USSR and other key actors engaged in Far Eastern affairs during this dynamic and eventful era.

Initially, Soviet Far Eastern policy and diplomacy were driven by an ideological mission rooted in the ideas of the October Revolution, aiming to support revolutionary movements worldwide, exemplified by active backing of Sun Yat-sen's government in China. Subsequently, as Japanese aggression intensified in the region, priorities shifted toward securing the USSR's eastern borders.² Following the outbreak of World War II, the USSR's allied commitments and the imperative to safeguard its future security in the Far East necessitated Moscow's participation in extensive military operations alongside its regional allies, culminating in Japan's surrender.

The body of historiography addressing diplomacy and military operations in East Asia and the Pacific on the eve of and during World War II is extensive. It encompasses non-fiction works, memoirs, and scholarly research, which have been thoroughly studied and analyzed in both Russian and international literature. This article does not aim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the entire range of texts concerning the USSR's international relations, policies, and diplomacy in East Asia and the Pacific during this period.

² It is important to recognize that the East Siberian and Far Eastern regions of the USSR appeared particularly vulnerable to possible external aggression because their population density and economic development lagged significantly behind those of the European part of the country.

This study utilized a wide range of both domestic and foreign sources. Of particular importance is the twelve-volume series *Velikaya Otechestvennaya vojna 1941–1945 godov* [*The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945*],³ especially volumes five (*Pobednyj final* [*The Victorious Finale*], 2013) and eight (*Vneshnyaya politika i diplomatiya Sovetskogo Soyuza v gody vojny* [*Foreign Policy and Diplomacy of the Soviet Union during the War*], 2014), which provide factual material grounded in the latest documentary publications concerning the military and political decisions made by the Soviet leadership and military command during the Great Patriotic War. Another valuable resource was the five-volume *Istoriya vojny na Tikhom okeane* [*History of the War in the Pacific*] (*Pervyy period vojny* [*The First Period of the War*], 1958; and *Vtoroy period vojny* [*The Second Period of the War*], 1958), offering an in-depth analysis of Japanese policy in the Far East throughout the conflict in East Asia and the Pacific. Although this work reflects the ideological perspectives of its time, its major strength lies in its thorough examination of documents from various Japanese government agencies, shedding light on the Imperial court's and government's approaches to regional military and political strategy. Additionally, the Japanese and Chinese sections of the documentary collection from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, titled *SSSR i strany Vostoka nakanune i v gody Vtoroy mirovoy vojny* [*The USSR and the Countries of the East on the Eve of and During World War II*],⁴ focus on regional issues relevant to this study, particularly the nuances of Soviet-Japanese relations from 1941 to 1944, when Moscow, while combating German aggression in the west, skillfully maintained a balance with Japan, thereby avoiding the danger of a two-front war (Molodyakov, 2010a, 2010b). The collection also covers the Soviet-Chinese negotiations in the summer of 1945, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance based on the terms agreed upon at Yalta (Luzyanin, Mirovickaya, Pikover, 2010; Luzyanin, Mirovickaya, 2010). It is worth highlighting the significant work by A.N. Panov, K.O. Sarkisov, and D.V. Strelcov (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019), which examines Japan's foreign policy within a broad historical framework – from the Meiji Restoration to the present day. Their study dedicates considerable attention to Japanese politics and Soviet-Japanese relations on the eve of and during World War II. In his monograph on Soviet-American relations in the 1940s, V.O. Pechatnov (Pechatnov, 2006) reveals several lesser-known episodes of Soviet-American interactions during the war, particularly through the lens of the Far Eastern dimension of their political and diplomatic engagements. Pechatnov provides a detailed analysis of urgent American diplomatic efforts to enlist Soviet support for military operations in

³ *Velikaya Otechestvennaya vojna 1941–1945 godov* [*The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945*]. 2011–2015. In 12 volumes. Moscow: Voenizdat, Kuchkovo pole (in Russian).

⁴ *SSSR i strany Vostoka nakanune i v gody Vtoroy mirovoy vojny* [*The USSR and the Countries of the East on the Eve of and During World War II*]. 2010. Ed. V.V. Naumkin. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies. 460 p. (In Russian).

the Pacific theater – efforts that Moscow consistently declined as premature during the challenging years when the USSR was solely engaged in fighting German aggression, while awaiting in vain the promised opening of a second front by the Allies.

The work by renowned Japanese researcher Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (Hasegawa, 2003; Hasegawa, 2005) presents an interesting Far Eastern perspective on the diplomatic intrigues of the Potsdam Conference. Hasegawa offers an alternative to the widely accepted Western view, arguing against the decisive role of the American atomic bombings in Japan's swift surrender.

A crucial resource for this article was the series *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, which contains U.S. foreign policy documents from the World War II era. We have conducted a detailed analysis of the volumes covering key conferences, including the Cairo Conference of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek;⁵ the Yalta (Crimean) Conference of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Joseph Stalin;⁶ and the Potsdam (Berlin) Conference of Harry Truman, Churchill, and Stalin.⁷ Particular attention was given not only to the trilateral documents and protocols of these meetings but also to appeals from Anglo-American military leaders to their political authorities, emphasizing the necessity of the Red Army's active participation in operations against Japan. We have also examined how U.S. officials sought to secure China's cooperation in fulfilling Roosevelt's Yalta commitments concerning the conditions set by Stalin for the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan. Due to Roosevelt's untimely death, these obligations were not fulfilled within the Yalta timeline – namely, after Germany's defeat and before the redeployment of significant Soviet forces to the Far East. Through an analysis of American diplomatic correspondence,⁸ the author of this article reconstructs the process used the United States to implement its commitments and highlights the influence of U.S. diplomacy on Soviet-Chinese negotiations, which ultimately culminated in the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance on August 14, 1945. To the author's knowledge, this information is being introduced into Russian academic discourse for the first time.

This article explores the USSR's politics and diplomacy in the Far East in a chronological framework: first, the period from 1927 to 1932, marked by the severance of relations with Moscow by China's Nanjing-based government and their subsequent

⁵ The First Cairo Conference. 1961. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers. The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943CairoTehran> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

⁶ General: Political and Economic Matters. 1955. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers. Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Malta> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

⁷ Basic military objectives, strategy, and policies in the war against Japan. Issuance of a proclamation calling for the surrender of Japan. 1960. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers. The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945, Volume II*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Berlinv02> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

⁸ Interest of the United States in the Negotiation of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of August 14, 1945; Attempts by the United States to Obtain a Public Reaffirmation of the Open Door Policy. 1969. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers. 1945. The Far East, China, Volume VII*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v07> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

restoration amid Japan's occupation of Manchuria; second, the context of escalating military threats and the onset of Japan's invasion of mainland China; third, Moscow's policy following Nazi Germany's attack on the USSR. The fourth section focuses on analyzing Soviet diplomatic efforts to secure its rightful role within the Allied coalition aimed at defeating Japan.

Ideology and politics (1927–1932)

From the outset, both the Versailles system in Europe and the Washington system in the Far East were inherently unstable. Most participants sought to secure self-serving changes via political and diplomatic methods, while some were ready to resort to military force. The framework established by the Washington treaties was breached by their signatories almost immediately after being signed, with revolutionary upheavals in China significantly contributing to the region's growing instability.

Among the major players in Pacific international relations, Japan was the most dissatisfied with the outcomes of its participation in World War I on the side of the Entente. The Washington Conference of 1921–1922 further heightened Tokyo's discontent with the emerging regional order. The United States and Great Britain relegated Japan to the status of a second-tier naval power through the Five-Power Treaty, while the Nine-Power Treaty reaffirmed China's territorial integrity and enshrined the U.S.-backed principle of “open doors and equal opportunities.” This effectively blocked Japan's ambitions for exclusive “spheres of interest” in China. Allied pressure also prevented Japan from realizing its broader objectives for China, as outlined in the infamous “Twenty-One Demands.”

Despite these constraints, Japan continued to pursue greater influence in North-east Asia and asserted a special role for itself in the region. Japanese policy was marked by a steady escalation of pressure on both regional and central Chinese authorities, with each aggressive move carefully calibrated in response to the reactions of major world powers and international organizations. Taking advantage of the global economic crisis, Japanese leaders exploited the reluctance of Western powers to intervene actively in Far Eastern affairs.

According to some contemporary Chinese sources,⁹ World War II began with Japan's aggression against China, starting with the staged incident on the South Manchurian Railway on September 18, 1931. This aggression initially manifested in the occupation of China's northeastern provinces and the establishment of the puppet state

⁹ Specifically, an article by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping, published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* on September 3, 2015, asserts that: “The September 18 incident marked the beginning of the anti-Japanese war and served as the prelude to World War II.” See Cheng G. *Vklad Kitaya v dostizhenie Pobedy vo Vtoroy mirovoy voyne* [China's Contribution to the Victory in World War II]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. URL: <https://rg.ru/2015/09/03/voyna.html> (Accessed: December 15, 2023) (in Russian).

of Manchukuo in 1932, followed by the full-scale invasion of China in 1937 and the occupation of large portions of its territory. Although the League of Nations discussed the Manchurian question in December 1932, no economic or military sanctions were imposed on Japan.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Japan was officially recognized as an aggressor by the League and subsequently withdrew from the organization in the spring of 1933.

In the years that followed, Japan's aggressive policies continued to intensify, both globally and regionally, culminating in the formation of the Berlin–Rome–Tokyo Axis and ultimately leading to the outbreak of war in the Pacific.

Meanwhile, the situation along the Soviet Union's Far Eastern borders posed a serious threat to its security. The defeat of the Canton Commune, the severing of diplomatic ties with the USSR by Chiang Kai-shek's government, and the seizure of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) in the summer of 1929 brought Soviet-Chinese relations to the brink of war. In response, Moscow not only recalled all its representatives from China, including CER administrators, but also resorted to military action. The Special Far Eastern Army swiftly defeated the 20,000-strong Chinese force, compelling Zhang Xueliang to sign the Khabarovsk Protocol in December of that year, which restored Soviet rights to the CER.

In its dealings with its Far Eastern neighbors, Moscow adopted a position that was both principled and pragmatic. The primary objectives of Soviet foreign policy and diplomacy in the region were to strengthen its already considerable military capabilities while ensuring peace and stability among its neighboring countries. At the same time, the USSR remained committed to its ideological principles by continuing to support the Chinese Communists. This stance led Nanjing to sever diplomatic ties with Moscow. However, faced with the escalating Japanese threat and the absence of substantial support from European powers and the United States, Chiang Kai-shek's government found it increasingly urgent to restore cooperation with the Soviet Union. Soviet diplomacy skillfully capitalized on this situation: the exchange of notes to re-establish Soviet-Chinese diplomatic relations took place in Geneva on December 12, 1932, coinciding with the League of Nations Assembly's discussion of the Manchurian question (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, p. 101). Interestingly, while restoring ties with China, Soviet diplomacy left room for continued dialogue with Japan. Maxim Litvinov's statement on the restoration of relations with China notably avoided addressing China's territorial integrity, *i.e.*, the status of Manchukuo – the issue that could provoke Japan's reaction. In response, Tokyo rejected longstanding Soviet proposals to conclude a Non-Aggression Pact.

The presence of the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchukuo created a significant risk of an unwanted conflict between Japan and the USSR. To avoid this, Moscow took a dual approach: on one hand, it actively strengthened its security apparatus in the Far

¹⁰ See, *e.g.*, Nikonov V.A. 2020. *Voyna nachalas' na Vostoke* [The war began in the East]. Vyacheslav Nikonov's web site. URL: <https://v-nikonov.ru/publications/article/194716/> (Accessed: December 15, 2023) (in Russian).

East and the Pacific region, culminating, on March 12, 1936, in the signing of a Mutual Assistance Pact with the Mongolian People's Republic¹¹ – an entity recognized only by the Soviet Union at that time;¹² on the other hand, it sought to eliminate potential sources of provocation, including addressing the growing complications posed by the Chinese Eastern Railway, which had become a considerable liability.

Negotiations regarding the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) began with Chinese representatives at the end of 1930. On April 10, 1931, the Soviet Politburo approved the proposals made by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID), outlining the basic principles for China's purchase of the CER. However, the situation shifted dramatically following Japan's occupation of Manchuria. Tokyo declared its intention to buy the railway, provided that the formal purchaser would be the Manchukuo government. On May 29, 1933, the Japanese ambassador in Moscow informed the NKID of Manchukuo's consent and Japan's offer to act as an intermediary. Initially, Moscow's asking price of 250 million gold rubles was 12.5 times higher than Japan's offer. Eventually, on September 14, 1934, the Soviet Union accepted Japan's final offer of 140 million yen, equivalent to 47.5 million gold rubles. After difficult and sometimes tense negotiations, an agreement was signed in Tokyo on March 23, 1935, between the USSR and Manchukuo concerning the transfer of rights to the CER. The railway was immediately handed over to Manchukuo, with Japan guaranteeing the payment and transfer of all amounts owed to the Soviet Union. This agreement removed a potential source of conflict with Japan and helped foster a temporary easing of tensions between Moscow and Tokyo (Molodyakov, 2010a, pp. 71-73).

Soviet-Japanese relations were heavily influenced by the signing of the German-Japanese treaty in Berlin, known as the "Anti-Comintern Pact," on November 25, 1936. The official aim of the Pact was a coordinated effort against the Comintern (Communist International), whose Seventh Congress in 1935 had condemned the fascist regimes of Japan, Germany, Italy, and Poland, and called for the formation of a broad popular front to promote peace. The signatories of the Anti-Comintern Pact declared their intention to cooperate for "defense against communistic disintegration" and invited "third States whose internal peace is menaced by the disintegrating work of the Communistic International"¹³ to join. Germany and Japan agreed not to enter into political treaties with the USSR without mutual consent, in line with the spirit of the Pact;

¹¹ *Protokol o vzaimnoy pomoshchi mezhdru Soyuzom Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i Mongol'skoy Narodnoy Respublikoy* [Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Mongolian People's Republic] of March 12, 1936. 1974. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki SSSR* [Documents of the USSR's Foreign Policy]. Vol. XIX. Moscow. Pp. 136-137 (in Russian).

¹² The Nanjing government issued a protest note to the Kremlin, asserting that Mongolia, being an integral part of China, had no authority to enter into independent international agreements. The note stated: "Since Outer Mongolia is an inseparable part of China, no foreign power has the right to conclude any treaty or agreement with it <...> Under no circumstances can the Chinese government recognize such a treaty, nor is it bound by it in any way." *Izvestiya*, April 9, 1936 (in Russian).

¹³ For the text of the Pact, see: German-Japanese Agreement and Supplementary Protocol, Signed at Berlin, November 25, 1936. *Yale Law School*. URL: <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/tri1.asp> (Accessed: December 15, 2023)

however, the agreement did not include commitments to mutual military or political support in the event of conflict with a third state. Over time, Italy joined the Pact on November 6, 1937, followed by Hungary and Manchukuo on February 24, 1939, and Spain on March 27, 1939. The Anti-Comintern Pact was later expanded by the Pact of Steel of 1939 and the Tripartite Pact of 1940. After Germany's invasion of the USSR, Bulgaria, Finland, Romania, Denmark, Slovakia, Croatia, and the Japanese-backed Wang Jingwei government in occupied China also joined the Pact.

Support for China and the containment of Japan (1937–1941)

The next phase of international relations in the Pacific began with the “Marco Polo Bridge Incident” on July 8, 1937, which signaled Japan's shift to open aggression against the Kuomintang government. Japanese forces soon occupied Beijing and Tianjin; by November, despite staunch resistance from Chiang Kai-shek's troops, Shanghai had fallen, followed by the Chinese capital, Nanjing, in December. As Japanese troops advanced, the Republic of China's capital was relocated first to Wuhan and later to Chongqing. Amidst a surge in patriotic sentiment in China, the announcement of a “united anti-Japanese front” between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, along with the formal subordination of communist forces to the central government, effectively undermined those within the Kuomintang who favored joining the Anti-Comintern Pact.

With the United States and Great Britain offering only verbal condemnation of Japan's invasion, and the Japanese navy successfully blockading China's coastline, the Nanjing government began actively seeking a Mutual Assistance Pact with the Soviet Union. For the USSR, accepting this proposal risked direct involvement in a war with Japan – something Moscow was eager to avoid. Nevertheless, Soviet leaders were keen for China to continue its resistance, as a Chinese surrender would likely make the Soviet Union Japan's next target. Consequently, the Soviet leadership agreed to Chiang Kai-shek's requests for arms shipments and the deployment of Soviet military advisors.

The Soviet Union made large-scale military assistance to China contingent upon the signing of a long-sought non-aggression pact. The treaty was signed in Nanjing on August 21, 1937, with a validity of five years. An accompanying “oral declaration, strictly confidential and never to be disclosed either officially or unofficially,” included the USSR's pledge not to enter into a non-aggression treaty with Japan until Japanese-Chinese relations were normalized – that is, until the end of the war (Molodyakov, 2010a, p. 76). China received several substantial concessional loans to purchase Soviet military equipment, and Soviet military experts – including around 2,000 pilots – were dispatched to assist. Between October 1937 and October 1939, the Soviet Union supplied China with 985 aircraft, over 1,300 artillery pieces, more than 14,000 machine guns, as well as ammunition and other equipment. The total value of Soviet loans to China in 1938–1939 reached \$250 million (Luzyanin, Mirovickaya, Pikover, 2010,

p. 140). Soviet military aid was delivered via Central Asia and Xinjiang, a route beyond Japanese control. The signing of the Sino-Soviet Pact was viewed in Tokyo as a significant diplomatic setback.

The Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was, in effect, a mutual assistance agreement. This format was deliberately chosen because the USSR, while supporting China, sought to avoid direct involvement in a war with Japan. Between 1937 and 1939, Moscow repeatedly declined Chiang Kai-shek's proposals to establish a formal bilateral military and political alliance. Nevertheless, even without such a treaty, the USSR remained virtually China's only genuine ally during this period.

Japan protested against the presence of Soviet military personnel in China and the Soviet supply of arms to Chiang Kai-shek's government, attempting to portray these arrangements as "military actions" against Japan (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, p. 118). Although Moscow officially denied these accusations, pointing out, among other things, that Japan and China were not formally at war, tensions between Japan and the USSR continued to escalate. Border clashes along the Soviet Far Eastern frontier increased in frequency, with the most significant incidents occurring at Lake Hassan in 1938 and on the Khalkhin Gol River in 1939. While the Lake Hassan conflict was a serious but localized skirmish, the clashes at Khalkhin Gol involved Soviet and Mongolian forces and escalated into a full-scale border war.¹⁴ The decisive defeat of the Japanese interventionists revealed the weaknesses of the Japanese army when facing a better-organized and better-equipped opponent, culminating in the signing of an armistice on September 15, 1939.¹⁵

For the faction in Japan that counted on Germany's support for their aggressive ambitions against the USSR, Berlin's moves to improve relations with Moscow – resulting in the signing of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939 – were seen in Tokyo as a "betrayal" that effectively shattered their plans. This development dealt a significant blow to the so-called "anti-Comintern axis" (The First Period of the War, 1958, pp. 92-96). Although Germany, Italy, and Japan later signed the Tripartite Pact in Berlin on September 27, 1940, the agreement included a crucial clause stating that its provisions "do not in any way affect the political status which exists at present as between each of the three contracting powers and Soviet Russia."¹⁶

¹⁴ It has been suggested that the experience gained from the Khalkhin Gol operation was creatively applied in formulating the plan to encircle the Nazi forces near Stalingrad. See Sorokin A., Skorospelov P. 2023. Preprint of the forthcoming book *Teoriya Pobedy [Theory of Victory]. Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*. URL: https://nvo.ng.ru/history/2023-11-16/14_1262_history.html (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

¹⁵ See Zhukov G.K. 2002. *Neobyavlenaya voyna na Khalkhin-Gole. Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya [The Unannounced War at Khalkhin Gol. Reminiscences and Reflections]*. Moscow: OLMA-PRESS (in Russian).

¹⁶ For the text of the Tripartite Pact, see: Three-Power Pact Between Germany, Italy, and Japan, Signed at Berlin, September 27, 1940. *Yale Law School*. URL: <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/triparti.asp> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

With Japan's southern expansion taking precedence in its strategic planning, the Japanese government adopted the "Principles of Negotiation with Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union" on February 3, 1941 (Molodyakov, Molodyakova, Markaryan, 2007, p. 169). Tokyo invited Moscow to sign a non-aggression pact similar to the one between the USSR and Germany. However, the Soviet leadership was reluctant, linking any such agreement to the return of territories lost by Russia after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, p. 150). Since Japan was unwilling to negotiate these territorial issues, the Soviet Union proposed signing a neutrality pact instead. On March 24, 1941, during a stopover in Moscow on his way to Berlin, Japanese Foreign Minister Yōsuke Matsuoka met with Joseph Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov and once again advocated for the signing of a non-aggression pact.

Regardless, Tokyo had little choice but to accept the Soviet proposal. On April 13, 1941, shortly after returning from Berlin, Japanese Minister Matsuoka and his Soviet counterpart Molotov signed the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in Moscow (The First Period of the War, 1958, pp. 372–373). The agreement was set to last five years, with the possibility of extension for an additional five years by mutual consent. Accompanying the Pact was a special declaration stating: "<...> the Government of the U.S.S.R. and the Government of Japan, in the interest of insuring peaceful and friendly relations between the two countries, solemnly declare that the U.S.S.R. pledges to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of Manchoukuo and Japan pledges to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the Mongolian People's Republic" (Molodyakov, 2010b, p. 97). On April 25, the Pact was ratified simultaneously by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Emperor of Japan. The signing of this Pact had a profound impact on the global political landscape, shaping the strategic calculations of leaders worldwide, not just in the Pacific region.

Following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, Matsuoka stressed that "Japan's foreign policy is fundamentally based on the Tripartite Pact, and if the current (German-Soviet) war and the Neutrality Pact contradict this foundation and the Tripartite Pact, then the Neutrality Pact will no longer be valid" (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, p. 153).

Diplomacy in the East during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945)

The onset of aggression by Nazi Germany and its allies¹⁷ against the USSR shifted the Soviet leadership's primary focus to organizing a defense against the Western threat, while still maintaining vigilance over the security of the country's eastern borders. Despite the existence of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, Moscow remained wary of

¹⁷ The aggression included forces from Germany's allies – Italy, Hungary, Romania, Finland, Slovakia, and Croatia – along with military units and formations totaling 1.8 million personnel from other countries.

Tokyo's intentions and closely monitored developments in the region. On July 2, 1941, the Imperial Conference in Japan adopted the "Outline of Imperial National Policy in View of the Changing Situation" (The First Period of the War, 1958, p. 216). It was decided that "should the German-Soviet war evolve in a manner favorable to the empire," armed force would be employed in the north. The large deployment of Japanese troops in Manchuria and Korea, combined with the uncertainty surrounding Japan's strategic goals, compelled the Soviet State Defense Committee (GKO) and the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command to maintain a substantial military presence in the Far East throughout 1941–1945. This included between 32 and 59 infantry divisions, 10 to 29 aviation divisions, and up to six divisions and four brigades of air defense forces, totaling over one million personnel – accounting for 15 to 30% of the USSR's combat forces and assets at various stages of the war (Borisov et al., 1985, p. 21). It was only after Soviet intelligence officer Richard Sorge provided information that Japan was preparing to direct its military efforts southward that the Soviet command redeployed part of the Siberian divisions to counter the German offensive near Moscow.

Frequent changes in the Japanese government during the summer and early fall of 1941 continued to cause concern for Soviet leaders. At the same time, as tensions with the United States escalated, Tokyo sought assurances from Moscow regarding its commitment to the Soviet-Japanese Pact. Japan was troubled by America's increasing support for Britain in the European war – especially following the passage of the Lend-Lease Act – and by signs that the United States was also considering aid to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the other signatories of the Tripartite Pact expected Japan to intensify efforts to restrain the United States, thereby reducing American involvement in the Atlantic. Difficult negotiations between U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Japanese Ambassador Kichisaburō Nomura throughout the summer and fall of 1941 failed to produce any mutually acceptable solutions. As a result, Prime Minister Hideki Tojo's war cabinet began immediate preparations for conflict. On December 7, 1941, while Japanese bombs were already falling on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Nomura informed Hull that the Japanese government "considers it impossible to reach an agreement through further negotiations" (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, p. 139). The following day, an imperial rescript was issued declaring war on the United States and Great Britain; Germany and its allies also declared war, and the signatories of the Tripartite Pact pledged to continue fighting together until complete victory, vowing not to conclude any armistice or peace without full mutual agreement. On December 9, China – already at war with Japan since 1931 – formally declared war on the Axis powers. At this point, the conflict truly became global in scale.

During the initial phase of the Pacific War, from December 1941 to February 1942, Japanese forces seized Malaya and Singapore, prompting the British army's surrender. Between December 1941 and May 1942, American troops were driven out of the Philippines. As he withdrew from the fortress on Corregidor Island to Australia on May 7, 1942, the commander of U.S. forces, General Douglas MacArthur, famously declared, "I shall return" (Manchester, 2008, p. 187). Japanese troops also occupied Guam and

Wake Islands, and by early March 1942, Dutch colonial forces in Indonesia had capitulated. By May 1942, the Japanese army had secured all key positions in Burma.

These victories marked the conclusion of the first stage of the Pacific War, a period of remarkable success for Japanese forces. This phase effectively ended with the failed Japanese attempt to capture Midway Island, where their fleet suffered significant losses and the strategic initiative shifted to the United States. The costly and unsuccessful Japanese efforts to seize Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands during the summer and fall of 1942 are also part of this stage. By early February 1943, Japanese troops had been fully evacuated from Guadalcanal.

Meanwhile, the USSR, fully engaged in its struggle against Nazi Germany, avoided involvement in the Pacific conflict. Soviet military advisors who had been assisting China were recalled home.

Overall, Soviet-Japanese relations during most of the Great Patriotic War remained relatively calm, as both countries were focused on their own, geographically distant priorities. While occasional incidents did occur, they were typically the result of wartime circumstances rather than deliberate political provocation. In retrospect, Soviet military officials accused Japan of repeated violations, noting that units of the Kwantung Army crossed the land border 779 times and Japanese aircraft entered Soviet airspace on 433 occasions (*The Victorious Finale*, 2013, p. 433–434). However, at the time, these incidents had little impact on the broader state of bilateral relations. This is reflected in Vyacheslav Molotov's remarks to Japanese Ambassador Naotake Satō: "We address current issues within the framework of our normal relations... The Soviet government believes that Soviet-Japanese relations are developing normally and moving in a positive direction." (Slavinskij, 1995, p. 247). In 1942, both countries exchanged new ambassadors: Yakov Malik, then the world's youngest ambassador, was appointed to Tokyo, while former Foreign Minister Naotake Satō, an experienced diplomat who had previously served in St. Petersburg after the Russo-Japanese War, arrived in Moscow. Among the positive developments in bilateral relations was the signing, after lengthy negotiations, of protocols on March 30, 1944, by Ambassador Satō and Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Solomon Lozovsky, regarding the liquidation of Japanese concessions on Sakhalin. The Soviet government nationalized these assets, agreeing to compensate Japan with 5 million rubles and annual deliveries of 50,000 tons of oil for five years. At the same time, both sides agreed to extend the fisheries convention, which had expired in December 1943 (Molodyakov, 2010b, p. 104).

After being attacked by Japan, the Anglo-American powers repeatedly urged the USSR to cooperate in the fight against Japan.¹⁸ One specific proposal was to allow U.S. and Allied air forces to use bases on the Soviet Pacific coast to launch raids on Japanese

¹⁸ Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Cordell Hull raised the issue of Soviet involvement in the war against Japan with the new Soviet ambassador, Maxim Litvinov. Moscow responded unfavorably to this request, emphasizing its reluctance to fight on two fronts due to the challenging circumstances created by its resistance to Germany.

territory. These issues of cooperation were discussed in Churchill's correspondence and in conversations between U.S. President Roosevelt's special envoy, Averall Harriman, and Joseph Stalin in 1942 (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, pp. 153–154).

Both at that time and later, during a meeting with Harriman in February 1944, Stalin explained the Soviet reluctance to grant Americans access to air bases in Primorye. He cited the desire to avoid provoking Japan prematurely: "We cannot participate in any operations undertaken by the Americans against Japan right now, as our forces in the Far East are still insufficient," Stalin said. "<...> The situation will be clearer in the summer. Once we have reinforced our units in the Far East and reequipped our air forces, we will no longer fear Japanese provocations, and perhaps we may even initiate provocations ourselves. If we prompt the Japanese to act before we are ready, it could end in disaster for us and the loss of Primorye, which would be detrimental both to us and our allies" (Pechatnov, 2006, p. 131–132).

Nevertheless, the shifting dynamics of the war necessitated closer Soviet-American cooperation than Moscow had originally expected. During American air operations against targets in Japan, Manchuria, South Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands, some U.S. aircraft were forced to make emergency landings in the Soviet Far East. By arrangement with the U.S. Air Force, airfields were made available near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and Vladivostok. The first American pilots arrived there after the famous "Doolittle Raid," a bold attack on Tokyo in March 1942. Under the terms of the Neutrality Pact with Japan, the Soviet Union was required to intern American crews and aircraft for the duration of the war. Between 1942 and 1945, a total of 37 U.S. planes with 291 crew members made emergency landings in Soviet Primorye (Pechatnov, 2006, pp. 185–207).

Following a decisive turning point in the Pacific War, U.S. and Allied forces began a strategic offensive. In the summer of 1944, intense fighting erupted for control of the Mariana Islands. The recapture of Saipan, Guam, and Tinian, along with the construction of airfields there, enabled American bombers to launch regular raids on Japanese territory, including the capital. Meanwhile, Japanese forces were also losing ground in the Philippines and Burma, prompting Tokyo to introduce a war plan for mid-1945. This plan called for the establishment of an active defense system based in Japan, Manchuria, and China to sustain a prolonged war.

The intense month-long resistance mounted by the small Japanese garrison on Iwo Jima took the American command by surprise. During the battle for the island – just 60 miles long – the United States suffered over 12,000 killed and more than 36,000 wounded (Cray, 1990, p. 337). These heavy losses prompted the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff to once again urge the political leadership to consider involving the Red Army in the fight against Japan. According to their estimates, invading the Japanese home islands would require landing millions of American troops, and, based on the fierce resistance encountered so far, the end of hostilities was projected for late 1946. After launching a counteroffensive in the Philippines at the end of 1944 – where 250,000 Japanese troops were entrenched – the United States only managed to fully liberate the

territory by May 1945 (The Victorious Finale, 2013, p. 426). American military leaders recognized, as reflected in Joint Chiefs of Staff documents,¹⁹ that a swift Japanese surrender could likely be achieved only by delivering a decisive blow to the strategically significant concentration of Japanese forces in Manchuria and Korea. These areas housed important industrial and raw material resources, as well as large stockpiles of strategic weapons, enabling Japan to sustain a prolonged war and inflict significant losses on Allied forces. At this time, the Japanese armed forces numbered 4 million abroad and 2.5 million stationed on the home islands (Cray, 1990, p. 336).²⁰ According to estimates by the American and British commands, an invasion of the Japanese home islands would require an army of seven million troops. However, by early 1945, the United States and its allies had only 2,458,000 personnel deployed across the entire theater of war against Japan (The Victorious Finale, 2013, p. 426). The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff projected that American casualties during a landing on the Japanese islands – especially if Japan managed to bring in reinforcements from the mainland – could exceed one million dead, while British losses could surpass 500,000. Given these daunting figures, the U.S. military command did not intend for American forces to participate in operations in Manchuria, emphasizing the need to “save American lives.” Instead, they argued to the country’s political leadership that it was essential to involve the Soviet Union in defeating Japanese forces in China and Korea.

The Soviet Union’s first unequivocal commitment to join the war against Japan after Germany’s defeat was made at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers from the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain, held from October 19 to 30, 1943. During discussions with U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Joseph Stalin assured that the Soviet Union would assist American and British forces in defeating Japan. However, at the Allied summit in Tehran, Stalin expressed support for the Cairo Declaration by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek,²¹ but stopped short of making concrete promises about Soviet involvement in the Pacific War.

¹⁹ “Russia’s entry at as early a date as possible <...> is necessary to provide maximum assistance to our Pacific operations. <...> The objective of Russia’s military effort against Japan in the Far East should be the defeat of the Japanese forces in Manchuria, air operations against Japan proper in collaboration with U. S. air forces <...>” Entry of the Soviet Union into the war against Japan. Document 267. The Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President. 1955. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers. Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Malta> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

²⁰ Russian researchers note that “the Japanese Army’s ground forces exceeded 5.5 million personnel. In the Asia-Pacific theater, Japan’s ground troops were nearly twice as numerous as those of the United States and Great Britain combined. However, Japan lagged significantly in other areas, possessing only one-third as many aircraft and about one-fifth as many major warships as its opponents” (Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, 2014, p. 658).

²¹ The Cairo Declaration, which called for Japan’s unconditional surrender, was signed on November 27 and made public on December 1, 1943. The declaration specified that Japan must be expelled from all territories “which she had taken by violence and greed”. See: The First Cairo Conference. Document 343. 1961. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943CairoTehran> (Accessed: December 15, 2023).

The conditions for the USSR's entry into the war against Japan were finalized during personal meetings between Stalin and Roosevelt at the Yalta (Crimean) Conference on February 8 and 10, 1945. The Soviet Union pledged to declare war on Japan two to three months after Germany's surrender, with the following stipulations for its future allies:

- Territorial adjustments in favor of the USSR: restoration of its rights to the southern part of Sakhalin and adjacent islands, as well as the handover of the Kuril Islands to the Soviet Union;
- Internationalization of the commercial port of Dairen (Dalian), granting the Soviet Union preferential rights, and the restoration of the lease of Port Arthur as a Soviet naval base;
- Maintenance of the *status quo* in Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic);
- Joint operation of the Chinese-Eastern and South-Manchurian railroads to secure Soviet interests, while China would retain full sovereignty over Manchuria.²²

The last three conditions were supposed to be negotiated with the Chinese government. However, as Roosevelt remarked, "one of the difficulties in speaking to the Chinese was that anything said to them was known to the whole world in twenty-four hours."²³ Because of this, the U.S. president agreed to take appropriate steps at the right moment to secure Chiang Kai-shek's approval for the Soviet terms. Stalin, for his part, suggested speaking with Chiang Kai-shek only after the USSR managed to free a number of Soviet troops in the west and move twenty-five divisions to the Far East. In return, the USSR committed to signing a Friendship and Alliance Pact with the National Chinese government to help liberate China from Japanese occupation.²⁴

Additionally, the USSR and the United States agreed to increase American shipments of weapons and military supplies to the Soviet Union throughout 1945 to better prepare for the Soviet entry into the war against Japan. To support this, the United States launched a project code-named Milepost, which aimed to build up reserves in Siberia for use in the campaign against Japan (Jones, 1969, p. 180). On February 11, 1945, the Allies signed the Yalta Agreement concerning the war in the Far East.²⁵

Recognizing that the tide of war in both Europe and the Pacific was turning against the Axis powers, Japan's Imperial Conference established the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War on August 8, 1944. Then, on August 19, it resolved that, should Germany be defeated or negotiate a separate peace, Japan should seek to alter its own

²² Conversations Regarding the Entry of the Soviet Union into the War against Japan. 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*. February 10. Afternoon. Document 450. P. 896.

²³ Roosevelt–Stalin Meeting, February 8, 1945, 3:30 p.m., Livadia Palace. 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic papers, Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*. Document 393. Bohlen Collection. Pp. 769–770.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Pp. 766–771.

²⁵ Signed agreements. Agreement Regarding Entry of the Soviet Union into the War Against Japan. 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*. Document 503. P. 984.

situation by engaging with the Soviet Union (The Second Period of the War, 1958, p. 187). As early as the summer of 1943, Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu began preparing a special diplomatic mission to Moscow to gauge the Soviet stance. However, the Soviet Foreign Ministry refused the request, citing a lack of clarity regarding the purpose of the proposed talks. Shigemitsu renewed his proposal in April 1944 but was again turned down for the same reason. According to Soviet Ambassador Malik, Japan did not yet feel threatened with defeat and saw no need to curry favor or seek assistance from the Soviets. Shigemitsu believed that strengthening ties with the USSR might help Japan improve its position if Germany withdrew from the war (Molodyakov, 2010b, p. 107). His goal was to prevent the Soviet Union from joining the war against Japan. To this end, Japan explored the possibility of sending former Foreign Minister Kōki Hirota to Moscow as a special envoy, and Hirota also held preliminary discussions with the Soviet ambassador. However, the USSR rebuffed these vague overtures from the Japanese side. In July 1944, after being urgently summoned by Stalin to Moscow, Ambassador Malik asked the Soviet leader what his instructions were for the coming months. Stalin replied, “You will watch Japan die” (Slavinskij, 1995, p. 237).

From Yalta to victory (winter – summer 1945)

After committing to join the war against Japan, Moscow began both political and logistical preparations to fulfill this promise. As early as November 6, 1944, during his speech marking the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution, Stalin openly identified Japan as an aggressor. On April 5, 1945, the Soviet Union formally denounced the Neutrality Pact with Japan, a full year before it was set to expire. When Vyacheslav Molotov summoned Japanese Ambassador Naotake Satō to deliver this news, he made it clear that Soviet entry into the war against Japan was a real possibility. Despite these signals, throughout the spring and summer of 1945, the Japanese government and Imperial Court continued efforts to arrange mediation missions to Moscow – among them, an initiative involving former Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoe – under the mistaken belief that the USSR was still honoring the Neutrality Pact. American intelligence, through intercepted Japanese communications, revealed that the Japanese Foreign Minister instructed his ambassador in Moscow to meet with Molotov before the Soviet delegation departed for the Potsdam Conference. The ambassador was to convey the Emperor’s sincere desire to end the bloodshed and Japan’s willingness to relinquish its conquered territories. Although this did not amount to an unconditional surrender, it showed that Japan was wavering (Cray, 1990, p. 343). However, by the time these efforts were made, the Soviet delegation had already left for Potsdam, and the Japanese mission never took place.

Two significant developments in the spring and summer of 1945 introduced unexpected challenges to Soviet-American political and military cooperation. The first was the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, after which Vice President Harry

Truman assumed the presidency. Truman initially held a much more reserved attitude toward the Soviet Union.²⁶ Given the close and trusting relationship that had existed between the wartime leaders of the USSR and the United States, there was uncertainty about how this dynamic would change under the new American president. The second development occurred when Truman received his first detailed briefing on the progress of the atomic bomb project from Chief of Staff of the United States Army George C. Marshall and Manhattan Project director Leslie Groves (Pogue, 1973, p. 475). Until then, Truman had not been informed about the project. On May 2, 1945, he established the Interim Committee to advise him about “the most terrible weapon known in human history, one bomb of which could destroy a whole city” (Cray, 1990, p. 339).

As a result, the new U.S. leadership began to view relations with the Soviet Union as less critical – especially since the USSR had nearly completed the defeat of Nazi Germany, thereby fulfilling the primary wartime role expected of it by the Anglo-American allies. Furthermore, the anticipated availability of atomic weapons greatly diminished, at least in the eyes of Truman and his associates, the strategic importance of Soviet participation in hastening Japan’s surrender and minimizing American casualties.

On this issue, President Truman and the U.S. military held differing views. Before the atomic bomb was tested, there was uncertainty not only about how effective the weapon would be, but also about whether it could be completed successfully. “Some believed that it might take another year for a successful testing” (Pechatnov, 2006, p. 353). The fact that the test at Alamogordo occurred while the U.S. president was already at Potsdam highlights just how tight the timeline was for finishing the nuclear project. The successful nuclear test dramatically shifted the motivations behind the actions of both sides. Truman, who had initially gone to Potsdam seeking to secure Soviet entry into the war against Japan, now hoped to avoid relying on Soviet involvement. In his memoirs, he wrote, “There were many reasons for my going to Potsdam, but the most urgent, to my mind, was to get from Stalin a personal reaffirmation of Russia’s entry into the war against Japan, a matter which our military chiefs were most anxious to clinch. This I was able to get from Stalin in the very first days of the conference.”²⁷ At their first meeting in Potsdam on July 17, 1945, Stalin “reverted to the Yalta agreement concerning Soviet entry into the Pacific war and told the President that the Soviets would be ready for such entry by the middle of August, but said that prior to acting they would need to complete their negotiations and reach agreement with the Chinese.”²⁸

²⁶ On June 24, 1941, he told to *the New York Times*: “If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia; and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible <...>.”

²⁷ Harry S. Truman. 1955. *Year of Decisions. Memoirs*. Vol. 1. Garden City, New York: Doubleday. P. 411.

²⁸ The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference). 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*. Volume II. Document 1418. P. 1587.

After learning from the United States about the successful atomic bomb test, President Truman's outlook shifted significantly. After receiving the news from Alamogordo, he wrote in his diary: "Believe Japs will fold up before Russia comes in. I am sure they will when Manhattan appears over their homeland" (Pechatnov, 2006, p. 352). As a result, Truman's approach at Potsdam changed as well.

On the other hand, American military leaders believed that "even if we went ahead in the war without the Russians and compelled the Japanese to surrender to our terms, that would not prevent the Russians from marching into Manchuria anyhow and striking, thus permitting them to get virtually what they wanted in the surrender terms" (Cray, 1990, p. 344). Consequently, at the meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Potsdam on June 18, 1945, which focused on finalizing strategy for the war against Japan, it was decided to welcome Soviet entry into the conflict (The Victorious Finale, 2013, p. 437).

Given these new circumstances, the Soviet leadership – and Stalin personally – needed to ensure the implementation of the agreements made at Yalta and the Soviet demands on China, as well as to secure Chiang Kai-shek's consent, as Roosevelt had promised at Yalta (see above).

By late 1944, the Chinese government was already expressing interest in negotiating with the Soviet Union regarding the future of their bilateral relations both during and after the war. The Republic of China's Foreign Minister, T. V. Soong, informed Soviet chargé d'affaires in China T.F. Skvortsov that he planned to visit Moscow in late February, emphasizing that his trip was to remain confidential (Luzyanin, Mirovickaya, 2010, p. 184).

After the Soviet Union renounced the Neutrality Pact with Japan, it became clear to Chinese leaders that Moscow intended to support its allies in the Far East. On May 10, 1945, U.S. Ambassador to China, General Patrick Hurley, reported to President Truman:

"<...> the Generalissimo [Chiang Kai-shek] has received telegrams from the Chinese Ambassador at Washington summarizing all of the items decided at Yalta except the primary one [the Soviet commitment to enter the war against Japan] <...> Both Roosevelt and Stalin advised me that it was agreed between them that I would not open the subject of the Yalta decision with Chiang Kai-shek until the signal was given me by Stalin. <...> It now appears desirable that you discuss this situation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of State to determine when you should direct me to ask Stalin for his approval of the time when I am to officially inform Chiang Kai-shek."²⁹ Truman advised Hurley not to act hastily, stating: "In regard to the 'prelude"

²⁹ Interest of the United States in the Negotiation of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of August 14, 1945; Attempts by the United States to Obtain a Public Reaffirmation of the Open Door Policy. 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Far East, China*. Vol. VII. Document 607. P. 865–869.

to the Yalta agreement on the future conduct of the Pacific War, it is not appropriate at the present time for you to give any information to the Chinese Government. When it is appropriate and promising of advantage to the common cause, you will be advised to inform the Chinese Government of the particulars of arrangements that may be in effect at that time. We will endeavor to get to Chiang Kai-shek, through you at the earliest practicable date, all the available information on this subject that can be disclosed without damage to the overall prospect.”³⁰

Negotiations in Moscow with the Chinese delegation, led by T. V. Soong, only began at the end of June 1945. Although the Soviet leadership aimed to conduct the talks swiftly, the timing of the Potsdam Conference split the negotiations into two phases. At both stages, Stalin actively participated alongside Molotov and diplomats from the NKID. Behind the scenes, representatives of the United States, including Ambassador Averell Harriman, were closely involved, with T. V. Soong regularly updating Harriman on the progress. During discussions of the Yalta agreements, the Chinese delegation deliberately complicated efforts to reach mutually acceptable terms. T. V. Soong consistently sought direct instructions from Chiang Kai-shek, who himself raised significant objections only regarding the recognition of the independence of the Mongolian People's Republic. This caused delays – by July 1945, T. V. Soong had met exclusively with Stalin eight times – and prevented the negotiations from concluding before the Soviet leadership departed for Potsdam.³¹

Negotiations resumed in Moscow from August 7 to August 14, 1945, following the Soviet delegation's return from Potsdam. These talks culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between the USSR and the Republic of China by Foreign Ministers Vyacheslav Molotov and Wang Shih Chieh, along with all related documents.

The Soviet Embassy in Washington informed the U.S. State Department about additional agreements reached with China: “The agreement on the Chinese Eastern Railway and the Southern Manchurian Railway provides for the common ownership by the Soviet Union and China of these railways, united into one railway under the name of “The Chinese Changchun Railway” and mutual exploitation of this railway in the course of 30 years after which period the latter will gratis become the full property of China. Other agreements – about Port-Arthur and Dalny – provided for the mutual use by the Soviet Union and China of Port-Arthur as a naval base and the use by the Soviet Union under the rights of lease of a part of facilities and equipment of the port Dalny, which in accordance with the agreement, is proclaimed a free port.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Document 608. P. 868–869. Chiang Kai-shek was informed about the Yalta agreements by Ambassador Hurley on behalf of Truman on June 15, 1945. *Ibid.* Document 628. P. 897–898. Ambassador Hurley's message on delivering Truman's letter containing full information about the Yalta agreements to Chiang Kai-shek. See: *Ibid.* Document 632. P. 903–904.

³¹ Stalin postponed his departure for Berlin by one day to allow the head of the Chinese delegation to contact Chongqing and obtain the necessary guidance.

<...> In the document about the Mongolian People's Republic the Chinese Government has stated that, in view of the repeatedly expressed by the people of Outer Mongolia desire for independence, after the defeat of Japan, if the plebiscite of the people of Outer Mongolia will confirm this desire, the Chinese Government will recognize the independence of Outer Mongolia within her existing borders.

<...> the Soviet side gave assurances to China that the USSR will respect the sovereignty of China over Manchuria, will render moral support and aid to the Central Government of China and will not interfere in her internal affairs.

The treaty and agreements are signed for the period of 30 years and will be published in the nearest future after their ratification.”³² On August 24, 1945, at a session of the Legislative Yuan in Chongqing, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was unanimously approved (Luzyanin, Mirovickaya, 2010, p. 194).

The Potsdam Conference primarily focused on addressing the aftermath of the Axis Powers' defeat in Europe and the Mediterranean region. However, the war in the Pacific was still ongoing, and Japan had not yet surrendered.

Regarding the USSR's commitments, largely made under American pressure at Yalta, Soviet diplomacy's goal at the Potsdam Conference was to secure international legitimation for its entry into the war. In May 1945, Truman's special envoy, Harry Hopkins, who visited Moscow, mentioned the possibility of issuing a joint ultimatum by the Allies at the upcoming “Big Three” meeting (Hasegawa, 2003, p. 6). However, as noted earlier, following the successful nuclear test, Truman and his associates aimed to conclude the war with Japan without involving the USSR. U.S. Secretary of War Henry Stimson believed “[i]t was of great importance to get the homeland [Japan] into our hands before the Russians could put in any substantial claim to occupy and help rule it” (Cray, 1990, p. 347). On July 25, 1945, after receiving approval from Secretary Stimson and Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Marshall, Truman authorized the atomic bombing of Japan. Subsequently, on July 26, 1945, after consulting with Churchill in Potsdam and Chiang Kai-shek via telegraph, the leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and China jointly issued the Potsdam Declaration. The Declaration demanded Japan's immediate surrender, warning of “inevitably the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland”³³ if they refused. The demand for unconditional surrender was expected to be accepted promptly by the Japanese government. The Soviet leadership had not been informed of the Declaration's contents beforehand. When Molotov, on Stalin's behalf, proposed to Truman that the Soviet government be officially invited to join the war, it placed the U.S. President in a difficult position. Secretary of State James Byrnes explained that the United States “did not consult the Soviet Government since

³² Interest of the United States in the Negotiation of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of August 14, 1945. 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Far East, China*. Volume VII; *Attempts by the United States to Obtain a Public Reaffirmation of the Open Door Policy*. Document 692. *The Soviet Embassy to the Department of State*. Undated. P. 976–977.

³³ Issuance of a Proclamation Calling for the Surrender of Japan. 1945. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945*. Volume II. Document 1382. P. 1475.

the latter was not at war with Japan and we did not wish to embarrass them.” Moreover, Mr. Molotov’s “request for a two or three day postponement in the issuance of the statement on Japan had only reached him [Byrnes] this morning when it was too late.”³⁴ In his memoirs, Truman reflected: “Our military advisers have strongly urged that Russia should be brought into the war<...> But I was not willing to let Russia to reap the fruits of long and bitter and gallant effort in which she had had no part.”³⁵

After extensive discussions within government and military circles, Japanese Prime Minister Kantarō Suzuki issued a statement on July 28 expressing the government’s stance on the Potsdam Declaration: “We ignore it. We will persistently continue our efforts toward a successful conclusion of the war” (The Second Period of the War, 1958, p. 201). On July 30, 1945, Naotake Satō met in Moscow with Solomon Lozovsky, Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, and commented on the Declaration: “Japan cannot surrender on such terms. However, if Japan’s honor and existence are preserved, the Japanese government will adopt very conciliatory positions to end the war.” Satō reported the meeting to Tokyo and suggested accepting the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, arguing that this was the only way to prevent the USSR from entering the war. Nevertheless, Foreign Minister Shigenori Tōgō rejected the proposal due to strong opposition from the military (Molodyakov, 2010b, p. 122).

On August 6, 1945, following Truman’s orders, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima,³⁶ and the U.S. military pledged to continue using its new weapons to bomb Japan until the country surrendered unconditionally. However, Japanese military leaders did not consider the bombing of Hiroshima sufficient grounds to end the fighting.³⁷ Furthermore, Shigenori Tōgō urgently instructed Ambassador Satō to meet immediately with Vyacheslav Molotov to ascertain Moscow’s response regarding the arrival of Fumimaro Kono’s mission. This indicates that Japan was still hoping for a diplomatic resolution to the war through the Soviet Union.

In anticipation of potential military operations against Japan, the General Staff conducted calculations in the autumn of 1944 regarding the concentration of Soviet troops along the border with Manchuria. In May 1945, a large-scale troop redeployment to the Far East commenced. Within three months, over 400,000 personnel were relocated, along with military equipment and weapons, including 3,698 field guns (Cherevko, 2003, p. 290).

³⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference)*, 1945. Volume II. Document 710. P. 449–453.

³⁵ Truman. Op. cit. P. 402–403.

³⁶ The bombing was reportedly justified by Japan’s rejection of the Potsdam Declaration and aimed at forcing a swift surrender.

³⁷ Despite the devastating impact of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, civilian casualties from conventional Allied aerial bombings and artillery attacks in Japan ranged between 500,000 and 900,000 – significantly exceeding the death toll from the atomic attacks (The Victorious Finale, 2013, p. 449).

On June 28, 1945, the Supreme High Command Headquarters approved a war plan against Japan, stipulating that all preparations be completed by August 1, with military operations to commence upon a special order.

As previously mentioned, on July 17, 1945, Stalin informed Truman at Potsdam of his readiness to enter the war against Japan by mid-August. However, the timing changed as events progressed: on August 7, 1945, Supreme Commander Joseph Stalin and Chief of the General Staff Aleksei Antonov signed Directive No. 11122 from the Supreme High Command Headquarters, instructing Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevsky, Commander-in-Chief of Soviet forces in the Far East, to begin military operations against Japan on August 9, 1945.³⁸

On the evening of August 8, 1945, Molotov addressed Japanese Ambassador Satō with the following statement:

“Due to Japan’s refusal to surrender, the Allies have approached the Soviet Government with a proposal to join the war against Japanese aggression, aiming to hasten the war’s end, reduce casualties, and facilitate the swift restoration of universal peace.

In keeping with its allied responsibilities, the Soviet Government accepted this proposal and endorsed the Allied Powers’ Declaration dated July 26 of this year.³⁹

Accordingly, the Soviet Government declares that, starting tomorrow, August 9, the Soviet Union will consider itself at war with Japan. <...> Therefore, the Japanese Government’s suggestion that the Soviet Union act as a mediator in the Far East war is now entirely invalid.”

On August 9, President Truman declared, “We gladly welcome into this struggle <...> our gallant and victorious ally <...>” (Tompkins 1949: 297).

This move by the Soviet Union was also praised by the Chinese leader. In a message to Stalin on the same day, Chiang Kai-shek wrote, “The Soviet Union’s declaration of war on Japan, effective from today, has deeply inspired the entire Chinese people. From the very start of China’s defensive struggle, the Soviet Union was the first to offer us significant moral and material support, for which our people remain profoundly grateful” (Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, 2014, pp. 669-670).

The Far Eastern campaign involved the Transbaikal Front under Marshal of the Soviet Union Rodion Malinovsky, the 1st Far Eastern Front led by Marshal of the Soviet Union Kirill Meretskov, and the 2nd Far Eastern Front commanded by Army General Maksim Purkayev. Naval forces included the Pacific Fleet under Admiral Ivan Yumashev, the Amur Military Flotilla led by Rear Admiral Neon Antonov, and the Northern Pacific Military Flotilla commanded by Vice Admiral Vladimir Andreyev. Additionally, formations and units of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Army, headed by Marshal Khorloogiin Choibalsan, took part. Overall command of the campaign was

³⁸ *Stavka VGK: Dokumenty i materialy 1944–1945* [Supreme High Command Headquarters: Documents and Materials, 1944–1945]. 1999. Russkiy arkhiv: Velikaya Otechestvennaya [Russian Archive: The Great Patriotic War]. Vol. 16 (5–4). Pp. 249-250 (in Russian).

³⁹ Although the Allies’ appeal to the USSR was not officially documented, this fact went unchallenged.

exercised by the Headquarters of the Main Command of Soviet Troops in the Far East, with Marshal of the Soviet Union Alexander Vasilevsky serving as Commander-in-Chief. Coordination of naval operations was overseen by the People's Commissar of the Navy, Fleet Admiral Nikolay Kuznetsov.

By the start of the Far Eastern campaign, the Soviet forces had concentrated 11 combined-arms armies, one tank army, and three air armies. The striking power of the Soviet troops exceeded 1.7 million personnel, supported by approximately 30,000 guns and mortars, over 5,200 tanks and self-propelled artillery, and more than 5,000 combat aircraft (The Victorious Finale, 2013, p. 472). In comparison to the Japanese forces, the Red Army had a numerical advantage of 1.5 times in manpower, 4.5 times in artillery, 4.3 times in tanks, and 2.7 times in combat aircraft.

Although the Japanese command believed their forces in Manchuria could withstand the Red Army for a year, the Transbaikal Front's troops crossed the steppes, the Gobi Desert, and the Greater Khingan mountain range in just ten days. They defeated enemy groups at Kalgan, Solun, and Hailar, then pushed rapidly into the central regions of northeastern China. On August 20, the main forces of the 6th Guards Tank Army entered Shenyang and Changchun, advancing south toward Dalian and Port Arthur. Meanwhile, a cavalry-mechanized group of Soviet-Mongolian troops reached Zhangjiakou and Chengde on August 18, effectively cutting off Japanese forces in Manchuria from their expeditionary units in China.

Starting August 19, Japanese troops began surrendering almost everywhere. To prevent the enemy from evacuating or destroying valuable materials, Soviet airborne forces were deployed in Harbin, Shenyang, Changchun, Jilin, Port Arthur, Pyongyang, and other cities between August 18 and 27.

The 2nd Far Eastern Front, supported by the Pacific Fleet – which conducted several amphibious landings – secured southern Sakhalin from August 16 to 25 and the Kuril Islands from August 18 to September 1. Meanwhile, the 1st Far Eastern Front occupied North Korea.

Evaluating the strategic situation following the Soviet Union's entry into the war, Prime Minister Kantarō Suzuki stated on August 9, 1945: "The Soviet Union's declaration of war this morning has placed us in an undeniably desperate position, making it impossible to continue the war" (Molodyakov, 2010b, p. 124). On the same day, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

During a meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War on the night of August 10, 1945, in the presence of Emperor the Prime Minister "said that he regretted that he must humbly beg the Emperor's decision." In response, the Emperor conveyed that "[n]ow, bearing the unbearable, he would submit to the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, thereby to preserve the national polity."⁴⁰ At 2:30 a.m. on August 10, the Supreme Council approved the following statement: "The Japanese Govern-

⁴⁰ Shigenori Tōgō. 1996. *Vospominaniya yaponskogo diplomata* [Memoirs of a Japanese Diplomat]. Translated from English. Moscow. P. 472 (in Russian).

ment is prepared to accept the terms of the three Powers' declaration of July 26. The Japanese Government understands that this declaration does not contain demands which prejudice the prerogatives of the Emperor as the sovereign ruler of Japan" (The Second Period of the War, 1958, pp. 212-213). That morning, the statement was communicated to the Allies via the governments of Sweden and Switzerland. However, Washington's response was unsatisfactory to the Japanese army and navy leadership. The Minister of War issued an appeal "to all generals, officers, and soldiers of the army," urging them "to bring the holy war to an end." Debates within Japan's ruling circles continued until 11 p.m. on August 14, when an urgent telegram was sent to Switzerland confirming the final acceptance of the surrender terms.

Following Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam surrender terms and Emperor Hirohito's imperial rescript broadcast on August 15, the Imperial General Headquarters ordered all Army and Navy forces to cease hostilities by August 16. Despite this, the Kwantung Army continued to resist in several areas. On August 17, the Emperor addressed the soldiers and officers of the Japanese Army, stating: "Now that Russia has entered the war, continuing the war given the internal and external circumstances of our country would result in further casualties and suffering, and could threaten the very foundations of our Empire" (Hattori, 1973, p. 576). The disarmament of the Kwantung Army was completed by the end of August. Fighting ceased on August 25 in Southern Sakhalin and on September 1 in the Southern Kuril Islands. Throughout the campaign, Soviet forces killed approximately 84,000 Japanese soldiers and officers and captured 594,000 prisoners.

On August 28, an advance detachment of the U.S. army was deployed in Kanagawa Prefecture, and two days later, on August 30, General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, arrived in Japan. On September 2, a formal surrender ceremony took place aboard the USS Missouri, anchored in Tokyo Bay. Representing Japan, the Instrument of Surrender was signed on behalf of the Emperor and the Japanese government by Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu and Chief of the General Staff Yoshijirō Umezu, acting for the Imperial General Headquarters. The Allied Powers were represented by General MacArthur, Admiral Chester Nimitz from the United States, Xu Yongchang from the Republic of China, Bruce Fraser from Great Britain, Major General Kuzma Derevyanko from the USSR, as well as representatives from Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. The Instrument of Surrender officially confirmed Japan's acceptance of the terms outlined in the Potsdam Declaration issued by the Allied Powers – the United States, China, and Great Britain – with the Soviet Union having subsequently joined the declaration.

On September 9, 1945, in Nanjing, the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Army in China signed an Act of Surrender to the Chinese government, a move strongly insisted upon by Chiang Kai-shek. To facilitate the acceptance of the surrender, Kuomintang forces were transported on U.S. ships and aircraft from western and southwestern China to key cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, and others (Panov, Sarkisov, Strelcov, 2019, p. 172).

Conclusions

Between 1927 and 1932, Soviet diplomacy successfully secured the USSR's borders, avoided direct involvement in war, and strengthened both the political interests – such as ensuring the independence of the Mongolian People's Republic – and economic interests, including compensation related to the Chinese Eastern Railway, in the Far East. Although Moscow made certain compromises in specific cases – for example, the *de facto* recognition of Manchukuo and encouraging the Chinese Communist Party to cooperate with the Kuomintang after the Xi'an Incident – these concessions ultimately enhanced the Soviet Union's influence in Asia and the Pacific. This growing authority was reflected in the formal establishment of official relations with the United States and the initiation of Soviet-American dialogue on Pacific security matters.

Amid the outbreak of Japanese military aggression against China and Southeast Asian countries, alongside the expanding global cooperation among fascist powers, Soviet policy and diplomacy achieved significant successes. Following the formation of a united front in China against Japanese aggression, the Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed. The USSR began providing military aid and sending advisers and specialists as critical support for the Chinese government, which had been cut off from supplies from the United Kingdom and the United States due to the Japanese blockade. The battles of Lake Khasan and Khalkhin Gol demonstrated the substantial strengthening of the USSR's Far Eastern border defenses. Soviet diplomatic achievements included agreements with aggressor nations that helped delay Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and diverted Japan's aggressive ambitions away from Soviet territory. As a result, the USSR successfully avoided fighting a two-front war against two powerful and well-armed adversaries.

Following the outbreak of aggression by Germany and the Axis powers against the USSR, along with the Japanese air raid on Pearl Harbor, the regional conflicts in Europe and the Pacific merged into a full-scale global war. The world was divided into two opposing camps: the aggressor powers and the United Nations, which was formally established with the signing of the Declaration by the United Nations on January 1, 1942.

The Soviet Union, which bore the brunt of German aggression alone in the West until the opening of the second front in the summer of 1944, was compelled to significantly adjust the eastern dimension of its foreign policy. The country's primary focus was on resisting the German offensive, and to avoid fighting a war on two fronts, Soviet leadership pursued a policy aimed at maintaining as normal relations with Japan as possible. Consequently, the USSR halted military aid to China and declined the proposals of its allies within the anti-Hitler coalition to engage in joint operations in the Pacific and East Asia until Nazi Germany was defeated. Only after the pivotal Battle of Stalingrad and the subsequent turning point in the Great Patriotic War did Moscow begin to cautiously signal its willingness to cooperate militarily with its allies in the Pacific. This readiness was strictly confidential and explicitly contingent upon the un-

conditional surrender of Germany. The Allied conferences at Tehran and Yalta marked significant milestones in the Soviet leadership's implementation of this strategy.

With the Soviet Union's military strength significantly enhanced, the Allies – particularly the United States – increasingly sought to leverage the power of the Soviet armed forces to defeat Japanese forces in Manchuria, northern China, and Korea.

Having failed to secure decisive and sustained victories in the Pacific War and unaware of Moscow's commitments to its allies, Japan began to explore diplomatic channels with the USSR in hopes of negotiating favorable terms for a peaceful resolution.

In 1945, both military operations across all fronts of World War II and diplomatic activity in the Pacific theater intensified sharply, with the Yalta and Potsdam conferences serving as focal points. These conferences set in motion previously dormant dynamics in the relationships between the USSR, Japan, the United States, and China. Moscow's decision to withdraw from the Neutrality Pact with Japan marked a significant shift in Soviet policy in the Far East. The Japanese government made a late and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to propose a mediation mission to the Soviet leadership.

Meanwhile, developments unfolded in Soviet-Chinese relations. Reports reached Chongqing regarding certain decisions made at Yalta concerning the Pacific War. However, relying on President Roosevelt's assurances at Yalta that these matters would be addressed directly with Chiang Kai-shek at an appropriate time, the Americans adopted a wait-and-see approach. Roosevelt's death introduced uncertainty about future developments. The Truman administration honored the Yalta commitments made by his late predecessor, leading to the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance along with several related agreements based on the Yalta terms.

After learning of the successful nuclear weapons tests, Truman chose to act without involving the USSR in efforts to compel Japan's surrender and excluded Stalin from the Potsdam Declaration. By swiftly preparing to enter the war against Japan and securing the decisive defeat of the Kwantung Army as well as Japanese forces on Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and in North Korea, the Soviet Union firmly established its rightful status among the victors of the Pacific War.

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The author declares the absence of any conflicts of interests.

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