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Exploring Lessons from Soviet Diplomacy and Western Allied Cooperation during the Second World War¹

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Abstract. This article uses documentary sources from Russian, American, and British archives to analyse the intricacies of coalition diplomacy among the Allies during the Second World War. Particular emphasis is placed on investigating the extent to which each side observed their obligations and the general rules of conduct, which include respect for the interests of the other parties, maintaining unity in the face of disagreements, coordinating actions towards shared objectives, and avoiding movements that could cause the coalition to breakdown. Our comparative analysis of Soviet and Anglo-American diplomacy reveals that the principal members of the anti-Hitler coalition generally adhered to these rules, and this contributed significantly to the ultimate defeat of their common adversary. However, the study indicates that the Soviet Union exhibited greater fidelity in fulfilling its obligations and was more proactive in institutionalizing the coalition in order to increase stability and ensure equal participation in strategic decision-making on conducting the war conduct and post-war settlement. This quest for parity was often impeded by the reluctance of the Western powers to accept the Soviet Union as an enduring, equal partner and legitimate member of the great powers' club, both during and after the war. This hesitance, the article argues, was rooted not only in geopolitical considerations, but also in deep-seated cultural factors, particularly the traditional Western sense of superiority and perception of Russia as a “lesser” civilization not fit for inclusion in the Euro-Atlantic community. The article brings to light lesser-known documents from U.S. and UK archives to illustrate this mindset. It also acknowledges dissenting voices in Anglo-American political spheres that advocated for a more equitable relationship with the USSR. However, these perspectives did not significantly alter the overarching direction of Western policy.

Keywords: Second World War, Soviet diplomacy, anti-Hitler coalition, Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Pechatnov V.O. 2023. O nekotorykh urokakh vzaimodejstviya sovetsoj diplomatii s zapadnymi sojuznikami v gody Vtoroj mirovoj vojny. *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. No. 16 (6). P. 13–36. DOI: [10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-13-36](https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-13-36)

A substantial body of both domestic and international scholarly literature examines the cooperation among the three major powers within the anti-Hitler coalition, including their diplomatic relations.² Nevertheless, the subject is so broad and intricate that, despite extensive research, certain areas remain under-explored. One such area is the comparative analysis of Soviet and Anglo-American diplomacy, particularly regarding adherence to coalition norms – the formal (such as fulfilling obligations) and informal rules guiding the behaviour of coalition members. In our view, Western historians have largely overlooked this issue, possibly because, in such comparisons, Anglo-American diplomacy often appears less consistent than its Soviet counterpart, especially concerning the fulfillment of obligations like the opening of the second front. Western historiography typically highlights Soviet violations of the Yalta agreements on Poland and Eastern Europe, but these counter-accusations are generally weak and do not address the broader imbalance, as evidenced by the few objective American studies on the topic (Leffler, 1991, p. 355–356). Methodologically, this gap also exists because the issue sits at the crossroads of traditional diplomatic history and international relations theory, which tends to focus on theoretical and methodological questions about coalition formation and operation. These works demonstrate that coalition diplomacy, like the broader process of building relations within coalitions, follows its own distinct rules and patterns (Istomin, 2018; Schroeder, 1976; Snyder, 1997; Walt, 1987; Walt, 1997).³ Combining these historical and political science perspectives through the lens of the anti-Hitler coalition presents a compelling research challenge that demands comprehensive scholarly investigation. This article represents only an initial step toward addressing this complex task, focusing on outlining the most fundamental and apparent rules – an informal code of conduct for states participating in allied coalitions – to assess how well the principal members of the anti-Hitler coalition adhered to them. Based on this analysis, we aim to draw conclusions that extend beyond purely historical interest.

Building and strengthening a coalition

Let us begin with the formation of the coalition and the role played by Soviet diplomacy. The key points are well established. The creation of the anti-Hitler coalition was not automatic; it encountered significant challenges and required the concerted efforts of all three parties. While the initiative came from the Anglo-Americans, Soviet diplomacy swiftly adapted to cooperating with former adversaries and firmly grasped the

² Among the most widely recognized works are: *Soyuzniki SSSR po antigitlerovskoi koalitsii* [Allies of the USSR from the Anti-Hitler Coalition], 2014; *Vneshnyaya politika i diplomatiya Sovetskogo Soyuza v gody voyny* [Soviet Foreign Policy and Diplomacy during the War], 2014; Israelyan, 1985; Sipols, 2000; *Soyuzniki v vojne. 1941–1945* [Allies in the War. 1941–1945], 1995; Feis, 1967; Fenby, 2007; Lane, Temperley, 1995; Stoler, 2007.

³ Bloch F. 2012. Endogenous Formation of Alliances in Conflict. *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Peace and Conflict*. Ed. by M. Garfinkel and S. Skaperdas. Oxford.

helping hand extended by the West. One often overlooked aspect deserves attention. Diplomatic theory and practice show that the strength and longevity of international coalitions largely depend on their foundation in legally binding agreements. Notably, from the outset, the Soviet side aimed to institutionalize its new relationships with allies, whereas the Western powers preferred to avoid formal contractual commitments. It was only through Stalin's determination that the Soviet-British agreement of July 12, 1941, was recognized as an official treaty rather than a mere joint statement, as the British had initially intended (Pechatnov, Magadeev, 2015a, p. 32–34). The agreement committed the parties to mutual assistance against Nazi Germany, prohibited separate negotiations with the enemy, and forbade any truce or peace treaty without mutual consent. This agreement marked the beginning of the Soviet-British wartime alliance. On July 8, Stalin told British Ambassador S. Cripps, "Hitler's coalition must be countered by a coalition." He added, "While the cooperation Churchill mentioned in his June 22 speech is positive, it will be sporadic and short-lived. Only if both sides are bound by a mutual assistance pact, can stable and lasting cooperation be achieved."⁴ During an August meeting with H. Hopkins, Stalin even suggested concluding a similar agreement with the United States, which had not yet entered the war. Furthermore, at Stalin and Molotov's insistence, an official protocol on supplies was signed during the Moscow conference of representatives from the three powers in late September to early October 1941, despite resistance from A. Harriman and Lord Beaverbrook against formalizing the conference's outcomes (Pechatnov, 2002, p. 181–182).

It is not widely known that U.S. experts were developing more ambitious plans to involve the USSR in permanent joint coalition planning. In a confidential report to the U.S. State Department dated December 15, 1941, the influential New York-based Council on Foreign Relations urgently recommended establishing a military and political alliance including the U.S., the British Commonwealth, the USSR, China, the Netherlands, *France libre*, European governments in exile, and interested Latin American countries. The alliance's terms were to encompass waging war against the Axis powers until victory, refraining from separate negotiations with the enemy, and creating allied bodies for coordinated military operations. The report emphasized that without such integrated efforts, it would be impossible to effectively counter the highly integrated forces of the Axis.⁵ Notably, even after the formation of the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee and the adoption of the United Nations Declaration, the Council's experts deemed these steps insufficient and continued to

⁴ *Sovetsko-angliyskie otnosheniya v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny, 1941–1945. 1983. Dokumenty i materialy* [Soviet-British Relations during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945. 1983. Documents and Materials]. In two volumes. Vol. 1, covering 1941–1943. Moscow. P. 69–71 (in Russian).

⁵ War Planning. The Armament Group, Council on Foreign Relations Records, December 15, 1941. H.F. Armstrong Papers, *S.Mudd Manuscript Library*. Princeton, New Jersey.

advocate for the creation of a coalition governing military and political body akin to the Supreme War Council of the Entente formed at the end of 1917, with Marshal F. Foch serving as supreme allied commander.⁶

However, these plans never materialized. A major obstacle was the strong opposition from the British military leadership and Churchill himself, who viewed them as a threat to their “special relationship” with Washington. The Pentagon showed little enthusiasm for Soviet involvement, although it was somewhat more open to the idea than the British. The 1942 alliance treaty with Great Britain was initiated by the Soviet side, which proceeded even though key conditions had not been fulfilled. As is well known, relations with Washington at that time were limited to the 1942 mutual aid agreement formalizing the principles of Lend-Lease. Later, during preparations for the 1943 Moscow Conference, the Kremlin sought ways to strengthen the “Big Three” alliance on a more stable and lasting foundation. A draft message from Stalin to Roosevelt and Churchill, dated September 25, proposed discussing the establishment of a military and political alliance among the three great powers at the upcoming conference. The goal was to build upon the Soviet-British treaty of 1942 and reach an agreement that would “further strengthen our military alliance in the fight against Hitler’s Germany, as well as advance our cooperation in the postwar period for the peace and security of all peoples.” The document stressed that such an agreement “should not be a mere declaration, but a binding accord defining the political relations between our countries both during the war and for a long period afterward.” It described this step as potentially “of outstanding importance.”⁷ However, the message was never sent, and the topic was not brought up at the Moscow Conference. It appears the Kremlin judged that the timing was not yet right for a productive discussion. Nonetheless, the very existence of this idea within Soviet leadership reveals that the Kremlin was actively exploring ways to further institutionalize the anti-Hitler coalition, aiming to transform it into a lasting military and political alliance extending beyond the war itself. From the standpoint of international relations theory, this would represent a higher level of interstate integration – an alliance – compared to a coalition (Istomin, 2018, p. 250–251).

The dramatic shifts in the strategic landscape and the tightening encirclement of Germany from both the west and east brought the need for enhanced coordination of Allied military operations to the forefront. This issue was raised by the Americans at the Anglo-American Sextant Conference in November 1943 but remained unresolved due to British opposition. In late June 1944, during a meeting with U.S. Ambassador

⁶ A Supreme War Council for the United Nations. *The Armament Group, Council on Foreign Relations Records*. August 31, 1942.

⁷ Private and confidential message from Premier J.V. Stalin to President F.D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister W. Churchill, dated September 25, 1943. *Russian State Archive of Social and Political History*, Fond 588, List 11, File 263, Sheet 81 (in Russian).

A. Harriman, Stalin introduced for the first time the idea of establishing a joint military planning mechanism for the three powers. This proposal sparked renewed debate within Anglo-American military leadership. The American military recognized that the final phase of joint military operations in Europe and the subsequent occupation of Germany required trilateral military planning; trying to address these challenges bilaterally through existing Anglo-American headquarters would be ineffective and would only increase suspicion and distrust of the Russians, according to the Joint Strategic Survey Committee of the U.S. Chiefs of Staff. Moreover, with the USSR's impending entry into the war against Japan, Soviet-American cooperation was seen as no less, if not more important than U.S.-British collaboration.⁸ Similar sentiments were emerging within the British Foreign Office, where some officials in the Northern Department, responsible for Soviet affairs, suggested that regular military staff consultations between Britain and the USSR – building on the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 1942 – should be established and continued after the war. They argued that such interactions would foster greater mutual understanding and facilitate compromise on security issues, thereby reducing mutual suspicions.⁹

However, this idea, along with the above-mentioned American military's proposal, was rejected by Churchill and the British military leadership. In the British Chiefs of Staff's response to Stalin's initiative and the American military's position, the primary argument was that such a supreme tripartite body "might even claim to be the more representative body, and, therefore, to exercise jurisdiction over the Combined Chiefs of Staff", *i.e.*, the Anglo-American headquarters. This prospect was clearly unacceptable to London. Instead, the British proposed enhancing allied coordination through the U.S. and British military missions in Moscow.¹⁰ The American military command did not oppose its closest ally, and consequently, the institutionalization of military strategic planning with equal Soviet participation did not materialize. As a result, the "Big Three" alliance never evolved into a fully developed trilateral framework with legally binding treaty obligations.

The issue of equality

Another issue concerns equality among coalition members. Naturally, full equality was hardly achievable due to differences in military and economic strength and other factors. However, the very logic of coalition demands at least some level of coordinated action among participants. For a long time, even this basic coordination was lacking:

⁸ Machinery for Coordination of United States-Soviet-British military effort. Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, August 31, 1944. *Franklin D. Roosevelt Library*, Hyde Park, New York ("FDRL"). President's Secretary File. American-British Joint Chiefs of Staff.

⁹ G. Wilson's minute, September 24, 1944. *The National Archives*, Kew Garden, UK ("TNA"). Foreign Office ("FO") 371/43306.

¹⁰ Proposed Combined Committee in Moscow. Memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff. 29 August 1944. *FDRL*. President's Secretary File. American-British Joint Chiefs of Staff.

crucial strategic decisions made by the Allies – such as Operations Torch and Husky, and the postponement of the second front's opening at the Trident Conference in summer 1943 – were taken without consulting the USSR, despite these decisions largely determining the course of the war; the Soviet Union was only informed of them afterward. This exclusion of Moscow reflected the Anglo-Saxon (especially British) sense of superiority and distrust toward a new ally they considered insufficiently civilized. In the summer of 1943, Soviet Ambassador I.M. Maisky, who recently returned from London, complained to the British Ambassador in Moscow, A. Kerr, that the British treated Russians like “poor country relatives,” not as equals, as they treated the Americans. Kerr later wrote to a colleague at the Foreign Office: “I protested, but in my heart I felt he was right. I feel indeed that we are still holding these people at an arm's length. We have not yet let them into the club. They are still scrutinised by the hall-porter, stared at by the members and made to feel that they do not really belong. Whereas we fall over ourselves to make the Americans feel at home. We even let them sit on the Committee and change the rules. In a word, we consult Washington and we inform Moscow (*emphasis added in the original – author*). Little or no progress can be made here as long as this goes on. Our country cousins, who are people who miss nothing and who refuse to be taken in, will one day stop wanting to belong to our club and will start one of their own. And on its doors we shall beat in vain for admission <...> we shall have to learn not to be snobs and still more not to be fools. And the sooner we learn that they have earned their place on the Committee the better.”¹¹ Kerr was echoed by another proponent of equal cooperation with the USSR, J. Wilson, a senior official in the Foreign Office's Northern Department. In a letter to Kerr in May 1944, Wilson wrote, “I am as convinced as ever I was that the Russians want to be reasonable, but influential, members of the club, even though they think some of the rules are damn silly and want to change them. They are members now but are not allowed into some of the rooms <...> The fault seems to me to be about equal on both sides, but I think you've got to go on going out of your way to make the new member feel at home if you want to keep him inside.”¹²

Relations within the “Big Three” can also be seen as an intercultural dialogue between representatives of two fundamentally different socio-cultural traditions: the Anglo-American and the Soviet-Russian. This cultural divide influenced their mutual perceptions and significantly hindered understanding. Roosevelt and Churchill shared a sense of Anglo-American exceptionalism and superiority, rooted in the belief that English-speaking peoples had a civilizing mission toward the rest of the world, including what they viewed as the “semi-barbaric” Russia. They saw Stalin as an exceptional yet still barbaric leader – some British figures even referred to him behind

¹¹ A. Kerr to Ch. Warner, 10 August 1943. TNA. FO 800/301.

¹² G. Wilson to A. Kerr, 15 May 1944. TNA. FO 800/302.

the scenes as “Attila.” The frequent depiction of Stalin as a bear in Churchill’s correspondence with Eden reflects a longstanding British Russophobic stereotype dating back centuries (Degoyev, 2022; Volodin, Filatov, 2023). Stalin, meanwhile, inherited the traditional Russian suspicion of the West (intensified by Bolshevik mentality) and viewed the policies of Anglo-Saxon leaders as driven by a typical self-interested desire to exploit Russia, disregarding its needs. Having lived through World War I, Stalin expected the Western allies to once again use Russia as cannon fodder, offering geopolitical promises they would later abandon under convenient pretexts. “They are wary of us, and we are even more wary of them,” observed V.M. Molotov regarding this mutual distrust (Chuev, 2000, p. 79). This cultural and civilizational gap imposed certain limits on Allied cooperation, although during the war years it tended to recede into the background.

The dynamics within the “Big Three” began to shift during the Moscow and Tehran conferences, as the USSR emerged as a key player in collectively shaping Allied strategy. By the end of the Moscow Conference, the Russians demonstrated, as reported by A. Eden to Churchill, that they are willing to cooperate with the British on all fronts, provided they are treated as equals in every respect and nothing is withheld from them.¹³ Ambassador Kerr also attributed this shift in attitude primarily to the fact that the Soviets felt, for the first time, that they were genuinely accepted as equals within the intimate circle, from which they had previously felt excluded.¹⁴ Ch. Bohlen, a prominent American diplomat present at the conference noted, during the staff meeting at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, that the conference marked the return of the USSR as a member of the community of nations, endowed with appropriate responsibility.¹⁵ It appeared that Moscow was finally joining the ranks of the great powers’ club, as Kerr had described. However, this sense of full membership proved to be short-lived.

“Enlightened self-interest” and commitment to obligations

Another implicit principle guiding coalition relations can be described as “enlightened self-interest.” This concept was clearly articulated by Maisky in a dispatch to Stalin in the fall of 1942. He wrote, “There can be no doubt that our allies are difficult partners, especially England, but since we have no other allies, we must take from them whatever we can.”¹⁶ On the British side, this view was echoed by Eden’s private secretary, O. Harvey, who noted in his diary after the German defeat at Stalingrad: “The Russians are very tiresome allies, importunate, ungrateful, secretive, suspicious, ever asking for more, but they are delivering the goods.” (Harvey, 1978, p. 219).

¹³ From Moscow to Foreign Office, November 2, 1943. 2017. *The Churchill Documents*. M. Gilbert and L. Arnn. Vol. 19. *Fateful Questions*, September 1943 to April 1944. Hillsdale. P. 760.

¹⁴ From DO to Canada e.a., 8 November 1943. *TNA*. FO 371/37031.

¹⁵ Staff Meeting at American Embassy, November 9, 1943. *Library of Congress Manuscript Division* (danee – LC MD), William A. Harriman Papers, Chronological File, Cont.170.

¹⁶ *Dokumenty vreshnei politiki SSSR* [USSR Foreign Policy Documents], 1942. Tula, 2000. Vol. XXV. Book 2, p. 323 (in Russian).

The anti-Hitler coalition, like other alliances of its kind, was essentially a marriage of convenience, where each participant aimed to leverage the others for their own benefit while conserving their own resources. The “enlightenment” of this selfishness lies in accurately recognizing one’s long-term interests while also appreciating the need to consider the interests of coalition partners. The leadership of the “Big Three” was united by a shared primary strategic goal – the defeat of the Axis powers – and the necessity of subordinating all other concerns to this objective. Roosevelt, Churchill, and their advisors fully understood that victory over the Axis was impossible without the Soviet Union; as Churchill wrote to Roosevelt in October 1943, their fate totally depended on the Russians.¹⁷ The cornerstone of Anglo-American strategy was, first, to “keep Russia in the war,” as Churchill put it (Gilbert, 1983, p. 1198–1199), and second, to maximize the Soviet contribution to defeating the enemy, especially Germany. From the earliest American strategic plans in September 1941, great importance was placed on maintaining “an active front in Russia,” since it “offers by far the best opportunity for a successful land offensive against Germany, because only Russia possesses adequate manpower, situated in favorable proximity to the center of German military power <...> were the Soviet forces to be driven even beyond the Ural Mountains, and were they there to continue an organized resistance, there would always remain the hope of a final and complete defeat of Germany by land operations.”¹⁸ Churchill echoed this view almost verbatim in his July 1941 instructions to commanders, stating that the benefits Britain would gain if Russia could hold out and continue the war, at least until winter, were incalculable. He added that as long as the Russians kept fighting, it did not matter where the front line was, and that they had proven themselves worthy of support. Therefore, the British must be prepared to make sacrifices and take risks, even at their own inconvenience, to sustain Russian morale.¹⁹

However, the Allies were reluctant to make significant sacrifices, take risks, or endure inconveniences. They countered the Soviet strategy of direct confrontation with what Maisky called a strategy of “easy war,” allowing the Red Army to bear the brunt of the Wehrmacht’s main force. As Ch. Bohlen later noted in his “personal” working notes, once it became clear that the Soviet Union would withstand the initial German onslaught, a strong consensus emerged within the British and American military commands that keeping the Russian armies actively engaged against Germany was the most crucial task and the key to Allied victory. This fundamental strategic approach was upheld by Allied military leaders until the ultimate victory in May 1945.²⁰ Indeed,

¹⁷ *The Churchill Documents*. Ed. by M. Gilbert and L. Arnn. Vol. 19. *Fateful Questions*, September 1943 to April 1944. Hillsdale, 2017. P. 663.

¹⁸ Joint Board Estimate of United States Over-All Production Requirements (September 11, 1941). *FDRL*. President’s Secretary File. American-British Joint Chiefs of Staff.

¹⁹ Gilbert M. 2000. *The Churchill War Papers*. Vol. III. *The Ever-Widening War 1941*. London. P. 921.

²⁰ General Situation in 1941. *National Archives (NA)*. College Park, Maryland. Record Group (RG) 59. Records of Charles E. Bohlen, 1944–52. Box 8.

the Soviet-German front remained the primary front throughout the war. General S. Embick, Chief of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee within the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, observed in August 1943 that whenever the Allies opened a second front on the continent, it would clearly be secondary to the Russian front, which would remain the main one. He emphasized that without Russia's involvement, the Axis powers could not be defeated in Europe, and the position of the anti-Hitler coalition would remain extremely precarious.²¹ Many other military leaders from the United States and Great Britain echoed this unchanging reality. For instance, the British Chief of Staff's program report "American-British Strategy" of October 30, 1942, stated that "the Russian army is, today, the only force capable of defeating the German army, or, indeed, of containing it. Britain and America can't hope to challenge the bulk of the Axis forces on land." Churchill wrote in the margin next to this paragraph, "I hope Stalin will not see this."²² However, Stalin likely had access to this document through the "Cambridge Five" and Soviet intelligence agents in London. The Kremlin was well aware of the Allies' concealed assessments and plans, which only served to undermine trust in them.

The Anglo-American strategy of pursuing an "easy war" proved effective. In terms of combined military and civilian casualties, the USSR suffered the loss of nearly one in seven citizens, while the UK lost one in 127, and the US one in 320 (Harrison, 1998, p. 184-186; Ready, 1996, p. 322-333; Krivosheev, 2010, p. 219). It was no coincidence that Churchill, shortly after the war, expressed satisfaction in a lesser-known private letter, noting that unlike World War I, World War II was conducted skillfully and concluded with the unconditional surrender of all enemies, resulting in a significant saving of Anglo-American lives (Koul'kov, 2002, p. 250).

The Soviet leadership also recognized the critical importance of the Western Allies' economic and military support in defeating their common enemy. Stalin acknowledged at the Yalta Conference that without Lend-Lease aid, achieving victory would have been significantly more difficult.²³ The Kremlin understood that only by pooling the resources and efforts of the three great powers could the Allies achieve the decisive superiority needed to overcome their most formidable adversary.

The Soviets were fully conscious of their Allies' true motives, and the Allies were well aware that the Soviets understood them. As one of the principal U.S. military planners, General A. Wedemeyer, wrote to his superiors, Russia did not trust the Americans, and in fact, understood perfectly well that their sudden friendly interest was purely selfish.²⁴ Moscow also practiced a form of pragmatic self-interest, aiming to

²¹ Memorandum for Mr. H. Hopkins, August 10, 1943. *FDRL*. H. Hopkins Papers. Box 217.

²² American-British Strategy, 30 October 1942. *TNA*. PREM3/499/6.

²³ *Krymskaya konferentsiya rukovoditeley tryokh soyuznykh derzhav – SSSR, SShA i Velikobritanii (4–11 fevralya 1945 g.)*. 1979. *Sovetskiy Soyuz na konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945 gg.* [The Crimean Conference of the leaders of the three Allied powers – the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain (February 4–11, 1945). 1979. The Soviet Union at the conferences during the period of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945.], Vol.3. Collection of Documents, Moscow, p. 143 (in Russian).

²⁴ Military Policy Toward Russia. Memorandum for General Handy, December 12, 1942. *LC MD*. H. Arnold Papers. Military Subject File. Box 201.

extract as much as possible from its allies. However, the crucial difference was that the USSR was far more honest than its Western partners in meeting its obligations. “Fulfill your obligations” is another fundamental rule of Allied relations and a key condition for the effectiveness of any coalition. Unlike the Allies’ repeated delays and breaches regarding the opening of a second front, Moscow diligently honored its promises – most notably by launching its powerful offensive (Operation Bagration) to support the Allied landing in Normandy and by entering the war against Japan. Furthermore, the Soviet command responded to the Allies’ request to divert Wehrmacht forces during the Ardennes offensive, the last major German offensive campaign on the Western Front, acting not out of formal obligation but from “the duty of an ally,” as Stalin stated at the Yalta Conference.²⁵ At the war’s end, U.S. Secretary of War H. Stimson reminded President Truman that, in major military matters, the Soviet Union had remained faithful to its commitments.²⁶

The delays in opening the second front stand out as perhaps the most prominent and classic illustration of Allied – to put it mildly – dishonesty. However, two significant factors are often overlooked. First, the Allies were fully cognizant of the dangers inherent in their decision to postpone the Normandy invasion. The author of this article was the first to publish the U.S. military command’s summer 1942 assessment prepared in case Russia falls. According to this forecast, if the Red Army were defeated at Stalingrad and at least half of the Wehrmacht’s forces were redeployed to the Western Front, the consequences would be disastrous: the Allies would lose the European continent, Germany would gain control over Soviet resources and become nearly unbeatable in direct conflict, the British Empire would disintegrate, German and Japanese forces might link up in the Middle East, and the United States would be confined to the Western Hemisphere, forced onto the defensive.²⁷ Despite understanding the immense risk, the Allies decided against launching Operation Sledgehammer – a planned Normandy landing in 1942 with at least 8–10 divisions – which might have drawn German forces away from the Eastern Front and provided crucial support to the Soviet Union at a decisive moment. Maisky’s appeals to Churchill, recalling the self-sacrifice of Samsonov’s army that saved Paris in 1914 by launching an offensive in East Prussia, went unheeded. The Allies were unwilling to risk their own troops, relying instead on the hope that the USSR would endure. In October, Roosevelt wrote to Churchill that he was firmly convinced that Russia would hold out through the coming winter.²⁸

²⁵ *Krymskaya konferentsiya rukovoditeley tryokh soyuznykh derzhav – SSSR, SShA i Velikobritanii (4–11 fevralya 1945 g.)*. 1979. *Sovetskiy Soyuz na konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945 gg.* [The Crimean Conference of the leaders of the three Allied powers – the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain (February 4–11, 1945). 1979. The Soviet Union at the conferences during the period of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945.], Vol.3, p. 61, 62 (in Russian).

²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1945. 1967. Vol. V. Europe. Washington. P. 252–255.

²⁷ Strategic Policy of the United Nations and the United States on the Collapse of Russia, August 7, 1942. NA. RG 165. ABC 384. USSR (6-1-42).

²⁸ *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*. Vol. 1–3 (hereinafter, “Churchill and Roosevelt”). Edited by W. Kimball. Princeton, 1984. Vol. I. P. 643.

Maisky reported to Stalin that Churchill's visit to Moscow in August 1942 had only reinforced the British Prime Minister's belief that, even in the worst-case scenario, the USSR would somehow "pull through," thanks to its resilience.²⁹ Fortunately for the world, this confidence proved justified – but the outcome could have been very different.

The second point is that among themselves, Allied leaders recognized the ethical shortcomings of their selfish position and sometimes felt remorse. Although Western historians often avoid discussing this, careful examination of the documents reveals such instances. For example, Churchill lamented to Hopkins in February 1943: "I think it is an awful thing that in April, May and June, not a single American or British soldier will be killing a single German or Italian soldier while the Russians are chasing 185 [German] divisions around." He added that Britain and America would be "very much open to grievous reproach at the hands of Russia" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 338). In July 1943, C. Warner, head of the Foreign Office's Northern Department, wrote to Ambassador A. Kerr: "The main problem, in my opinion, is that during their *appeasement* (emphasis added), we made hasty promises to the Russians that we are now unable to keep. Perhaps it was worth it, although I personally have serious doubts about that."³⁰ After the Tehran Conference, Churchill, in an effort to convince Roosevelt to adopt his Mediterranean strategy, suggested sacrificing Operation Anvil – agreed upon at Tehran – which supposed a landing in southern France. Roosevelt, however, halted these efforts, recognizing that the Allies had already reached their limit of broken promises. At a Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting on February 21, he stated that the Allies had already made promises to the Russians that they had been unable to keep. He added that the Allies had broken promises in the past and should not do so in the future.³¹

It is unsurprising that in Moscow, the Allies' decision to delay the opening of the second front in 1942, combined with their suspension of Lend-Lease supplies via the northern route, was taken with grave seriousness. Ambassador Maisky captured the situation succinctly in a telegram to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, stating, "Thus, at the most critical moment for us, we found ourselves essentially abandoned to our fate by our allies." He identified two main reasons for the Allies' inaction: "the desire to see the mutual exhaustion of Germany and the USSR" and "the Anglo-American leadership's fear of Germany's military power."³² Even pro-Western Litvinov acknowledged this in one of his dispatches at that time, writing: "The Americans and British consider the ideal situation to be one in which the Germans defeat and push us back, as long as there is some kind of front somewhere – even if only in Western

²⁹ *Maiskiy – Stalinu, 22.10.1942. 2013. Velikaya pobeda* [Maisky to Stalin, October 22, 1942. 2013. The Great Victory]: A multi-volume ongoing edition, edited by S.E. Naryshkin and academician A.V. Torkunov. MGIMO. Vol. 9, p. 397–398 (in Russian).
³⁰ Ch. Warner to A. Kerr, 8 July 1943. TNA. FO 800/301.

³¹ Minutes of Meeting between FDR and JCS, Feb.21, 1944. FDRL, Map Room Files. Box 24.

³² *Maiskiy – NKID, 16 iyulya, 1942 g.* [Maisky to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, July 16, 1942]. USSR Foreign Policy Documents, Vol. XXV, Book 2, p. 58-59 (in Russian).

Siberia – to keep German troops engaged until, in a year or two, having achieved significant superiority in aviation, they [the Americans and British] can launch offensive operations. We must be weakened to the point that we cannot raise our voices loudly when peace is concluded.”³³ As we can see, the veteran Soviet diplomat nearly anticipated the sentiments later expressed by Churchill (“it doesn’t matter where the front line is”) and the American command (“were the Soviet forces to be driven even beyond the Ural Mountains”). It is therefore unsurprising that Stalin, in his famous message to the Allies responding to their cancellation of the second front in 1942, wrote: “The Soviet Government cannot accept such disregard for the fundamental interests of the Soviet Union in the war against the common enemy... this is not simply a matter of disappointment on the part of the Soviet Government, but of preserving its trust in the allies, which is being severely tested” (Pechatnov, Magadeev, 2015b, p. 487).

Preserving the unity

Another fundamental principle of coalition diplomacy is preserving the unity of the coalition. The “strategic consensus” among the “Big Three” fostered a readiness among their leaders to subordinate all other concerns – ideological differences, secondary political interests, bureaucratic hurdles, and personal issues such as pride and emotions – to the pursuit of their primary shared objective. This approach facilitated finding common ground and navigating through even the most seemingly intractable crises that occasionally emerged in Allied relations. Through their interactions, the leaders learned from experience to avoid crossing lines that might provoke a breakdown in their cooperation. “Anything but a break!” Churchill repeatedly told Maisky, anxious about Stalin’s possible reaction to yet another suspension of northern convoys in spring 1943.³⁴ There are other instances where leaders retreated from the brink of rupture. During Churchill’s visit to Moscow in August 1942, he nearly departed prematurely, angered by Stalin’s severe accusation of broken commitments. He admitted to Ambassador Kerr that the day before, he “could hardly bring himself to shake Stalin’s hand.” The British aristocrat, offended by what he saw as a rebuke from a “peasant,” exclaimed, “Did he not realize who he was speaking to? The representative of the most powerful empire the world has ever seen.” (Moran, 1966, p. 80). Kerr hardly managed to persuade Churchill to postpone his departure, and Stalin, unwilling to let the Prime Minister leave empty-handed, disarmed him with an unexpected late-night invitation to dinner at his apartment, where they shared their first candid conversation. The following day, Kerr wrote to a friend that Churchill spoke only of Stalin: “Stalin this, Stalin that... He has formed a friendship with Stalin and is delighted by it. Stalin was

³³ Litvinov – Molotovu, 23 iyulya 1942 g. [Litvinov to Molotov, July 23, 1942]. *Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (hereinafter, the “Foreign Policy Archive”). Fond 059, List 1, Folder 368, File 2568, Sheet 110 (in Russian).

³⁴ Maisky v NKID, 31.III. 1943 [Maisky to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, March 31, 1943]. *Foreign Policy Archive*, Fond 059a, List 7, Folder 13, File 6, Sheets 258-260 (in Russian).

magnificent. What a pleasure it is to work with this great man!”³⁵ High-stakes negotiations were saved. Although the emotional Churchill attempted several times to halt correspondence with Stalin after receiving reprimands, he always resumed communication first.

Tensions also flared between Roosevelt and Stalin, notably during the “Bern incident” in March 1945, when American intelligence engaged in separate contacts with the German command in Switzerland and excluded Soviet representatives from the talks. Despite this strain, both leaders ultimately chose to defuse the situation at the last moment. Throughout the war, the Polish question repeatedly threatened to escalate, yet the Allies managed to prevent it from undermining their unified efforts against the common enemy. Allied leadership maintained a friendly tone in propaganda, deliberately avoiding publications that might damage their relations. For example, in March 1944, the U.S. State Department blocked the House Un-American Activities Committee from releasing the manuscript of L. Trotsky’s book on Stalin. Later, in June of the same year, it postponed the release of the next volume in the official series “Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States,” which focused on the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and included discussions of Entente plans for anti-Soviet intervention. The U.S. Department of State concluded that they must not harm their relations with the Soviet Union as long as the war with Germany continued.³⁶ This crucial caveat – “as long as the war continued” – should be kept in mind.

Anglo-American diplomatic leaders sought to curb the widespread anti-Soviet sentiments among their military personnel, intelligence officers, and diplomats. The British military, particularly those assigned to the USSR, were particularly prone to displaying anti-Soviet snobbery. Aware that such attitudes undermined the alliance and reached Soviet authorities, the Foreign Office leadership attempted to suppress this “anti-Russian chatter” and alerted military commanders to the most egregious offenders. As noted in a May 1944 minute by Foreign Office employee G. Wilson, “Increasingly, one can hear Americans, especially military personnel, saying that the massive army they have built will eventually be useful in a war against the Russians, with discussions focusing on the advantages of the Alaska route. British officers in the Middle East speak of Russia with barely concealed hostility, and members of our military mission in Moscow (at least until recently) openly expressed dislike and contempt for the Russians. These conversations are not confined to military circles and undoubtedly reach the Russians, often in exaggerated form. There is no doubt they take them seriously. They might say that if such talk occurs now, while the Russians are pulling British and American chestnuts out of the fire, what will happen after the war ends?”³⁷

³⁵ A. Kerr to Ch. Warner, 17 Aug. 1942. TNA. FO800/300; See also: Moran Ch., *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival*. Pp.82-83. For more details, see: (Pechatnov, 2017, p. 177–178).

³⁶ Policy Committee Minutes, March 10, June 19, 1944. NA. RG 59. Records of H. Notter, 1949–1945. Box 138.

³⁷ Minute by G. Wilson, 26 May 1944. TNA. FO 371/43305.

The minute's author recommended reviewing personnel policies for British staff interacting with Soviet representatives. In particular, he suggested to issue strict instructions to all civilian and military officials to avoid anti-Soviet remarks. The document received support from A. Eden, who intended to present it to Churchill for consideration.

A similar situation occurred on the American side, where the primary force fostering a positive attitude toward the USSR was the Soviet Protocol Committee. This committee, responsible for overseeing aid to the Soviet Union, operated under the leadership of H. Hopkins, a trusted associate of President F. D. Roosevelt. Under Hopkins' guidance, the committee drafted a presidential directive addressed to the Secretary of State and the heads of the military departments, outlining expectations for all officials interacting with Soviet representatives. The proposed directive included the following statement for the president: "I am convinced that sincere friendship and mutual understanding between the USSR and the United States are essential for victory in the war and the future of peace. I also believe that such mutual understanding is best achieved through sympathetic recognition of Soviet challenges and goals, by being sincere and open, and by treating all Soviet representatives with respect in the spirit of democratic equality <...> I insist that this policy be implemented immediately, and that any officials representing our country in dealings with the USSR who do not adhere to it should be replaced."³⁸ Essentially, this amounted to a call for purging anti-Soviet elements from the government apparatus. However, both this effort and the similar British initiative failed: Eden never submitted the Wilson's minute to the Prime Minister, and Roosevelt did not sign the Hopkins' memorandum. The deep-rooted anti-Sovietism within the Western allies' state machinery would become evident immediately after the war's end.

Rivalry within cooperation

Diplomatic rivalry, rooted in the contest for spheres of influence, continued throughout the duration of the alliance but took place within an overarching framework of cooperation. This form of rivalry, constrained by cooperative boundaries, represents another principle of coalition relations that demands adherence to certain rules. First, it must not lead to a breakdown in the alliance; second, it should involve coordination, information sharing, and – most importantly – consideration of the partner's interests. The following examples illustrate this concept of "competitive cooperation."

Within this framework, the Allies developed a common stance toward Italy and other German satellite states, which were gradually abandoning the collapsing "Third Reich." Although each side aimed to secure unilateral advantages and strengthen its

³⁸ Memorandum for the Secretaries of State, War and Navy. *FDRL*. O. Cox Papers. Book 5 (Aid to Russia).

dominance within its sphere of influence, the Allies respected the rules of coalition diplomacy by coordinating their actions – particularly concerning the terms of armistice with these satellite states. Through this coordination, an unspoken compromise emerged: a *de facto* acknowledgment of each partner's dominance in its priority regions, while maintaining a presence in joint control bodies to influence that partner's policies as much as possible.

The first precedent of this nature was established during discussions on how to handle Italy after its withdrawal from the war. Initially, the Allies sought to exclude the USSR from involvement in Italian affairs, viewing Italy as a key sphere of their influence. However, Stalin successfully pushed for the establishment of a trilateral military and political commission that would hold full control powers in Italy, except for directing military operations.³⁹ This arrangement would have granted the Soviet Union genuine, equal participation in critical Italian matters alongside the United States and Great Britain. Unsurprisingly, this proposal was unacceptable to the Western Allies, who aimed to weaken the commission's authority. According to American historian W. Kimball, while the Anglo-Americans wanted to avoid creating an exclusionary precedent that Stalin could later use against them, the risk of allowing the Russians into Italy was deemed too great, especially given the strong influence of Italian Communists (Kimball, 1997, p. 223). As it happened, Stalin's failure to secure equal participation in Italy later served as a precedent for reducing Allied influence in control bodies established in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Despite these tensions, in the spirit of allied solidarity, Moscow consistently kept the Allies informed about negotiations with German satellite states and coordinated the terms of armistice with them. Although these agreements could be difficult and sometimes tense – as in the case of Romania – the Soviet side, despite hidden irritation at the “importunity of the Allies” (as A.A. Gromyko put it), took their interests and concerns into account (Soviet Foreign Policy and Diplomacy during the War, 2014, p. 379-403).

Soviet diplomacy demonstrated similar flexibility regarding the recognition of the French Committee of National Liberation. Despite generally positive views toward de Gaulle's organization, the USSR agreed to the Allies' request to delay its official recognition. A significant step in further institutionalizing the anti-Hitler coalition was the signing of the Soviet-French military and political alliance treaty in December 1944. In this instance as well, all the principles of allied diplomacy were respected: Moscow kept the Western Allies informed about the progress of negotiations with de Gaulle and, when drafting the treaty's terms, carefully considered the concerns of the British, who closely monitored the negotiations (Pechatnov, Magadeev, 2015b, p. 336-338; Zueva, 2010). Another example of accommodating coalition partners' views

³⁹ About the exchange of these letters, see: *Sovetsko-amerikanskije otnosheniya v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny, 1941–1945. 1984. Dokumenty i materialy* [Soviet-American Relations during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945. 1984. Documents and Materials]. Moscow. In two volumes. Vol. 1, covering 1941-1943. P. 368-369, 371-372 (in Russian).

occurred when the Kremlin abandoned plans to form similar committees involving Italian, Hungarian, and Romanian prisoners of war after the Allies reacted negatively to the creation of the Free Germany Committee, fearing it signaled the emergence of a future pro-Soviet government in defeated Germany (Banac, 2003, p. 276, 284). The well-known decision to dissolve the Comintern in May 1943 also served a “Western purpose” and was unsurprisingly seen by the Anglo-Americans as a reliable signal that the Soviet government wished to improve relations with Great Britain and the United States.⁴⁰

The leaders also demonstrated adherence to the ethics of coalition diplomacy in their interactions. In the summer of 1943, Stalin tactfully avoided a one-on-one meeting with Roosevelt, who, through his envoy J. Davies, persistently sought direct contact with the Soviet leader, bypassing Churchill. Although Stalin was able to exploit divisions between his Western allies, he was careful not to give the impression of a Soviet-American “conspiracy” against the British, nor a Soviet-British “conspiracy” against the Americans. The latter concern first arose during the 1942 Soviet-British negotiations on the allied treaty, when Stalin persuaded Churchill to secure Washington’s approval, and again during Stalin’s meeting with Churchill in October 1944, after which Stalin offered to inform Roosevelt. Roosevelt, in turn, avoided separate talks with Churchill before the “Big Three” conferences in Tehran and Yalta. When a meeting did occur in Cairo before Tehran, Roosevelt insisted – despite Churchill’s objections – that Soviet representatives be invited, writing to Churchill that it would be a terrible mistake if Uncle Joe – referring to Stalin – thought they were conspiring about military action without him. At least, Roosevelt hoped, the Soviets would not feel like they were being left out.⁴¹ However, the Kremlin chose not to attend the Cairo meeting once it learned that Chiang Kai-shek would also be present.

Conclusions

The final principle of coalition diplomacy is “do not deceive your ally.” At the closing dinner at Livadia Palace during the Yalta Conference, Stalin offered a toast, recorded by the British, emphasizing this point: “In an alliance the allies should not deceive each other. Perhaps that is naïve? Experienced diplomatists may say, ‘Why should I not deceive my ally?’ But I as a naïve man think it best not to deceive my ally even if he is a fool. Possibly our alliance is so firm just because we do not deceive each other; or is it because it is not so easy to deceive each other?” (Churchill, 2014, p. 521-522). Was Stalin subtly warning his partners that deceiving him would be futile? He may have been aware that, at Yalta, Roosevelt had considered telling Stalin about the immi-

⁴⁰ From the British Embassy’s 1943 annual report (Review of Soviet Foreign Policy During 1943. February 8, 1944). NA, RG 84, 800 Soviet Union. Box 46.

⁴¹ *Churchill and Roosevelt*. Vol. II. P. 597.

nent completion of the Manhattan Project, but Churchill, reportedly “shocked” by the idea, persuaded the U.S. President not to do so.⁴² Stalin later remarked to Ambassador A.A. Gromyko that, at the Yalta Conference, Roosevelt “could have just told me that nuclear weapons were being manufactured. We are allies after all” (Gromyko, 1990, p. 277). Anyway, withholding the atomic secret – a fact Stalin was well aware of – did little to bolster his trust in the Allies. He was also informed about one of the most blatant acts of betrayal: Churchill’s directive for a contingency plan to wage war against the Soviet Union, code-named “Operation Unthinkable,” which was drafted immediately after Germany’s surrender (Litvin, Myagkov, 2017, p. 298-300). Soviet intelligence networks in both the United States and Great Britain were effective in gathering evidence that fueled these suspicions. Nevertheless, despite ongoing mutual distrust and allegations, the Allies generally avoided entering into substantive separate negotiations with the Germans, though some informal contacts of this nature did occur on the Western side.

When reflecting on the missed opportunities and weaknesses of coalition diplomacy during the war – including the limited institutionalization of the anti-Hitler coalition, which hastened its eventual breakdown – it is important to remember that the coalition mechanism established during the conflict succeeded in achieving the primary shared objective. As noted in a foundational study by Russian historians, “Despite significant internal conflicts, the coalition’s strategic leadership in the armed struggle successfully completed most of its military objectives and, importantly, prevented the collapse of the anti-Hitler alliance, a collapse eagerly anticipated by Berlin” (Allies of the USSR from the Anti-Hitler Coalition, 2014, p. 630). Western historiography often downplays the Soviet Union’s role in maintaining this cooperation, frequently depicting the USSR as the “sick man” of the coalition, supposedly incapable of fully collaborating with the Western democracies. A striking example of this perspective is the recent book by American historian S. McMeekin, *Stalin’s War: A New History of World War II*, in which the author portrays the USSR as a greater evil than Nazi Germany and criticizes Roosevelt and Churchill for making a misguided choice in selecting their principal ally during the war (McMeekin, 2021). However, more balanced evaluations also exist in the West. For instance, the recent *History of the Second World War* series published by Cambridge University observes that, “Despite mutual suspicions, the Soviets actually cooperated more often and more effectively with their Western allies than is usually recognized” (Menning, House, 2015, p. 244).

In summary, the members of the “Big Three” anti-Hitler coalition generally aimed to uphold the fundamental principles of coalition conduct: fulfilling their obligations, preserving unity despite differences and conflicts, and subordinating all efforts to the primary objective of defeating their common enemy. However, on critical issues of the “grand strategy,” the Soviet side demonstrated greater honesty in meeting its

⁴² Foreign Secretary, 25.3.45. TNA. PREM 3/139/6.

commitments compared to the Western Allies. The USSR also showed strong willingness to institutionalize the coalition to enhance integration and secure equal participation in key decisions regarding the war efforts and post-war settlement. However, this pursuit of equality was hindered by the Western Allies' reluctance to acknowledge the Soviet Union as a long-term, full-fledged partner and legitimate member of the great powers' "club." While the USSR's decisive role in defeating Nazi Germany and its active diplomacy temporarily earned it a respected place within the "Big Three," this recognition ultimately proved to be short-lived.

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Ideas of Multipolarity in the Conceptual Frame of the Soviet Diplomacy during the Final Phases of the Second World War (1943–1945)¹

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Abstract. This article aims to identify the conceptual landscape occupied by ideas of post-war multipolarity within the strategic discourse of Soviet diplomacy during the latter phases of the Second World War. Particular emphasis is placed on the intellectual contributions of two prominent Soviet diplomats, Maxim Litvinov and Ivan Maisky. In the paper, the author draws upon both published and archival source materials including the diaries and records maintained by officials within the Soviet Foreign Office, as well as documents produced by the “Litvinov Commission.”

While the diplomatic theories formulated by Litvinov and Maisky during the years 1943–1945 have been subject to analysis by Russian and international scholars, existing scholarship has for the most part focused on the content and nuances of their perspectives on specific international “questions.” Departing from this convention, this article adopts a methodological approach that seeks to explore the underlying conceptual foundations upon which the ideas of Litvinov and Maisky were constructed. Additionally, the essay introduces a novel dimension by surveying the viewpoints of other Soviet diplomats (Solomon Lozovsky, Boris Shtein, Yakov Surits, and Yevgeny Tarle), who have garnered relatively less scholarly attention.

The author pays special attention to the nature of Litvinov and Maisky’s conceptualization of the international landscape following the war as a multipolar system, although the term “multipolarity” is not explicitly used. The article addresses such issues as how the Soviet diplomats envisioned the post-war security architecture, whether they considered Soviet-American bipolarity inevitable, and what factors and circumstances influenced their foreign policy conceptualizations. The resurgence today of discussions surrounding the trajectory of multipolarity in the 21st century underscores the pertinence of this historical inquiry.

The key conclusion of the article is that the conceptual framework embraced by Soviet diplomats in 1943–1945 was not centred on notions of bipolarity or an imminent Cold War. While acknowledging the potential escalation of tensions between the USSR and Western nations led by the United States and Great Britain, they favoured collaboration among the principal powers of the anti-Hitler coalition, grounded in an implicit understanding of their respective “spheres of influence.” Although Soviet Foreign Office

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Magadeev I.E. 2023. Idei mnogopolyarnosti v konceptual'nom arsenale sovetskoy diplomatii na zavershayushchih etapah Velikoy Otechestvennoy vojny (1943–1945 gg.). *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. No. 16 (6). P. 124–152. DOI: [10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-124-152](https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-124-152)

officials did not discount the possibility of the formation of a united Anglo-American front against the USSR, they believed that Soviet diplomacy should actively work to prevent such an outcome by capitalizing on the fissures between Washington and London.

Keywords: USSR, Soviet diplomacy, Great Patriotic War, Second World War, post-war world, Litvinov, Maisky, multipolarity

The growing intensity of debates surrounding the future of multipolarity and the multipolar world in the 21st century compels us to revisit earlier interpretations of these concepts, particularly those offered by Soviet diplomats and expert community.

During the Cold War, Soviet analysts predominantly regarded the notion of ‘multipolarity’ as a foreign concept originating in the English-speaking world; notably, it was frequently enclosed in quotation marks (Primakov et al., 1983, p. 214; Kunina, 1988, p. 158). Even throughout the 1970s and 1980s, despite increasing familiarity with and analysis of Western international relations theories, multipolarity was largely framed within the context of “contemporary U.S. foreign policy ideas” (Anichkina et al., 1979, p. 128) and “bourgeois predictions about the evolution of international relations” (Kokoshin, 1978, p. 53). Scholarly works often asserted that, “regardless of how ‘multipolarity’ was rationalized, the fundamental reality of international relations – the rivalry and competition between two social systems – was supplanted by a narrative aligned with the imperialist worldview” (Kunina, 1988, p. 158).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet experts generally viewed the concept of multipolarity as a means to “draw attention away from key transformations that demonstrate clear social progress toward socialism” (Petrovsky, 1976, p. 197). However, opinions varied – though not always explicitly – regarding whose interests the potential emergence of a multipolar world would serve: the USSR’s or the USA’s. This diversity of views was often reflected through citations of different perspectives from Western, primarily American, experts.

On one side, there was the notion that the United States, as “American theorists contend, benefits from the fragmentation or ‘multipolarity’ of Eurasia, characterized by its division into several centers of ‘gravitational force’ and the presence of at least two poles of state power” (Iakovlev et al., 1976, p. 160). Conversely, Soviet experts were also intrigued by Western analysts’ arguments suggesting that multipolarity – interpreted as increased foreign policy independence of Western European countries from the United States – could enhance Soviet influence in Europe (Khromushin, 1974, p. 36).

Henry Kissinger’s essay, *Central Issues of American Foreign Policy* (Kissinger, 1969, p. 51–97), which expressed concerns about the growing trend toward multipolarity in international relations, attracted significant attention. Kissinger was cited as stating that “political multipolarity makes it impossible to impose an American design”

(Trofimenko, 1976, p. 63; Khlebnikov, 1984, p. 34). Emphasis was placed on his view that “political multipolarity does not necessarily guarantee stability. Rigidity is diminished, but so is manageability” (Kokoshin, 1978, p. 53). In this context, bipolarity was portrayed as a more manageable and stable international framework, within which the Soviet Union asserted an equal status alongside the United States.

It was only toward the final years of the USSR that Soviet experts began to more confidently articulate the idea that “to some extent, multipolarity, viewed as a potential model for the global world order, reflects the increasing diversity of social paths of human development” (Sergunin, 1989, p. 9). Some researchers even proposed that “multipolarity now represents a more complex stage in the evolution and functioning of the world’s social bipolarity, rather than serving as a way to move beyond it” (Iakovlev, 1990, p. 105). The assertion that “economic multipolarity has already become a significant element in the international landscape” was accompanied by predictions that “by the end of the century, multipolarity is expected to emerge in the political realm as well” (Kholodkovskii, 1991, p. 22).

During the Cold War, issues related to a multipolar world largely remained marginal in Soviet expert analyses. This tendency aligned with the official foreign policy and ideological priorities of the Soviet state. Typically, Moscow emphasized parity with Washington and regarded bipolarity as reflecting the privileged status of the USSR alongside the United States within the prevailing international system. At the same time, multipolarity – understood as the growing independence of Western Europe from the United States – was viewed more favorably. By the late Soviet period, expert assessments began to acknowledge the possibility of a multipolar world, while also recognizing that “the second global center of power, the USSR, had lost its superpower status” (Pleshakov, 1991, p. 22). Consequently, Soviet discussions of multipolarity largely faded after 1991. In contemporary Russia, “the concept of multipolarity in global politics is most commonly linked to Yevgeny Primakov,” with its origins traced back to 1996.²

At the same time, despite avoiding the specific terms ‘multipolarity’ and ‘multipolar world,’ not only experts but also Soviet diplomats frequently interpreted international developments through these conceptual frameworks. This was particularly true for the first generation of officials at the USSR People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID, or Soviet Foreign Office), who operated during the interwar period – a time marked by the existence of multiple centers of international influence. Some scholars have even described the 1930s as a unique ‘tripolar’ era, with the United States, the USSR, and Germany serving as the key power centers (Schweller, 1998). Examining the views of Soviet diplomats regarding the structure of international relations helps

² Kortunov A.V. Pochemu mir ne stanovitsya mnogopolyarnym [Why the world is not becoming multipolar]. *Russia in Global Affairs*. June 26, 2018. URL: <https://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/pochemu-mir-ne-stanovitsya-mnogopolyarnym/> (accessed: December 20, 2023) (in Russian).

clarify the origins of multipolarity concepts within the Russian diplomatic and expert tradition, thereby deepening our understanding of how these ideas have evolved and transformed over time.

Among the first generation of employees at the Soviet Foreign Office, two prominent diplomats – Maxim Litvinov and Ivan Maisky – stand out. They are sometimes described, albeit conditionally, as ‘pro-Western’ within the highest ranks of the NKID (Pechatnov, 2013, p. 90). This tentative label stems from their belief in the possibility of cooperation between the USSR and major Western powers during various phases of international relations in the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, both diplomats consistently prioritized advancing Soviet interests. The perspective of Canadian historian Michael Jabara Carley, who reviewed historiographical debates regarding the foreign policy orientations of Georgy Chicherin and Litvinov, is particularly relevant here: “Historians and contemporaries have often observed that Chicherin was pro-German, and Litvinov pro-British. This is untrue; they were both pro-Soviet. The primacy of the interests of the Soviet state was their shared preoccupation” (Carley, 2019, p. 104).

Throughout their public service careers, Litvinov and Maisky amassed considerable practical experience. Litvinov served as the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR from 1930 to 1939, then as Deputy People’s Commissar from 1941 to 1946, and as Ambassador to the United States between 1941 and 1943 (for further details, see: Sokolov, 2002). Meanwhile, from 1932 to 1943, Maisky was the USSR’s permanent representative to Great Britain – initially as envoy and later as ambassador – before assuming the role of Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1943 to 1946 (for more information, see Pozharskaya, 2004).

While serving at the NKID headquarters and abroad, Litvinov and Maisky balanced hands-on diplomacy with insightful reflections on international developments, consistently adhering to the dominant communist party and Soviet state policies. Their expertise was highly valued by the Soviet leadership during the Great Patriotic War and World War II. This trust was reflected in their 1943 appointments as chairmen of two key NKID commissions: Litvinov led the peace treaties and post-war order commission (the Litvinov Commission) (Filitov, 1995), while Maisky chaired the reparations commission (the Maisky Commission) (Zhigalov, 2014).

The perspectives of several prominent members of the Litvinov and Maisky commissions also warrant attention. Among them are four notable figures: Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Solomon Lozovsky (Balandina, Davydov, 2020, p. 78–91); historian and diplomat Boris Shtein, who served as ambassador to Finland (1933–1934) and Italy (1934–1939) (Baryshnikov, Plenkov, 2015); NKID adviser Jakob Suritz, who held plenipotentiary representative positions in Germany (1934–1937) and France (1937–1940) (Sizonenko, 1991); and finally, academician Yevgeny Tarle, whose work on the Litvinov Commission represents “the only documented instance of his involvement<...> in actual foreign policy work, beyond propaganda and journalistic activities” (Kaganovich, 2014, p. 237).

This article focuses on the ideas about the post-war world formulated by Soviet diplomats during the final stages of the Great Patriotic War, between 1943 and 1945. At first glance, this topic appears to have been thoroughly studied. The memorandums by Litvinov and Maisky attracted significant attention from both domestic and foreign historians as early as during the extensive declassification of archival documents in Russia – the so-called “archival revolution” of the 1990s (Pikhoia, 2014). These sources remain widely used in current research on various facets of Soviet foreign policy during the Great Patriotic War. Scholars have analyzed Litvinov and Maisky’s vision of the USSR’s future relations with the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition and Axis opponents (Roberts, 2002; Pechatnov, 2006; Roberts, 2006; Arzakanian, 2010; Ageev et al., 2014; Gorozii, 2018). Their assessments of key issues concerning the post-war international order in Europe and globally – such as the Soviet, German, and Italian ‘questions’, among others – have also been explored (Sal’kov, 2009; Narinskii, 2010; Afiani, 2016; Sindeev, 2020). Additionally, their reflections on the political and strategic lessons of the war (Pechatnov, 2009; Magadeev, 2020), as well as their personal and formal interactions with the Soviet political leadership, other diplomats, and representatives of the anti-Hitler coalition (Sokolov, 2001; Pozdeeva, 2008; Pechatnov, 2010; Khakhalkina, Zhigalov, 2019) have been studied extensively.

This study is distinguished by the clear formulation of a research question, alongside a fresh interpretation of various archival and published documents. The primary aim of this article is to outline the general conceptual framework underlying the foreign policy ideas of Soviet diplomats concerning the post-war world. The author seeks to address several questions that have often been insufficiently explored in historiography: How did Soviet diplomats envision the post-war world? Did they consider bipolarity inevitable? What factors shaped their foreign policy ideas between 1943 and 1945? Which specific aspects of post-war multipolarity did they regard as most significant? The renewed interest in discussions about multipolarity in contemporary international relations underscores the relevance of this inquiry.

The study’s source base consists of published and archival notes from NKID officials submitted to their superiors and top government leaders, alongside records from the Litvinov Commission meetings. These documents not only capture the core positions Soviet diplomats aimed to communicate to higher authorities but also reveal the diversity of opinions expressed during confidential discussions. A critical analysis of these perspectives, as revealed in the documents, enables the reconstruction of the conceptual framework underpinning the foreign policy ideas of several leading NKID figures. Through a comparative historical analysis of the views held by Litvinov and Maisky – further enriched, in Maisky’s case, by contrasting his official memorandums with entries from his personal diary – the study aims to uncover both shared and unique perspectives of the two diplomats, highlighting the nuanced ideas that often went unspoken or ‘between the lines’ in their memos and proposals.³

³ Maisky I.M. 2009. *Dnevnik diplomata*. London. 1934–1943 [A Diplomat’s Diary. London, 1934–1943]. Book 2. Part 2. Ed. A.O. Chubarian. Moscow: Nauka (in Russian).

A new 'balance of power' in the post-war world

The terms 'multipolarity' and 'multipolar world' were unfamiliar to Litvinov, Maisky, and many later Soviet experts. Nevertheless, both diplomats effectively employed several concepts rooted in the framework of *Realpolitik*.

From the early days of the Soviet state, some Soviet diplomats – including the Soviet representative in Germany, Adolph Joffe – frequently based their practical work on “national interests in the spirit of *Realpolitik*” (Vatlin, Lannik, 2023, p. 35). In analyzing the views of the Litvinov Commission members during 1943–1945, scholars have similarly noted their “*Realpolitik*-inspired great-power thinking” (Kaganovich, 2000, p. 358). At the first meeting of the Litvinov Commission on September 8, 1943, academician Tarle emphasized that “all points should be developed from the perspective of maximizing the security of Soviet borders against future attacks, while also taking into account the future of Europe in terms of securing the greatest possible stability in peace and security.”⁴ Moreover, several fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism – such as the role of international struggle and the balance of power dynamics among ‘imperialist’ nations – fit naturally within a conceptual framework closely aligned with classical ‘political realism’.

Following the conclusion of the ‘radical turning point’ in the Great Patriotic War and World War II, Soviet diplomats recognized that the post-war ‘balance of power’ would differ significantly from the situation before 1939. This did not entail abandoning the broader conceptual framework of multipolarity that described the interwar period but rather anticipated a fundamental transformation in its internal dynamics and substance. As early as December 26, 1941, amid the success of the Soviet counteroffensive near Moscow, Lozovsky acknowledged that “the war is in full swing, with no known end in sight,” yet he was confident that “the outcome of the war is clear.” In his view, the post-war challenge would stem from the fact that “four great powers – Germany, Japan, Italy, and France – would be incapacitated, leaving the USSR, Great Britain, and the United States to determine the future course of international affairs.”⁵

The Litvinov Commission developed comprehensive plans aimed at ensuring Germany’s long-term weakening and even its potential dismemberment (Filitov, 2023, p. 15–71). Prior to the Commission’s establishment, Maisky, in his early diplomatic proposals for the post-war era, emphasized the necessity of Germany’s “industrial disarmament” – primarily through the significant reduction or elimination of its military industry. He argued that, “[u]nder such circumstances, even in the worst-case scenario, Germany would not be able to launch another act of aggression as swiftly as

⁴ *SSSR i germanskiy vopros. 1941–1949 [The USSR and the German Question. 1941–1949]*. 1996. Documents from the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Compiled by G.P. Kynin, J. Laufer. Vol.1. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 239 (in Russian).

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 141.

it had in recent times.”⁶ Later, as head of the NKID reparations commission, Maisky maintained this approach. He believed that, when determining and justifying the total sum of reparations and the mechanism for collecting them from Germany, the Soviet side needed to consider not only the losses suffered by the USSR and other countries, but also the “broader goal of Germany’s economic disarmament.”⁷ Litvinov supported this perspective as well. In a memorandum to People’s Commissar Vyacheslav Molotov dated October 9, 1943, he observed that “the necessity for Germany’s comprehensive disarmament – including the dissolution of its army, the removal of its navy and air force, the demolition of military fortifications, and the destruction of its military industry – is an almost universally accepted axiom.”⁸

Although issues concerning Japan were not examined in as much detail – given its longstanding neutrality toward the USSR – it was understood that this key Axis ally of Germany was also expected to weaken after the war.⁹ In a memorandum dated January 10, 1944, unaware of Stalin’s prior assurances to the Western Allies about the USSR’s forthcoming entry into the war against Japan, Maisky stated that the Soviet Union “is not interested in initiating a war with Japan, but it is very interested in Japan’s military defeat, because without this condition lasting peace in Asia cannot be ensured.”¹⁰

Preventing and deterring any future aggression from Germany and Japan following their defeat was intended to serve as a cornerstone not only for international stability but also for post-war cooperation among the leading powers of the anti-Hitler coalition. Another important, albeit unpublicized, foundation for this cooperation was the tacit agreement to divide ‘security zones,’ a term Litvinov used as “a substitute for ‘zones of influence.’”¹¹ Overall, “Soviet diplomats believed that the most effective way to achieve their objectives was through continued collaboration with the United States and Great Britain.<...>Although Moscow expected tough bargaining, particularly over Poland, it favored an agreed division of spheres of influence over confrontation or the use of force.” (Aganson et al., 2020, p. 454).

According to Litvinov’s vision, “our maximum sphere of interest, or more precisely, the security zone, should encompass Finland, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Turkey.”¹² This largely implied a significant expansion of the USSR’s “strategic buffer zone” and the establishment of a

⁶ Maisky to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, January 9, 1943. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki SSSR [Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR]*. 2016. Vol. 26, Book 1, covering the year 1943. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Maykop: Poligraf-Yug. P. 30 (in Russian).

⁷ Maisky’s memorandum to Stalin, December 20, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 583 (in Russian).

⁸ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 288 (in Russian).

⁹ Lozovsky’s memorandum to Stalin and Molotov, December 26, 1941. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 142-143 (in Russian).

¹⁰ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 347 (in Russian).

¹¹ Litvinov’s memorandum to Molotov, October 9, 1943. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 277 (in Russian).

¹² Litvinov’s memorandum to Molotov and Vyshinsky, January 11, 1945. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 596 (in Russian). See also: *Iz zapiski Litvinova [From Litvinov’s memorandum]*, November 15, 1944. *Sovetsko-britanskiye otnosheniya v 1943–1953 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy [Soviet-British Relations in 1943–1953: Documents and Materials]*. 2021. Ed. A.O. Chubarian and O. A. Westad. Moscow: Aspect Press. P. 241 (in Russian).

new “depth of defense” along its western and southern borders, with Stalin expressing particular concern over the vulnerability of the southern frontier (Roberts, 2011, p. 74–75). It was expected that the United Kingdom’s security zone would include the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, while the United States’ security zone would cover the countries of the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, certain countries – Denmark, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy – could, as Litvinov suggested, form a “neutral zone where both sides [the USSR and Great Britain] would cooperate on equal terms with ongoing consultations.”¹³

Soviet diplomats hoped that the existence of such ‘spheres of interest’ would not only avoid hindering post-war cooperation among the “Big Three” but would actually provide a fundamental basis for their collaboration (Roberts, 1999, p. 656, 672–673). Furthermore, Litvinov did not rule out the possibility that Soviet diplomacy could play a role in formalizing the division of zones of responsibility within the framework of the emerging International Security Organization (the future United Nations). This formalization would lend greater legitimacy and strength to these divisions: “<...> the United States would bear primary responsibility for the security of the countries in the Americas and certain parts of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans; Great Britain, the USSR, and China would each have their own security zones, for which they would be individually responsible in some cases and jointly responsible in others, with these arrangements agreed upon in advance by mutual consent.”¹⁴

The Soviet Foreign Office believed that an implicit division of ‘spheres of interest’ would not provoke strong opposition from Washington and London. In fact, there was some convergence between Soviet and Anglo-American post-war planning, framed within the context of the anti-Hitler coalition. By the summer of 1944, the British Foreign Office envisioned the post-war security architecture in Europe as comprising a “Western European system” led by Britain and “some similar security system in Eastern Europe” led by the Soviet Union, with the Anglo-Soviet treaty of May 26, 1942 serving as a bridge between these two systems.¹⁵ Through classified materials from the U.S. State Department, obtained via the Main Intelligence Directorate of the People’s Commissariat of Defence, Soviet diplomats understood that Washington recognized Moscow’s foreign policy ambitions: “To strengthen its military security and expand access to the sea, the Soviet Union has a direct interest in the states of Central and

¹³ Litvinov’s memorandum to Molotov and Vyshinsky, January 11, 1945. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 596 (in Russian).

¹⁴ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti* [International Security Organization], April 25, 1944. *Archives of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (the “Russian Foreign Policy Archives”). Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheet 22 (in Russian).

¹⁵ From Foreign Office to Chiefs of Staff, 22 June 1944 (in COS (44) 113) *The National Archives of Great Britain*, Cabinet Office 80/44.

Eastern Europe (including Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece) as well as in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan.”¹⁶

Moscow’s readiness to accept an unspoken division of ‘spheres of interest’ did not imply a willingness to preserve the colonial and semi-colonial status quo. Drawing on historical traditions, the Soviet Union was prepared to support anti-colonial movements, many of which were primarily directed against Great Britain and France. Litvinov even suggested that the “colonial problem” might provide a “potential foundation for Soviet-American cooperation.”¹⁷

Between 1943 and 1945, the boundaries of the USSR’s post-war ‘sphere of interests’ were far from predetermined, and, as is evident, its eventual shape differed significantly from the maximal vision originally conceived by Litvinov. The ongoing uncertainty surrounding the post-war international landscape was also reflected in the shifting perspectives of Soviet diplomats on various international matters. For instance, the Soviet Foreign Office’s stance on the ‘Transylvanian question’ evolved markedly: starting from Litvinov’s June 1944 proposal advocating the establishment of an independent Transylvanian state under Soviet protection, to the ultimate decision to integrate Northern Transylvania with Romania. Following the rise of the pro-Soviet government led by Petru Groza in March 1945, Romania increasingly came to be seen as a prospective ally rather than an adversary (Islamov, Pokivailova, 2008, p. 148–185).

In early 1944, Maisky remained uncertain about Poland’s future foreign policy focus, which largely shaped Moscow’s willingness to authorize the extent of Poland’s post-war strengthening. In a memo dated January 10 addressed to Molotov, Maisky wrote that “the USSR’s objective should be to establish an independent and viable Poland, but we have no interest in a Poland that is too large or too powerful. Historically, Poland has almost always been an enemy of Russia, and it is impossible to say with certainty whether future Poland will genuinely become a friend of the USSR (at least for the next generation).”¹⁸

A similar reasoning, which connected the USSR’s attitude toward a country with the degree of its friendliness to Moscow – often ensured by the presence of communists in power – is evident in Maisky’s views on Germany and Litvinov’s on France. In a telegram dated January 9, 1943, Maisky reflected on Germany’s future, suggesting that the best safeguard against renewed German aggression would be the establishment of a socialist regime through a “full-blooded and profound proletarian revolution.”¹⁹ However, he regarded such an outcome as unlikely. Similarly, in a memo to Molotov

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State Document, entitled *The Soviet Union’s Regional Policy*, February 16, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 143, Sheet 27.

¹⁷ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 50 (in Russian).

¹⁸ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 341 (in Russian).

¹⁹ *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26. Book 1. P. 28 (in Russian).

dated March 25, 1944, Litvinov analyzed possible post-war relations with France based on comparable logic. He noted that if “a government is established in France whose friendship we can confidently rely on” (hinting at a communist-led government), Moscow would be ready to shift its policy “within 24 hours.” Nonetheless, Litvinov still viewed France primarily as a post-war ally of Great Britain and the United States and therefore recommended “strongly opposing the return of France to the rank of a great power.”²⁰

When analyzing the structure of the post-war International Security Organization, Litvinov based his views on the assumption that “the four Great Powers – the USSR, the United States, Great Britain, and China – which have demonstrated their strength in the current war, must assume a leading and decisive role.”²¹ The unexpected and swift defeat of France in 1940 clearly influenced perceptions of France’s role and status in the post-war world. As Maisky observed, “this war was an astonishing lesson for all humanity<...> France simply failed.”²² In January 1944, the former Soviet ambassador to Great Britain maintained that the prospect of rebuilding “a strong French army and, more broadly, the revival of France as a genuine great power” in the post-war period “appeared highly doubtful.”²³

Generally, Litvinov and Maisky did not base their expectations on the scenario of revolutionary upheavals in Europe or the establishment of communist regimes across European countries, which were *a priori* considered friendly to the USSR. Nonetheless, they did not entirely dismiss this possibility. As early as February 2, 1943, Maisky cautiously noted in his diary that if Soviet forces liberated Europe without the Western Allies opening a second front, it could create more favorable conditions for expanding Soviet influence and establishing socialist regimes on the continent.²⁴ However, Maisky regarded the broader democratization of post-war Europe as the more probable outcome, one in which “cooperation between the USSR and the USA would be possible, though not always easy.”²⁵

Litvinov viewed the situation with greater concern; however, he also did not see the ideological antagonism between the former anti-Hitler coalition allies as inevitable. From his perspective, the United States would be particularly interested in ensuring the “complete stability” of European countries by supporting “bourgeois-democratic or even conservative governments that would not face the threat of social upheaval.” Litvinov recognized that this could lead to conflicts, believing that “different approaches to restoring order and establishing power in some European countries might

²⁰ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 146, Sheets 25, 28–29 (in Russian).

²¹ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti* [International Security Organization], April 25, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheet 18 (in Russian).

²² Maisky to Molotov, February 13, 1943. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 194–195 (in Russian).

²³ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 339 (in Russian).

²⁴ Maisky I.M. *Op. cit.* P. 210–211 (in Russian).

²⁵ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 349 (in Russian).

lead to misunderstandings and friction between us on one side, and Britain and the United States on the other.” He noted that such tensions “could be either temporary or prolonged, depending on how events unfold.”²⁶ However, the overall message of his detailed memo “On the Relations with the United States” dated January 10, 1945, went beyond simply anticipating inevitable Soviet-American antagonism.

As for China, Litvinov held an ambivalent view regarding its future role and status. On one hand, as reflected in his thoughts on the future International Security Organization, he was willing to include China – unlike France – among the powers granted a leading position in the organization’s Council. On the other hand, Litvinov did not regard Kuomintang China as an equal to the “Big Three” powers in terms of strength. He even considered it possible that, in the post-war period, “the United States’ interest in China <...> could grow significantly, potentially leading to the establishment of an American protectorate over China.”²⁷

At the Litvinov Commission meeting on April 28, 1944, the chairman – echoing the opinion of the absent Tarle, who opposed equating Kuomintang China with the “Big Three” powers – remarked: “I understand that we are dealing with three Great Powers, and China will be listed nominally, but we must speak of four,” primarily due to the U.S. position.²⁸

Maisky advocated for strengthening Soviet influence in China but remained cautious, stressing that “the extent of assistance to China in its development and transformation into a genuine great power should depend on the nature of the forces that will hold power” in the country after the war. The diplomat did not rule out the possibility that within 20 to 25 years, a “US-Chinese alliance hostile to the USSR” might emerge.²⁹

The dynamics of relations among the leading powers in the post-war world

Although the “Big Three” powers were expected to hold dominant positions in the post-war world, the precise nature of their ‘triangular’ relationship was not predetermined. This configuration varied across different documents produced by Soviet diplomats.

At times, the United States and Great Britain were perceived as prepared to unite on several issues based on a shared anti-Soviet stance. Reflecting on the struggle for political control in post-war Europe, Litvinov observed that “in this respect, American interests coincide with British ones.”³⁰ Similarly, Maisky predicted that “if the early

²⁶ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 48 (in Russian).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁸ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 23 (in Russian).

²⁹ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 354, 359 (in Russian).

³⁰ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 49 (in Russian).

post-war period sparks proletarian revolutions in Europe, relations between the USSR on one side, and the United States and Britain on the other, will inevitably become tense and possibly acute.”³¹ Maisky’s analysis was grounded in the assumption that the “Big Three” powers would initially reach a basic agreement on the ‘German question’ “immediately following the war”, but he cautioned that “there are no guarantees this agreement will endure for long.”³² Lozovsky also articulated the idea that, at a future peace conference, “on the most critical issues, we may face a united front of capitalist powers against us.”³³

However, the emergence of Anglo-American – or more broadly Western – solidarity grounded in anti-Soviet sentiment was not seen as inevitable. In fact, as Lozovsky stressed during the Litvinov Commission meeting on April 28, 1944, “our general line, our entire policy” aimed to “prevent the formation of a bloc between Great Britain and the United States against the Soviet Union.”³⁴

Soviet diplomats held two perspectives side by side: the potential for an Anglo-American alliance opposing Moscow and the expectation of a more intricate and shifting international landscape after the war. Using terminology from international relations theory, their assessments reflected a concept of ‘tripolarity,’ which was seen as providing the USSR with greater scope for diplomatic maneuvering and the ability to exploit tensions between the United States and Great Britain (Schweller, 1998).

Maisky argued that in the post-war era, “the logic of events will increasingly push Britain toward the USSR, as its primary struggle will be with the United States.” On this basis, he advised “leveraging the Anglo-American contradictions in Soviet interests, with the aim of fostering closer ties with Britain.”³⁵ Litvinov expressed a similar view but focused on Soviet-American rapprochement grounded in opposition to Britain. He believed that “the inevitable escalation of economic competition worldwide between the United States and Great Britain should encourage both powers to maintain [sic] the best possible relations with us, to avoid a prolonged alliance of one against the other. Equally important is our effort to prevent frequent coalitions between them against us.”³⁶

Litvinov paid particular attention to the potential for Anglo-American rivalry in the colonies, which he hoped the Soviet Union could exploit to broaden its international presence and influence. In a memo dated June 28, 1945, reflecting on the international administration of former Italian colonies, Litvinov observed that “in the

³¹ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 358 (in Russian).

³² Maisky to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, January 9, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26, Book 1. P. 29 (in Russian).

³³ Lozovsky’s memorandum to Stalin and Molotov, December 26, 1941. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 141-142 (in Russian).

³⁴ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 24 (in Russian).

³⁵ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 358-359 (in Russian).

³⁶ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 51 (in Russian).

forthcoming intensified competition with Britain, the United States would be reluctant to support Britain's overall strengthening, especially in the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean regions." From his perspective, this created a "window of opportunity" for the USSR to enhance its position. Litvinov proposed "beginning by advocating for the transfer of all Italian colonies in Africa to joint administration by the three powers – the USSR, the USA, and Britain."³⁷

The conceptual framework employed by senior NKID officials diverged from a simple bipolar model not only due to the USSR's perceived ability to leverage Anglo-American tensions but also because, in 1944–1945, Soviet diplomats recognized the significant roles of other international actors, including major European countries.

In the contemporary memos by Litvinov and Maisky, the decline of British power had not yet become distinctly apparent. Despite clear signs of growing U.S. pressure on Britain's former positions, Soviet diplomats were reluctant to dismiss Britain entirely. The situation remained ambiguous.

On one hand, during the final stages of World War II, it was clear that Britain's contribution was not only less significant than that of the USSR but also fell short compared to the United States, a factor that partly foreshadowed the emergence of bipolarity. In a conversation with the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on August 31, 1943, Maisky pointed out that "Great Britain's losses are eight times, and the British Empire's losses seventy times less than those of the USSR." The Soviet ambassador argued that "this comparison only underscores Britain's insufficient efforts in our shared struggle."³⁸

On the other hand, between 1943 and 1945, NKID officials did not view London's post-war role solely through the lens of 'Britain's decline.' In Soviet diplomatic assessments, Great Britain – bound to the USSR by the Treaty of May 26, 1942 – was often regarded as a key partner in addressing post-war European issues. Maisky emphasized that "the military occupation, disarmament, and division of Germany could only be accomplished through agreement among the principal allies – that is, the USSR, Britain, and the United States – or at the very least, through consensus between the USSR and Britain."³⁹

It is also noteworthy that some Soviet diplomats considered it possible that the post-World War I scenario, in which the United States refrained from military and political commitments in Europe, could recur. Litvinov leaned toward this perspective, though Lozovsky disagreed with him on the matter.⁴⁰ Litvinov saw the potential

³⁷ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 07, Folder 17, File 174, Sheets 64, 66 (in Russian).

³⁸ Maisky to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, September 3, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. 2016. Vol. 26, Book 2, covering the year 1943. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Maykop: Poligraf-Yug. P. 16 (in Russian).

³⁹ Maisky to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, January 9, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26, Book 1. P. 29 (in Russian).

⁴⁰ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheets 40, 42 (in Russian).

American withdrawal from Europe as a factor that would elevate the importance of Soviet-British relations, informally structured around the division of 'spheres of influence'.⁴¹

Members of the Litvinov Commission also cautioned against disregarding other European states entirely. For example, at a commission meeting on March 25, 1944, academician Tarle, while carefully debating with Litvinov, suggested that France "could serve as a counterweight to the Anglo-Saxons," and said he "would not object to a strong France," even though he doubted how quickly France could recover.⁴² In an earlier memo, "Franco-Russian Relations" (December 1943), Tarle had expressed even more directly the idea that Russian and French interests had historically been closely aligned. However, after receiving criticism from Litvinov, Tarle later revised his stance (Magadeev, 2023, p. 368–370).

The role of the 'French factor' was a significant topic in the internal discussions within the Soviet Foreign Office regarding the post-war world. Diplomatic opinions varied, and individual positions often evolved in response to numerous factors, including changes in the international situation.

In a memo dated March 25, 1944, Litvinov suggested that France's "friendly gestures" toward Moscow were "merely intended to tease, intimidate, and pressure Britain and America into making concessions, with France likely siding with them against us."⁴³ However, in other instances, Litvinov presented a more nuanced view that went beyond a simple confrontation between the USSR and a Western coalition including France. Opposing France's initial membership in the Council of the International Security Organization, Litvinov sought to leverage Anglo-American tensions over the 'French question.' From his perspective, as an advocate for France's exclusion from the Council, "one could probably count on America, which has less interest in France than Britain does."⁴⁴

By the end of 1945, when the Soviet Foreign Office still harbored cautious hopes for occasional solidarity with Paris and their joint resistance to Anglo-American efforts to maintain Germany as a "more or less extensive strong state,"⁴⁵ Litvinov's stance had evolved. He tended to believe that "our support for France's claims in the West – provided it does not overly strengthen France" (such as through the annexation of

⁴¹ From Litvinov's memorandum, entitled *O perspektivakh i vozmozhnoi baze sovetsko-britanskogo sotrudnichestva* [On the prospects and possible basis of Soviet-British cooperation]. *Sovetsko-britanskiye otnosheniya* [Soviet-British Relations]. P. 238–243 (in Russian).

⁴² *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 6 (in Russian).

⁴³ *Ibid*, File 146, Sheet 29 (in Russian).

⁴⁴ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 35 (in Russian).

⁴⁵ Litvinov's memorandum, entitled *Po povodu zapiskok Alfana o Zapadnoy Germanii* [Regarding Alphand's memos on West Germany]. *SSSR i germanskiy vopros. 1941–1949* [The USSR and the German Question. 1941–1949]. 2000. Documents from the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Compiled by G.P. Kynin, J. Laufer. Vol. 2. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 304 (in Russian).

the Saarland) “could be highly significant for Soviet-French relations.”⁴⁶ Nonetheless, he recognized that the potential benefits of playing the ‘French card’ should not be overstated. Litvinov viewed the upcoming December meeting of the foreign ministers of the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain in Moscow as an opportunity to exchange views and gauge the overall position of the “Big Three” governments regarding France’s unique stance – at that time, Paris opposed the establishment of “central government mechanisms” in Germany.⁴⁷ Ultimately, in December 1945, Moscow prioritized coordination with Washington and London over a separate dialogue with Paris.

Suritz adopted an even more critical stance. He opposed France’s inclusion as an original member of the International Security Organization Council, arguing that “post-war France – unless, of course, a radical social revolution occurs there – would align with the Anglo-Saxons against us, rather than the other way around.”⁴⁸ His position was challenged by Lozovsky, who, unlike Litvinov and Tarle, regarded France as one of the great powers and believed that “politically, it would hardly be advantageous for us to support excluding France from the leadership [of the International Organization].”⁴⁹

The question of future relations with Italy and its role in the post-war world also remained a contentious issue among Soviet diplomats. As revealed during the meeting of the Litvinov Commission on September 4, 1944, its members held differing views. Tarle advocated for weakening Italy after the war, drawing on the historical pattern of Russian-Italian relations. From his perspective, whenever Italy was “either semi-united, as under Napoleon, or moving toward unification, as during the Crimean War and subsequent wars, it opposed us – that is, it tended, for its own reasons, to align with any adversary hostile to us.”⁵⁰

In contrast, another commission member, diplomat and historian Shtein, believed that Soviet diplomacy had promising prospects for developing post-war relations with Italy. He found Tarle’s historical arguments unconvincing, noting that “<...> no one else, like E.V. Tarle, convincingly demonstrated in his book on the Crimean War that Italy’s participation was not due to conflicting interests with Russia.” Shtein even entertained the possibility that Italy could become one of the “strongholds” of Soviet influence in the Mediterranean.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Dopolnitel’no k raznoglasiyam s Frantsiei v otnoshenii Germanii* [In addition to disagreements with France regarding Germany], November 29, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 0136, List 29, Folder 196, File 19, Sheet 134 (in Russian).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Sheet 133.

⁴⁸ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 30 (in Russian).

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Sheet 24.

⁵⁰ Verbatim record No. 9 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, September 4, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 76 (in Russian).

⁵¹ *Ibid*, Sheets 78-79.

Soviet diplomats' reflections on their diplomatic engagement with Paris and Rome to reduce these countries' alignment with Great Britain reveal the Soviet Foreign Office's generally positive attitude toward the idea of multipolarity. However, when it came to the possible emergence of an anti-Soviet 'center of power,' the NKID's stance on multipolarity was decidedly negative. This was precisely the position the NKID took regarding the proposed post-war Polish–Czechoslovak federation (or confederation), which was actively debated in 1942–1943. As Molotov emphasized, “the idea of confederation is not only devoid of vitality but also harmful and poses a danger to the Slavic peoples' struggle against German domination in Europe.”⁵²

Factors influencing the perspectives of Soviet diplomats

The aforementioned discussions among Soviet diplomats regarding the post-war world order considered several factors, with three key ones standing out.

First, members of the Litvinov and Maisky commissions, along with the top Soviet leadership, thoroughly evaluated the power potential of certain states, acknowledging that World War II had dramatically reshaped the balance of power. Half-jokingly, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin agreed at the Yalta Conference that the “entry fee” to the “very privileged club” of the three leading powers of the anti-Hitler coalition was maintaining armed forces numbering between 3 and 5 million troops.⁵³ In its efforts to limit Germany's post-war strength, the Litvinov Commission focused on several key components: territory, population size, level of industrial development and workforce, availability of raw materials and energy resources, and the state of agricultural development.⁵⁴ Expressing doubts about France's potential revival in January 1944, Maisky pointed to factors such as France's smaller population compared to Germany and “the severe political and moral crisis that the French people have endured during the current war.”⁵⁵

According to Soviet diplomats, the combined power potential, contribution to the victory over the Axis powers, and the international political influence gained from the war largely determined the leading status of the “Big Three” countries. The immense losses suffered by the USSR provided a moral and political basis for Moscow's insistence on securing its position as one of the foremost powers in the post-war world. However, the true foundation for these claims was the Soviet state's military and political strength, which had grown significantly despite the extensive damage endured.

⁵² Molotov to Bogomolov, March 11, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26, Book 1, covering the year 1943. P. 203 (in Russian).

⁵³ Proceedings of the Heads of Government Meeting, February 7, 1945. *Sovetskiy Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945 gg.* [The Soviet Union at International Conferences during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]: Collection of documents. 1984. Chief editing commission: A.A. Gromyko et al. Vol. 4. Moscow: Politizdat. P. 110 (in Russian).

⁵⁴ Varga's memorandum to Litvinov, September 27, 1943. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 252–263 (in Russian).

⁵⁵ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 340 (in Russian).

Secondly, Litvinov and Maisky placed considerable emphasis on the degree of political and ideological confrontation between the USSR and Western countries. Soviet diplomats largely linked this confrontation to the nature and character of domestic political regimes in European nations, although Litvinov and Maisky refrained from predicting the precise intensity of the resulting conflicts.

Thirdly and finally, the factor we wish to emphasize, based on the reflections of Soviet diplomats, can be characterized as ‘geographical’ or even ‘geopolitical,’ although geopolitical terminology was considered taboo in the USSR – partly due to its association with Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, Maisky was familiar with the fundamental distinction between land and sea powers, a concept discussed at the time by thinkers such as Halford John Mackinder and Alfred Thayer Mahan. From Maisky’s perspective, “post-war Europe should have only one dominant land power – the USSR – and only one dominant naval power – Britain.”⁵⁶

The geographical distance of the United States from Europe, combined with American political experience after World War I, led Litvinov to hope – even before Roosevelt’s assurances at Yalta about the U.S. stepping back from European affairs – that post-war tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States would be reduced.⁵⁷ According to this reasoning, their ‘spheres of interest’ would be geographically separated. In a memo dated January 10, 1945, Litvinov expressed the view that “there is no reason to anticipate significant friction between us and the United States in finalizing our western borders.” Furthermore, he believed that “America has little interest in European borders,” seeking primarily a general stabilization of Europe to facilitate the expansion of exports and investments.⁵⁸

Conclusions

The conceptual framework of Soviet diplomats’ ideas regarding the post-war order, developed between 1943 and 1945, was quite different from the later models of bipolarity and the Cold War. While the Soviet Foreign Office staff – particularly Litvinov and Maisky – acknowledged the possibility of growing tensions between the USSR and the Western powers led by the United States and Great Britain, they favored cooperation among the leading members of the anti-Hitler coalition based on an implicit division of ‘spheres of interest.’ Although the formation of a united Anglo-American ‘front’ against the USSR could not be ruled out – especially in the event of a communist transformation of Europe – Soviet diplomacy aimed to prevent such an alliance from solidifying and sought to exploit the disagreements between Washington and London.

⁵⁶ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 352 (in Russian).

⁵⁷ At the meeting of heads of government on February 5, 1945, the U.S. president expressed skepticism about the United States’ ability to sustain a large military presence in Europe for more than two years following the end of the war. See: *Sovetskiy Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945 gg.* [The Soviet Union at International Conferences during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]. Vol. 4. P. 66 (in Russian).

⁵⁸ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheets 47–48 (in Russian).

The ideas advanced by Litvinov and Maisky, which resembled a ‘tripolarity’ model involving the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain – where the Soviet Union could strategically navigate between the two Anglo-Saxon powers – coexisted within the Soviet Foreign Office alongside alternative perspectives. Some, like academician Tarle and Shtein, stressed the importance of other international actors such as France and Italy, respectively. Due to the uncertain domestic political situation in post-war China and its relative weakness, Litvinov and Maisky were reluctant to assign China a decisive role in the post-war world. Consequently, the outlook of Soviet diplomats remained largely Eurocentric.

The new ‘balance of power,’ grounded in the significantly enhanced strength of the “Big Three” powers, their decisive role in defeating the Axis countries, and their expanded international political influence after World War II, was viewed as the foundation for a new global political order. At the same time, Litvinov and Maisky placed particular emphasis on the geographical factor. The potential withdrawal of the United States from European affairs, Great Britain’s privileged status as a maritime power, and the USSR’s position as a dominant land power were seen as factors that could lessen tensions among the leading members of the anti-Hitler coalition, especially in Europe. According to this perspective, the interests of the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain would be largely divided across different geographic regions. Meanwhile, Moscow aimed to diminish London’s influence in the former colonial periphery, where, as Litvinov acknowledged, covert cooperation with Washington might be possible.

Overall, it seems reasonable to say that Soviet diplomats’ reflections from 1943 to 1945 on the post-war world did not so much predict the bipolar realities of the Cold War as lay the foundation for a shift toward a significantly transformed multipolar model. Multipolarity was a defining characteristic of the interwar period, during which many leading Soviet diplomats – and Stalin himself – developed their ideas about international relations and world politics (Wohlforth, 1993, p. 86). Litvinov’s theses, which anticipated a revival of “contradictions between Britain and France” after World War II and Britain’s “desire to maintain the balance of power in Europe, at least by supporting Germany,”⁵⁹ bore parallels to the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, Lozovsky’s remark in April 1944 highlighted that France “still has influence among a certain group of European countries,” presumably referring to the former “rear allies” of Paris – Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.⁶⁰

Drawing on the recommendations of Litvinov and Maisky, it can be concluded that “a form of ‘concert’ among the three great powers was taking shape, grounded in the division and mutual recognition of each other’s spheres of influence” (Pechatnov,

⁵⁹ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti* [International Security Organization], April 25, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheet 17 (in Russian).

⁶⁰ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 40 (in Russian).

2006, p. 254). This ‘concert,’ reminiscent of the order established after the 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna, remained an appealing model, prompting several Western statesmen to advocate its revival after both the First and Second World Wars.

When considering the influence of interwar concepts on the Soviet Foreign Office staff, certain parallels can be seen between two international political models. The first is a distinctive form of ‘tripolarity’ involving the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain, each with its own ‘spheres of interest,’ as described by Litvinov and Maisky. The second model involves the so-called pan-regional unions, which were widely discussed during the 1920s and 1930s. These pan-regional unions, as envisioned during the interwar period, could encompass the USSR, the United States, and the British Empire, along with a potential European integration alliance (Pan-Europe). Acting collectively, the latter would be able to sustain its influence despite the dominance of powerful ‘non-European’ states.⁶¹ The Soviet Foreign Office learned that references to ‘pan-regional unions’ were common in Anglo-American discussions of 1944–1945 about dividing ‘spheres of responsibility’ under the proposed International Security Organization.⁶²

The foreign policy principles established in the early years of Soviet rule, which continued to shape the thinking of Soviet diplomats between 1943 and 1945, included strategies aimed at exploiting ‘inter-imperialist’ rivalries. In this context, the Soviet Foreign Office staff underestimated the strength of Anglo-American unity against the USSR in the emerging post-war environment. Additionally, the ideas of Litvinov and Maisky advocating support for anti-colonial and national liberation movements had already become established tools of Soviet diplomacy. Unlike the previous point, this approach proved highly relevant and widely utilized during the Cold War.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework developed by Litvinov, Maisky, and other Soviet diplomats during 1943–1945 – that can be described as a model of transformed multipolarity – was marked by internal contradictions. While their perspectives were future-oriented, they remained largely influenced by the ‘shadow of the past,’ which at times provided guidance but also diverged from the realities of the new international order.

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Conflict of interest:

The author declares the absence of any conflicts of interests.

⁶¹ Magadeev I.E. 2021. *V teni Pervoy mirovoy voyny: Dilemmy evropeyskoy bezopasnosti v 1920-e gody [In the Shadow of World War I: European Security Dilemmas in the 1920s]*. Moscow: Aspect Press. P. 808-809 (in Russian).

⁶² Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti [International Security Organization]*, April 25, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheets 22-25 (in Russian).

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Soviet Diplomacy and Intelligence Efforts to Facilitate Finland's Withdrawal from the 1941–1944 War: Insights from Russian Archives¹

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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

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Khristoforov V.S. 2023. Sovetskaya diplomatiya i razvedka v bor'be za vyhod Finlyandii iz vojny 1941– 1944 gg. (po materialam rossijskih arhivov). *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. No. 16 (6). P. 37–68. DOI: 10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-37-68

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,² 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

² 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.³

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.⁴

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.

³ 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).

⁴ 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,⁵ Murmansk, Omsk, Petrozavodsk,⁶ and St. Petersburg.⁷

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).⁸

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. Meretskov⁹ and V.I. Platonov,¹⁰ the diaries of Finnish President R. Ryti,¹¹ as well as those of prominent Finnish politicians J.K. Paasikivi¹² and V.A. Tanner.¹³ Additionally, the memoirs of Finnish statesman and military figure C.G. Mannerheim¹⁴ offer numerous new and previously unknown

⁵ *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).

⁶ *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).

⁷ 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).

⁸ *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).

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

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

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ *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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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

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

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

¹⁹ *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.

²⁰ 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).

²¹ *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.²²

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.²³

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."²⁴

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

²³ 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).

²⁴ 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."²⁵ 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,"²⁶ 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.²⁷

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.²⁸ For an extended period, Finland successfully convinced the U.S. government of the importance of maintaining diplomatic ties and continuing bilateral dialogue.²⁹

On September 25, 1942, U.S. Ambassador A. Schoenfeld³⁰ 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

²⁵ *Perepiska Predsedatelya Soveta ministrov SSSR s prezidentami SShA i premii-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).

²⁶ 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).

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 121, 127.

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

²⁹ 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).

³⁰ 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.³¹

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 1940.³²

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.,³³ 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.³⁴

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).³⁵ This

³¹ «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).

³² *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).

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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).

³⁵ *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.³⁶

On the orders of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris,³⁷ chief of the Abwehr (German military intelligence service), a division of the Abwehr-Ausland – Kriegsorganisation Finnland (KOF), or Bureau Cellarius³⁸ – 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.³⁹

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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

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,

³⁶ *Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of Russia*. File N-21105.

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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.

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

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

⁴¹ *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,⁴² 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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴

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

⁴² 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.

⁴³ *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.

⁴⁴ *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.⁴⁵

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,⁴⁶ 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,⁴⁷ closely monitored all individuals in contact with Yartsev, investigated their backgrounds, and reported to Helsinki on the Soviet diplomat's proposals regarding armistice negotiations.⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰

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

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

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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.

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

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

⁵⁰ 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 Söderblom⁵¹ contacted Yartsev, noting that Swedish politics hoped the USSR would adopt a prudent stance to preserve the independence of all countries after the war.⁵²

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.⁵³

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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

Z.I. Yartseva⁵⁶, 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.⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸

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

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

⁵³ *Ibid*, Sheets 173-172.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, File 87, Sheets 165-163.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, File 90, Sheets 4-9.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 90, Sheet 20.

⁵⁸ *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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ 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

⁵⁹ *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).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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.⁶³

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,⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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

⁶³ 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).

⁶⁴ 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).

⁶⁵ *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.⁶⁶ 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. Ramsay⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, Sheets 51-53.

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

⁶⁸ 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,⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

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

Exploring the possibility of negotiations and reconciliation

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

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

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

⁷¹ *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 10, Folder 11, File 89, Sheet 165.

⁷² 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.

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

⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

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.⁷⁷ 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."⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹

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.

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

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, File 90, Sheets 11-15.

⁷⁷ *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).

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

⁷⁹ *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.⁸⁰

At the end of November 1943, a verdict was anticipated in the case of the so-called "Russian spy" Hella Wuolijoki,⁸¹ 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.⁸²

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).

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

⁸¹ 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.

⁸² 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.⁸³

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.⁸⁴

On March 26, 1944, a Finnish delegation comprising J.K. Paasikivi, C. Enckell,⁸⁵ and G. Enckell⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

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

⁸⁴ *Foreign Policy Archives*. List 12, Folder 27, File 155, Sheet 10.

⁸⁵ 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.

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

⁸⁷ *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. Gripenberg⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ 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).

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

⁹⁰ 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.⁹²

Helsinki accepted the terms, and on September 7, a Finnish delegation led by Prime Minister A. V. Hackzell⁹³ 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

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

⁹² *Ibid*, List 12, Folder 27, File 155, Sheets 47-49.

⁹³ 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).⁹⁴

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).

⁹⁴ *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.⁹⁵

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 agreement⁹⁶ 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.

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

⁹⁶ 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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Soviet Diplomatic Efforts to Prevent Hungary's Alignment with Germany in the Second World War (1939–1941)¹

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Abstract. The history of Soviet–Hungarian interactions from the establishment of diplomatic relations until Hungary entered the Second World War alongside the Axis powers offers valuable insights into the dynamics between small and great powers, as well as the efforts of small European states, particularly Hungary, to navigate their national interests in foreign policy in the face of the encroachments of Nazi Germany. This period was defined by two primary factors: the Hungarian political elite, led by Miklós Horthy, sought to join a quasi-crusade against Comintern Soviet Russia, while simultaneously striving to avoid deep involvement in major conflicts between the great powers. This dual approach aligned with the policies of Hitler's Western appeasers, who aimed to redirect German expansion eastward. In this geopolitical scenario, American and Western European actors (including Great Britain and France) were relegated to the role of observers, anticipating a prolonged conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union that would drain both. The Hungarian leadership hoped to secure a position among these observers and thus avoid direct participation in the conflict, and to later engage in territorial reconfiguration after the war. However, the reality in Europe by the early 1940s was very different, with Western powers (the United States and Great Britain) unable to redirect Hitler's global domination ambitions eastward. Facing an existential threat, these powers were compelled to enter the war. It was against this backdrop that Soviet diplomacy endeavoured to deter Hungary's alliance with Nazi Germany. Although ultimately unsuccessful, examining these diplomatic efforts offers valuable lessons in the context of the current evolution towards a multipolar world.

Keywords: Hungarian foreign policy, Second World War, Soviet–Hungarian relations, return of the banners of the Hungarian revolutionary army of 1848–1849, bombing of Košice on June 26, 1941

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The significance of reflecting on Soviet-Hungarian relations Before the Great Patriotic War

In the years leading up to the Great Patriotic War, Soviet diplomacy made determined efforts to prevent Hungary – a nation more reliant on Nazi Germany than many other small European countries – from joining the Axis alliance. A key element of these efforts was the symbolic return of the banners belonging to L. Kossuth's Hungarian revolutionary army. The author of this article aims to highlight this event, especially as its 80th anniversary approaches, as a classic example of Russian “soft power” diplomacy. Additionally, the USSR's participation in the Budapest International Fair in 1941 – just six weeks before Hungary officially entered the war alongside Nazi Germany – deserves historical recognition. Moreover, the author argues that Soviet diplomats engaged with Hungary during these critical pre-war months warrant greater scholarly attention.

A thorough political and historical examination of Soviet-Hungarian relations during this period supports the conclusion that small European states, by maintaining open dialogue with Moscow, can significantly enhance their sovereignty and pursue independent foreign policies. This insight remains particularly relevant today, amid the ongoing development of a multipolar international order.

In this context, conducting a comparative analysis of Hungary's foreign policy during the pre-war era and today holds significant political relevance. Both periods share key characteristics: a strong desire to maintain maximum autonomy in pursuing an independent foreign policy, an effort to avoid direct involvement in conflicts between major powers, and a focus on prioritizing national interests. This continuity is reflected in the Hungarian academic community's interest in the legacy of István Bethlen, whose strategic vision shaped Hungarian diplomacy throughout the interwar years. The Bethlen Foundation, established through the initiative of notable public figure and journalist István Bakos, is dedicated to studying and preserving this intellectual heritage.

A central aim of this research is to examine the events leading up to Hungary's entry into war with the USSR, especially the bombing of Košice (in Hungarian, Kassa), which served as the formal *casus belli* for the Horthy regime's declaration of war on the Soviet Union. Importantly, surviving documents and eyewitness testimonies offer a solid basis to challenge and disprove the distortions propagated by those who falsify the historical record of that period. As the 80th anniversary of Victory approaches, the author argues that it is crucial to publish a comprehensive “White Paper” to definitively resolve these controversies and put an end to Russophobic historical falsifications.

Literature review

Despite the existence of several fundamental research works by Soviet/Russian scholars specializing in Hungarian and Balkan studies – such as P.P. Bezushko, B.J. Zhelitsky, Yu.I. Igritskiy, T.M. Islamov, I.V. Kryuchkov, V.L. Musatov, L.N. Nezhinsky, K.V. Nykiforov, A.I. Pushkash, A.S. Stykalin, O.V. Khavanova, V.P. Shusharin, and others – the history of Soviet-Hungarian relations remains a relatively underexplored field within Russian political science. This is particularly true for the period immediately before the outbreak of the Soviet-Hungarian war, especially concerning the so-called Košicebombing incident, which served as the *casus belli* for the Horthy regime's declaration of war on the USSR.

This phase of bilateral relations is rich with significant political, military, humanitarian, and cultural events. However, their objective analysis has been and continues to be hindered by the politicization of these historical narratives. In the past, such politicization resulted in extreme interpretations – ranging from the exaggerated glorification of the relations between Soviet Russia and the Hungarian Soviet Republic (Pushkash, 1972, p. 95-162) to the outright demonization of all participants in the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising as fascists and proponents of capitalist restoration (Pushkash, 1972, p. 674-703).

This type of politicization is also present among Hungarian researchers who have studied the bilateral relations between Russia and Hungary at various times. However, because Hungarian researchers outnumber the smaller group of Russian scholars specializing in Hungarian studies – and since Russia occupies a more prominent place in Hungarian foreign policy and academic research than Hungary does within Russian domestic scholarship – there is a noticeable imbalance in the quantity of studies and publications on this topic, with a predominance on the Hungarian side.

This quantitative imbalance also influenced the qualitative assessments of various historical periods, including the years 1934–1941. Russian scholarship has often lacked a nuanced analysis of the internal contradictions within Hungarian society during the interwar era, which was marked by a complex array of forces and political currents. As a result, there has been an oversimplified conflation of the radical nationalists led by Regent Miklós Horthy with the Nazi-aligned Hungarian factions centered around the Berlin-oriented Ferenc Szálasi and his *Nyilaskeresztes Párt* (Arrow Cross Party). This conflation, for instance, is evident in the preface authored by Soviet scholars for the seminal document collection *Hungary and World War II*, published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.² However, a careful examination of the documents in this collection reveals significant qualitative differences in the ideological foundations

² László Zs. (editor). 1962. *Vengriya i Vtoraya mirovaya voyna, Sekretnye diplomaticheskie dokumenty iz istorii kanuna i perioda voyny* [Hungary and World War II: Secret Diplomatic Documents from the Pre-War and Wartime Periods]. Translated from Hungarian by B.Ya. Geiger and N.N. Sikachev. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House. 367 pages. P. 5-18. (in Russian).

and political strategies of the radical nationalists and the Hungarists. Dictator Horthy and his regime's grey cardinal, I. Bethlen, undoubtedly held Russophobic views and supported the idea of an anti-Bolshevik "crusade" against the USSR as a broad global alliance of all Western powers, including both Germany and its "Munich appeasers." However, the Horthist leaders, including Horthy himself – an admiral with a sophisticated understanding of global geopolitics – realistically recognized that the Axis powers were likely to be defeated by the global anti-Hitler coalition. Aware of the dire consequences that joining Nazi Germany in the war would bring to small Hungary, they sought to postpone the declaration of war on the USSR and to limit Hungary's involvement in the Nazi invasion.

Accordingly, the stance of the Horthists was fundamentally different from that of the Hungarists, who offered unconditional support to Nazi Germany.

As we move further from the dramatic events of June 1941, there has been a growing number of publications – primarily in the media but also in academic circles – that subtly or openly promote the notion that the bombing of Košice on June 26, 1941, was carried out by Soviet aircraft.³ However, these works often disregard a crucial principle of historical inquiry: *Cui prodest?* ("Who benefits?"). Meanwhile, clear and unequivocal testimony from Romanian Air Force Colonel Ion Cernăianu, who stated that the bombing was ordered by dictator Antonescu and executed by Romanian planes based at the Suceava airbase, is intentionally dismissed as "undocumented" (Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári... 2022, p. 181).⁴

The limited attention given to Soviet diplomatic activities in Hungary during the pre-war years within domestic scholarly literature can, in our view, be largely attributed to the absence of memoirs by key Soviet diplomats who held senior positions in Soviet missions to Hungary and interacted closely with Hungarian officials (such as Ya. Kh. Davtyan, A. M. Petrovsky, A. A. Bekzadyan, V. A. Plotnikov, and N. I. Sharonov). Notably, the first three were included on the notorious execution list "Moscow – Center" and were repressed in 1938. In 1941, N. I. Plotnikov was dismissed from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) due to "staff cuts" and reassigned to the People's Commissariat for Timber Industry. As for N. I. Sharonov, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary who led the Soviet Embassy in Budapest until diplomatic ties were severed on June 23, 1941, there is no comprehensive information about his fate in publicly available sources known to the author of this article. This lack of information suggests that he, too, could be on the execution list "Moscow – Center". The ultimate fate of this distinguished diplomat remains an open question for future researchers.

³ Balassa Z. Kassa bombázása még mindig rejtély III [Kassa Bombing is Still a Mystery]. *Felvidék.ma*. A hírportál működtetője: Szövetség a Közös Célokért – URL: <https://felvidek.ma/2021/06/kassa-bombazasa-meg-mindig-rejtely-iii/> (accessed: November 29, 2023) (in Hungarian). Sándor G. 2017. Kassa felett az ég... [The Sky above Kassa]. 444. Történelem. Július 18. URL: <https://444.hu/2017/07/18/kassa-felett-az-eg> (accessed: November 29, 2023) (in Hungarian).

⁴ Zolcsák I. [et al.]; szerk. 1978. *Anna Walter de Fehér. Erdélyi magyarság* [Transylvanian Hungarians]. Fel. szerk. Buenos Aires. (In Hungarian).

In our view, the activities of Soviet diplomacy during the period in question have not been adequately reflected in Soviet historical scholarship. For instance, the seminal work *The History of Hungary* states that both the Horthists (Bárdossy) and the Hungarists (Werth, Sztójay) “wanted Hungary to actively participate in the anti-Soviet war” (Pushkash, 1972, p. 348).

However, the same work also notes that the Horthists anticipated an imminent “mutual understanding” between Germany and the Western powers (Pushkash, 1978, p. 350). A.I. Pushkash, a leading Russian historian specializing in this era, provides evidence that the Horthists did not merely wait passively for the formation of an anti-Soviet coalition among Western states but actively sought to mediate a ‘behind-the-scenes peace’ among Western countries against the Soviet Union (Pushkash, 1978, p. 350). Additionally, as highlighted in the monograph by Russian scholars A.S. Stykalin and E.-M. Varga (Stykalin, Varga, 2012), Miklós Horthy’s political views were shaped through interactions with representatives of the White émigré community, including meetings with General A.A. von Lampe, head of Department II of the Russian All-Military Union (ROVS).

Accordingly, Regent Horthy and his close associates had a more strategically thoughtful and equally anti-Soviet position compared to the more straightforward and risk-taking approach of the Hungarists. Horthy, together with the influential figure behind his regime, Count István Bethlen, did not aim to actively participate in Hitler’s invasion of the USSR but rather sought to be involved in the division of Soviet territories following the hypothetical success of a collective Western advance eastward.

This subtle distinction among the various political factions in pre-war Hungary warrants thorough investigation, especially in light of today’s evolving multipolar international system.

A significant contribution to the study of Soviet-Hungarian relations between 1939 and 1941 is offered in the work by T.M. Islamov and T.A. Pokivaylova (Islamov, Pokivaylova, 2008). Their monograph is particularly valuable due to its extensive use of archival materials, including documents from the Russian Foreign Policy Archives. Notably, it incorporates reports from N.I. Sharonov, the USSR Ambassador to Budapest during 1940-1941, as well as records of his conversations with Hungarian ministers, politicians, and journalists. These sources provide important insights into the effectiveness of Soviet “soft power” diplomacy toward Hungary during this period.

Regarding contemporary Hungarian scholarship on this subject, we believe it is most thoroughly represented in the biographical article by historian Levente Sipos on the Hungarian diplomat József Kristóffy (Sipos, 2012). The article provides detailed information about Kristóffy’s tenure as Hungary’s envoy to Moscow and highlights his efforts to leverage the improved relations between 1939 and 1941 to advance the irredentist objectives of the Horthy regime.

The interview given by Attila Kolontári to Russian researcher A.S. Stykalin, published in the journal *Istoricheskaya ekspertiza* (Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári... 2022), also serves as a reliable source.

In our view, Hungarian historiography on Russian-Hungarian relations has been effectively summarized in a collection of scholarly articles, where the assessments of Russia by Hungarian authors are described as “varying and contradictory” (Igritskiy, 2009, p. 6). The Soviet Army’s campaign in Hungary at the end of World War II is portrayed by G. Bebesi and A. Kolontári as both the liberation of the country from fascism and the occupation (Igritskiy, 2009, p. 197-213). Conversely, Hungarian literary intellectuals, according to Ph.D. S.G. Dyukin, perceive Russia as an “extra-cultural mass from the East” and an “inanimate disaster” not only for Hungary but for all of Europe (Igritskiy, 2009, p. 214-216). Dyukin’s assessment echoes the personal memoirs of MGIMO professor and Ph.D. V.S. Ivanov (1924–1995), who served in the post-war years on the Allied Control Commission for Hungary. Unfortunately, this distinguished educator and author of the first Hungarian language textbook published in the Soviet Union did not have the opportunity to formally reflect on his experiences in historical or political science publications.

Soviet-Hungarian relations from the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic to the establishment of diplomatic ties

In the aftermath of World War I, relations between Soviet Russia and Hungary were characterized by ambiguity and predominantly confrontational attitudes. Admiral Miklós Horthy, the regent and authoritarian leader who rose to power after the overthrow of the Hungarian Soviet Republic – a regime allied with Soviet Russia – could not count on Moscow’s goodwill. Meanwhile, the political elite in Budapest remained wary of engaging with a country where a small but militant communist opposition operated clandestinely and maintained sympathizers within Hungary itself.

Despite these tensions, economic considerations and the example set by Germany – which had secured significant benefits from the Treaty of Rapallo – prompted Budapest to take the initiative in 1924 to open negotiations aimed at establishing formal diplomatic relations with Moscow. These talks, held in Berlin, culminated in an agreement signed on September 5, 1924, by Soviet Ambassador N.N. Krestinsky and Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister K. Kánya, which established diplomatic and consular relations. Following this, further agreements were made to develop trade relations and set up mutual representative offices.

However, these documents were never ratified. According to the official Soviet account, “the Hungarian reactionary regime ultimately ensured that, contrary to the national interests of the Hungarian people, the treaties with the USSR were rejected and never came into force” (Pushkash, 1972, p. 216). It is important to note that the Soviet efforts to promote the ratification of these treaties were somewhat obstructed by the Hungarian communist émigré community, who justifiably feared the activities of the Horthy regime’s political police operating in Moscow under diplomatic cover.

For instance, in 1924, one of the émigré leaders, Mátyás Rákosi, was sent by the party to Hungary to carry out illegal work but was soon arrested and sentenced to a lengthy prison term (Vas, 1951).

As a result, up until 1934, there were no diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Hungary, as neither Moscow nor Budapest had achieved internal consensus on whether it was advisable to grant each other formal recognition. In the Soviet People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, G.V. Chicherin effectively advanced the so-called "Rapallo policy," which involved exploiting rivalries among imperialist powers. Hungary, having suffered significant territorial and population losses under the Treaty of Trianon, was seen as an ideal candidate for this strategy. This approach also allowed the Soviet Union to leverage tensions between Horthy's Hungary and boyar-dominated Romania, which had occupied Soviet Bessarabia in 1918. Notably, when the USSR signed the Briand–Kellogg Pact, it did so with the reservation that, for Moscow, the line of separation along the Prut River was not recognized as an official state border, but merely as a demarcation line.

However, the foreign policy pursued by the NKID under Chicherin was also shaped by the leadership of the Comintern, which encouraged Hungarian communist émigrés to take active measures against the Horthy regime. This duality in Soviet foreign policy was personified by the antagonistic relationship between People's Commissar G.V. Chicherin and his deputy, M.M. Litvinov. As noted by B.G. Bazhanov, a former official at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in his memoirs, they often used political and ethical arguments to pursue personal vendettas against each other (Bazhanov, 1992, p. 54).

There was no consensus in Budapest either – neither regarding relations with Moscow nor the overall political direction of the country in the postwar period. On one hand, the Hungarian political elite, including Horthy himself, prioritized revising the territorial losses imposed by the Treaty of Trianon, especially those involving Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. At the same time, more pragmatic leaders such as Bethlen aimed to exploit the rivalries among the great powers without committing Hungary to any military alliance, recognizing that siding with one bloc would inevitably drag the country into another devastating war.

Within Hungary's political landscape of the 1930s, the radical fascist Arrow Cross Party (led by Szálasi) also played a role. Although it enjoyed support from Berlin, the party remained in opposition and only came to power following the direct occupation of Hungary by German forces in 1944. Its leader had been imprisoned and was released solely at Hitler's personal intervention. Thus, despite their clear alignment with the 'anti-Bolshevik crusade,' the Horthy regime preserved a limited yet significant degree of diplomatic flexibility for an extended time. Soviet diplomacy sought to take advantage of this room for maneuver.

Establishment of USSR's diplomatic relations with Hungary and Romania

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the USSR and the countries of Hungary and Romania in 1934 represented a logical progression in Moscow's policy of building a collective security system in Europe. This policy actively opposed the approach taken by London and Paris, which sought to accommodate German expansion following the Nazis' rise to power. At the same time, Soviet diplomacy skillfully exploited the tensions between Budapest and Bucharest, showing a slight preference for Hungary. Notably, diplomatic ties with Hungary were formalized four months before those with Romania.

A.A. Smirnov, then an official at the Soviet embassy in Berlin and later Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, was assigned to establish a permanent Soviet mission in Budapest. In his memoirs, shared with the author of this article, Smirnov recalled that Hungarian officials demonstrated full understanding and readiness to cooperate. The Soviet Embassy was housed in a mansion on Stefánia út and began its operations in 1935.

Alexander Artemyevich Bekzadyan was appointed as the first Soviet ambassador in Budapest. Simultaneously, a mission was established in Moscow, led by the experienced diplomat Mihály Jungerth-Arnóthy, who was fluent in Russian. Jungerth-Arnóthy quickly built strong connections within the Moscow diplomatic community and even established contact with Litvinov, with whom he had previously worked during negotiations on prisoner-of-war exchanges following World War I.

However, bilateral relations during this period saw little progress. Anti-Bolshevik sentiment remained strong in Budapest, and the work of the Hungarian mission in Moscow was adversely affected by what Hungarian historian Levente Sipos describes as "the all-encompassing paralyzing consequences of the mass show trials of 1937–1938 and the atmosphere of deep suspicion toward foreigners" (Sipos, 2012, p. 2). Ambassador Bekzadyan, along with nearly all Soviet representatives in Budapest from 1935 to 1941, fell victim to these "show trials." Many were included on the notorious "Moscow – Center" execution list, alongside hundreds of other repressed officials from the Soviet Foreign Ministry (NKID) and Soviet diplomatic missions abroad.

Breakdown and resumption of diplomatic relations on the eve of World War II

On February 2, 1939, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs M.M. Litvinov notified the Hungarian envoy in Moscow that the USSR was suspending diplomatic relations with Hungary due to Budapest's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact. However, Litvinov emphasized that this action did not constitute a complete break in diplomatic ties but rather the suspension of the activities of the respective missions in each other's capitals. Moscow proposed maintaining communication through diplomatic channels by utilizing missions located in third-country capitals.

Hungarian Foreign Minister István Csáky correctly interpreted Moscow's move not as an anti-Hungarian measure but as a warning aimed at deterring other governments from joining the Anti-Comintern Pact. Consequently, the Hungarian side was initially reluctant to pursue contact via diplomatic missions in third countries (Sipos, 2012, p. 2-3). It was only in July 1939 that Hungary made a tentative attempt to reopen communication through its embassy in Warsaw.

Meanwhile, developments were unfolding at a breathtaking pace across multiple diplomatic and military fronts. In March 1939, in direct violation of the 1938 Munich Agreement, German forces occupied the Czech lands and Moravia, effectively ending the already fragile independence of Czechoslovakia, Hungary's neighboring state. Moscow was compelled to respond. On April 17, 1939, the Soviet government proposed to the British and French governments the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact in the event of aggression by Germany or its allies against any of the signatories. Just a week later, M.M. Litvinov was dismissed from his position, and the role of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was assumed by V.M. Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

The Soviet-Anglo-French negotiations that began in June clearly exposed the Western powers' strategy to direct German expansion eastward against the USSR. To avoid this, Joseph Stalin abruptly shifted Soviet foreign policy and signed the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression. This development inevitably affected Soviet-Hungarian relations. Jungerth-Arnóthy established contact with Soviet diplomats in Paris, and in early September, the Soviet embassy in France was instructed to inform the Hungarian side about the possibility of reopening its mission in Moscow. The official announcement came just one day after the launch of the Soviet campaign in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus – then parts of Poland – which made it clear that the USSR and Hungary would share a common border. By October, diplomatic relations at the mission level were fully restored. An envoy was dispatched to Budapest – Nikolai Ivanovich Sharonov, who had prior diplomatic experience in Greece, Poland, and Slovakia – and on May 9, 1941, he was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. At the same time, a new Hungarian envoy, József Kristóffy, arrived in Moscow.

Although Kristóffy held a lower rank within the Hungarian diplomatic corps compared to his predecessor Jungerth-Arnóthy, the latter had already been reassigned elsewhere. Kristóffy's appointment was also influenced by his strong performance at the Hungarian embassy in Warsaw, where the USSR was simultaneously represented by its new envoy to Budapest, N.I. Sharonov.

On October 19, 1939, Kristóffy presented copies of his credentials to V.M. Molotov, who, during a brief conversation, assured the envoy of Moscow's intention to foster good-neighborly relations with Hungary. Kristóffy later reported to Budapest that the same sentiment was expressed by M.I. Kalinin, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, in a conversation following the presentation of credentials on October 25. Kalinin emphasized that there were no hostilities between the two countries,

only “misunderstandings” that had previously hindered the development of their relationship. Seizing on this remark, the experienced Kristóffy raised the possibility of concluding a bilateral agreement between the two governments, to which, according to the envoy, a commitment was made to “consider this valuable initiative” (Sipos, 2012, p. 4).

The period between the restoration of diplomatic relations in October 1939 and Hungary’s entry into war against the USSR on June 27, 1941, was marked by numerous diplomatic developments. Despite joining the Anti-Comintern Pact, the Horthy regime still hoped to keep Hungary out of a large-scale conflict. Their ideal scenario was a united front of all Western powers – including Britain, Germany, Italy, and France – against the Soviet Union. The Horthy model of fascism fit neatly into this geopolitical vision, as it lacked the virulent Judeophobia characteristic of German Nazism, which ultimately alienated Berlin from the United States and Great Britain. According to eyewitnesses of the time, the anti-Semitism of Horthy and his associates was relatively moderate, and the “Jewish laws” enacted during this period allowed Hungary’s substantial Jewish population some legal protections. The genocide of Jews in Hungary only began after the Nazi occupation in March 1944 and is closely linked to Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the fascist Arrow Cross Party, who was executed after the war. This approach aligned with Horthy’s broader policy of seeking cooperation with Western democracies on an anti-Soviet basis.

For a time, the Horthists’ diplomatic maneuvering between the great powers was effective. Without fully severing ties with Britain, Horthy, through the mediation of Germany and Italy, succeeded in reclaiming parts of the territories lost under the Treaty of Trianon – specifically those ceded to Slovakia in 1938 and Romania in 1940 – via the First and Second Vienna Awards.

However, with the Nazi occupation of Poland and the signing of the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression, the Horthists’ hopes of forming a unified anti-Soviet Western bloc for an eastward advance were finally dashed. Caught between Berlin, London, and Moscow, Horthy continued to navigate carefully, aiming to avoid direct involvement in the conflict, following the examples set by Franco in Spain, İnönü in Turkey, and Tsar Boris in Bulgaria. For a brief period, there was some hope that plans to stay out of the great power conflict could succeed, tied to the idea of creating an anti-Atlantic “continental bloc” of Eurasian powers. Had German diplomacy prevailed – successfully compelling the USSR to join a confrontation with the Anglo-Saxon powers during Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop’s visits to Moscow (August 23–24 and September 27–29, 1939) and Soviet Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov’s visit to Berlin (November 12–13, 1940) – Hungary would have found itself in a more secure position away from the front lines in global politics, precisely as the Horthists desired.

However, the plans to establish a “continental bloc” ultimately failed because Moscow accurately assessed the balance of power on the eve of the war and recognized the inevitable collapse of the Nazis’ ambitions for world domination – plans that relied on the USSR as a temporary partner destined for total and unconditional subjugation.

Additionally, for ideological reasons, Joseph Stalin could not relinquish his position as the leader of the global communist antifascist labor movement, which was gaining significant momentum in the pre-war years.

Meanwhile, Hungary faced a challenging political climate. Between August 1938 and September 1940, Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the radical Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross Party was imprisoned. His release was closely linked in Budapest to pressure exerted by Berlin. At the same time, contacts with Moscow intensified regarding the release of the Hungarian Communist leader Mátyás Rákosi and his closest associate, Zoltán Vas.

The Hungarian liberal democratic public, which was predominantly Anglophilic, found itself politically disoriented following the signing of the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression. This confusion is illustrated by the actions of Albert Szent-Györgyi, a Nobel Prize-winning Hungarian biochemist and committed anti-fascist, who, at the onset of the Soviet-Finnish Winter War, visited the Finnish Embassy and donated his gold Nobel medal along with a significant monetary contribution to the Finnish Red Cross to aid war victims (Ala-Fossi, Richly, Vilisics, 2014, p. 9).

By early 1940, Hungary had mobilized more volunteers to fight alongside Finland in the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939–1940 than any other European country. Of the 25,000 volunteers, a battalion of 5,000 was formed and sent to Finland. However, they did not engage in combat, as the war ended while they were still training in skiing under harsh northern winter conditions. Nevertheless, many of these volunteers were honored with Finnish state awards by Marshal Mannerheim.

The Soviet-Finnish War placed all political parties opposing the Horthy regime in a highly uncomfortable position. The largest among them, the Social Democratic Party, became divided: the pro-communist minority, which consistently supported Moscow, was expelled from the party (Ala-Fossi, Richly, Vilisics, 2014, p. 19). The extreme right, aligned with Berlin, was also thrown into confusion. Initially, they welcomed the anti-Soviet conflict waged by the “Ugro-Finnish brothers” of shared blood, but later, in line with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, they actively opposed the recruitment of volunteers to fight on the Finnish side against the Soviets (Ala-Fossi, Richly, Vilisics, 2014, p. 19).

Amid these challenging circumstances, Soviet diplomacy faced the difficult task of swaying Hungarian public opinion in its favor. Efforts were indeed made in this direction. The months leading up to the German invasion of the USSR saw the most intense activity in Soviet-Hungarian relations, with a key focus on influencing public sentiment within Hungary.

Soviet “soft-power diplomacy” of 1939–1941

In 1849, at the urging of Russian Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode, Tsar Nicholas I – the so-called “gendarme of Europe” – sent Russian troops under Field Marshal I.F. Paskevich to suppress the Hungarian revolutionary army led by Lajos

Kossuth, thereby securing Austrian control over Hungary. This intervention decisively ended the Hungarian struggle for liberation from Habsburg rule. The Habsburgs subsequently attributed their continued control over Hungary largely to Russian military support, especially the role of the Russian Cossacks, fueling widespread anti-Russian propaganda that had deeply influenced Hungarian society by the outbreak of World War II. For decades, Hungarian youth were educated to revere the legacy of Kossuth's uprising.

Fully aware of these complex historical sensitivities, Soviet foreign policy adopted a skillful and effective approach – one that exemplifies the principles of “soft power” diplomacy. As a symbolic gesture, the Soviets decided to return to the Hungarian government the captured banners of Kossuth's army, which had been seized by Paskovich's forces. This act of cultural and humanitarian diplomacy proved highly effective, achieving significant political impact through non-coercive means.

The idea first occurred to the Hungarian envoy Jungerth-Arnóthy as early as 1935, but it was dismissed in Budapest as unrealistic. Genuine negotiations regarding the transfer of the banners began in the fall of 1940. Initially, neither Moscow nor Budapest had much confidence in the success of the initiative. The talks gained new momentum when a proposal was made to exchange the banners for Mátyás Rákosi, the leader of the Hungarian Communists who was imprisoned in Hungary. Both parties preferred to keep the negotiations on such a sensitive matter discreet, and some details remain classified to this day. To maintain secrecy, it was decided to stagger the two parts of the agreement over time: on November 2, 1940, Rákosi was handed over to Soviet authorities at the border, and on November 7, he was already present on the podium at a celebratory parade in Moscow.

The Soviet side then moved swiftly. On March 20, 1941, in a solemn ceremony, Army General I.V. Tyulenev, representing the Soviet government, formally handed over 56 captured banners to Envoy J. Kristóffy. The event took place in the Red Banner Hall of the Central House of the Red Army, where a guard of honor was present, and both the Hungarian national anthem and the *Internationale* were played. After signing the transfer document, Tyulenev and Kristóffy delivered speeches. That same day, the Hungarian banners, escorted by a guard of honor and representatives from the Soviet People's Commissariat of Defense and the Hungarian Mission in Moscow, were transported to the Soviet-Hungarian border to be presented to a specially dispatched Hungarian delegation.⁵

According to press reports, the Soviet side skillfully leveraged the return of the banners to demonstrate its friendly intentions toward Hungary. Beyond the ceremony held at the Central House of the Red Army, additional solemn events took place at

⁵ *Soobshchenie o vozvrashchenii Vengrii voennykh znamyon vengerskoy revolyutsii 1848 goda 21 marta 1941 g.* [Announcement of the return to Hungary of the military banners of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 on March 21, 1941]. 1998. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki. 1940 — 22 iyunya 1941* [Foreign Policy Documents. 1940 — June 22, 1941]. In two books. Book 2 (2), covering the period of March 2, 1941, to June 22, 1941. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 489 (in Russian).

Moscow's Kievsky Railway Station and at the Soviet-Hungarian border itself. Coverage of these events appeared prominently in both the central Soviet press and all regional newspapers. The formal transfer of these revolutionary relics was documented through an exchange of letters between People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs V.M. Molotov and Hungarian Foreign Minister László Bárdossy. As noted by Kristóffy in his report, when First Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs A.Ya. Vyshinsky handed him the letter, he unusually expressed warm and friendly sentiments toward Hungary, a rare display of loquacity for him (Sipos, 2012, p. 10).

In Molotov's reply to the Hungarian minister's letter of thanks, Moscow's stance was clearly stated: "The Soviet Government has always been, and will continue to be, guided by the desire to strengthen and develop good-neighborly relations with Hungary for the benefit of our countries and peoples" (Sipos 2012: 10).

The success of this Soviet diplomatic initiative is evident in the position taken by the German Embassy in the USSR, which expressed concern and quickly warned the Hungarian envoy about the "treachery of Moscow," accusing the Soviets of acting solely to "win the sympathies of the Hungarian people" (Sipos, 2012, p. 10).

Overall, Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári observes that the period from the summer of 1940 to April 1941 proved far more productive in the history of Soviet-Hungarian relations than all previous years combined (Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári... 2022, p. 164). Within just a few weeks, Moscow and Budapest resolved several longstanding issues that had previously stalled negotiations. In early September 1940, a trade and payment agreement was signed in Moscow, establishing a goods exchange valued at \$3.7 million. In February 1941, additional agreements were reached to restore postal and telegraphic communications as well as railway services between the two countries.

On January 17, 1940, a senior Hungarian official, representing his government, informed Soviet Ambassador N.I. Sharonov that Hungarian newspapers had been instructed as follows: 1) anti-Soviet articles were to be prohibited; 2) censorship was being changed from voluntary to mandatory after one newspaper depicted a Red Army soldier as a vagrant; and 3) an increased number of TASS reports would be published. Later, on February 13, 1940, during a conversation with the Soviet envoy, Foreign Minister István Csáky reaffirmed Budapest's stance, stating, "We feel secure about our Carpathian border, have no disputes with the Soviets, and generally do not perceive any threat from that direction" (Islamov, Pokivaylova, 2008, p. 83–84).

The strengthening of bilateral relations was also evident in the full staffing of the Soviet and Hungarian diplomatic missions in each other's capitals. Both missions included military attachés, trade representatives, councilors, secretaries, and telegraphic agency personnel. By October 1940, the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow employed 22 staff members, while the Soviet Embassy in Hungary had 18 (Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári... 2022, p.164). According to NKID documents, a significant expansion was planned for 1941, increasing the mission staff to 27, in addition to six employees from the trade representative office.

The improvement in relations, however, proved to be short-lived. On April 6, 1941, Axis forces invaded Yugoslavia. Berlin applied intense pressure on Budapest, demanding Hungary's participation in the operation, which placed Horthy and his associates in a difficult position. Just four months earlier, Prime Minister Pál Teleki's government had signed a Treaty of Eternal Friendship and Permanent Peace with Yugoslavia. Additionally, on the night of April 5–6, the USSR signed its own Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression with Yugoslavia. Hungary's involvement in the Axis aggression marked the collapse of the careful balancing policy the Horthy regime had pursued with mixed success for years. Teleki, who had signed the Hungarian-Yugoslav treaty, faced immense personal moral and psychological strain and tragically took his own life on April 3, leaving a posthumous note in which he described Hungary as a nation of "corpse robbers."⁶ In response, Moscow deemed it appropriate to send a telegram of condolence signed by Molotov.

Under pressure from Berlin, the new cabinet led by L. Bárdossy decided on April 10 to deploy Hungarian troops into Yugoslav territory. Moscow responded immediately: on April 12, Kristóffy was summoned to the NKID, where he received a statement from Vyshinsky that was published in the Soviet press the following day. The statement explicitly condemned Hungary's action, emphasizing that "The Soviet government cannot approve such a move by Hungary. It is especially troubling that Hungary initiated a war against Yugoslavia only four months after signing a treaty of eternal friendship with that country."⁷

From that point onward, relations between the two countries began to deteriorate, although the NKID continued its efforts to maintain them at a level that left hope Hungary would not fall entirely under Berlin's control. According to Hungarian sources, before returning to Budapest on May 8, 1941, Sharonov met with Kristóffy. During their discussion, Sharonov noted that the differences of opinion between the Hungarian and Soviet governments would not affect their relations, and that the Soviet government's intentions remained focused on maintaining good-neighborly relations with Hungary (Sipos, 2012, p. 11-12). In a coded message to Budapest reporting this conversation, Kristóffy reasonably added that he believed Sharonov's statement reflected the instructions received from the NKID. Indeed, it is unlikely that a Soviet diplomat would make such a significant declaration without approval from the leadership.

Sharonov's return to his post was accompanied by a renewed wave of goodwill in bilateral relations, this time more on a humanitarian rather than official level. In May 1941, the USSR participated for the first time in the traditional Budapest International Fair. The Soviet pavilion attracted unprecedented public interest, with the Regent

⁶ Április 3. Gróf Teleki Pál halála. *Kalendarium*. URL: <https://turul.info/napok/telekipalhalala> (accessed: November 29, 2023) (in Hungarian).

⁷ *V Narodnom komissariate inostrannykh del SSSR 12 aprelya 1941 g.* [At the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR on April 12, 1941]. 1998. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki. 1940 — 22 iyunya 1941* [Foreign Policy Documents. 1940 — June 22, 1941]. In two books. Book 2 (2), covering the period of March 2, 1941, to June 22, 1941. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 553 (in Russian).

himself, his wife, and two ministers attending the exhibition of Soviet industrial and agricultural products. Visitors queued in long lines to see the Soviet display⁸ (Sipos, 2012, p. 12).

Last attempts to prevent the catastrophe (May – June 1941)

Meanwhile, the momentum toward war preparations continued relentlessly. German diplomacy and intelligence, through their agents in Budapest, actively pushed Hungary toward the brink of disaster. The most influential agent within Budapest's political elite was Chief of the General Staff, Henrik Werth. Around the time Horthy visited the Soviet pavilion at the fair, Werth presented Prime Minister L. Bárdossy with a memorandum.⁹ In it, citing the inevitability of an imminent war between Germany and the USSR, he urged the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact with Berlin, which would also support the Hortist territorial claims against neighboring countries. The memorandum stated: "Our accession to the Axis powers makes Hungary's participation in the war compulsory. This is necessary because further territorial expansion can only be expected if we remain loyal and steadfast allies of the Axis. As a reward, we are certain to regain all the territories of historic Hungary. German authorities have long hinted at this, and the political course pursued by the Axis powers so far gives us every reason to be confident. We should especially join the military action promptly, as Romania has already committed to participating in the war. Romanian propaganda has cleverly exploited this fact against us. Should we delay joining the war, we risk not only losing any future territorial claims against Romania – perhaps forever – but also endangering what we have already gained."¹⁰

The Germans had no doubts about the loyalty of the pro-Hitler faction within the Hungarian political elite and viewed the Horthists' attempts to avoid direct involvement in the forthcoming Nazi invasion as doomed to failure. In a conversation with Ambassador V.G. Dekanozov just four days before Germany's attack on the USSR, Ernst von Weizsäcker, State Secretary at Germany's Foreign Office, described L. Bárdossy as a staunch supporter of the Axis, adding with confidence, "And the Hungarian foreign minister cannot be anything else, since everything Hungary has gained has come thanks to the Axis powers."¹¹

⁸ Those who survived were invited to the Soviet pavilion at the Budapest International Fair 1967 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the exhibition. The author of this article, attending the event as an interpreter, witnessed veteran visitors recalling the 1941 Soviet exhibition with tears in their eyes – an exhibition held just a month and a half before the outbreak of the war.

⁹ László Zs. (editor). 1962. *Vengriya i Vtoraya mirovaya voyna, Sekretnye diplomaticheskie dokumenty iz istorii kanuna i periody voyny* [Hungary and World War II: Secret Diplomatic Documents from the Pre-War and Wartime Periods]. Translated from Hungarian by B.Ya. Geiger and N.N. Sikachev. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House. P. 252-255 (in Russian).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 254.

¹¹ *Iz dnevniky posla SSSR v Germanii V.G. Dekanozova, 18 iyunya 1941 g.* [From the diary of the USSR ambassador to Germany, V.G. Dekanozov, June 18, 1941]. 1998. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki. 1940 — 22 iyunya 1941* [Foreign Policy Documents. 1940 — June 22, 1941]. In two books. Book 2 (2), covering the period of March 2, 1941, to June 22, 1941. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 744 (in Russian).

However, the State Secretary's assessment was not entirely accurate. The struggle within the Hungarian political elite was still ongoing; Bárdossy himself rejected the memorandum presented by Werth. Meanwhile, figures like István Bethlen and Regent Horthy resisted Hungary's direct entry into the war until the very end. Although they were anti-communists and Russophobes, they realistically recognized that war would be a tragedy for Hungary and doubted Germany's chances of victory. This perspective helps explain why Hungary did not enter the war on June 22, 1941, like Romania, nor on June 25, like Finland, or even on June 26, like Slovakia. This also sheds light on the skepticism in Berlin about Hungary's role, with Field Marshal Paulus stating that Hungary was the only German satellite not privy to the details of the 'Barbarossa plan'.¹²

At the Cabinet of Ministers meeting on June 23, the decision was limited to severing diplomatic relations with the USSR. However, one politician within the Horthy's government – the Minister of Interior – cautioned his colleagues against acting too hastily. When Bárdossy informed the German ambassador of the government's decision, he unexpectedly and somewhat hesitantly asked whether Hungary should maintain its mission in Moscow to “carry out intelligence activities in favor of Germany through it” (Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári... 2022, p. 172). The response was that such a measure was unnecessary.

During these critical hours, the Soviet leadership also made efforts to prevent a war between the USSR and Hungary. On June 23, Molotov invited Kristóffy “to obtain information from him about the current developments” and Hungary's stance regarding the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. Molotov emphasized that “the Soviet Union has no disputes or claims against Hungary and does not object to Hungary's territorial expansion at Romania's expense.”¹³ This referred to the transfer of part of Transylvania to Hungary under the Second Vienna Award. In his coded telegram to Budapest, Kristóffy reinforced this part of the conversation, extending Molotov's assurances into the future.

Apparently, these assurances did not reach Horthy. Nevertheless, when the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff urged the Regent to side with Germany, Horthy refused, seemingly hoping to maintain Hungary's neutrality despite the difficult circumstances. It was then that a provocation, Hitler's tried-and-true diplomatic tactic came into play.

¹² Paulus F. 1960. «Ich stehe hier auf Befehl!». Fr./M. P. 130–131 (in German).

¹³ *Zapis besedy Narodnogo komissara inostrannykh del SSSR V.M. Molotova s Poslannikom Vengrii v SSSR J. Kristóffy, 23 iyunya 1941 g.* [Record of the conversation between the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR V.M. Molotov and the Envoy of Hungary to the USSR J. Kristóffy, June 23, 1941]. 2000. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki* [Foreign Policy Documents], June 22, 1941, – January 1, 1942. Vol. XXIV. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 21 (in Russian).

The bombing of Košice

On June 26, 1941, at 1:08 p.m., three unmarked bombers with yellow stripes around their fuselages appeared over the Slovak city of Košice, which had come under Hungarian control under the First Vienna Award. These yellow stripes typically identified aircraft belonging to the Axis powers. The planes dropped bombs on the city's main street, resulting in significant destruction and casualties. Although no thorough investigation was conducted, Chief of General Staff Henrik Werth strongly pushed the narrative that the bombing was carried out by Soviet forces. This event became the decisive factor in Hungary's complex diplomatic struggle, ultimately influencing the country's foreign policy direction. Five days after the Nazi invasion began, Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union.

To this day, some biased historians maintain that Košice was bombed by Soviet aircraft. However, even after more than eighty years, this claim does not withstand critical scrutiny. First, the Red Army had no strategic reason to bomb Košice. Second, during the initial days of the war, the Soviet Air Force suffered severe losses in personnel, equipment, and fuel, making it highly unlikely they could have executed such a long-range mission, even accidentally. Third, as historian and journalist M.A. Zhironkov pointed out, all combat-ready aviation units in the southwestern sector, including bombers, were ordered to focus exclusively on supporting frontline troops, ruling out the possibility of any long-range raids.¹⁴

In this context, the most plausible explanation appears to be the "Romanian" version, as outlined by the Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári (Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári... 2022, p. 181). According to this account, a Romanian officer, Colonel Ion Cernăianu, who was held captive by the Soviets, told a Hungarian POW pilot, István Zolcsák, during a heated argument over Transylvania's ownership, that the bombing of Košice was carried out by Romanian aircraft under the orders of dictator Antonescu. Although Kolontári expresses some skepticism about the authenticity of this claim, it is supported by documents and the memoirs of Zolcsák.¹⁵ Additionally, other Hungarian and Slovak sources have also referenced this version.¹⁶

The credibility of this version is further supported by the background of Zolcsák himself (1921–2006), a committed Hungarian nationalist, a Horthist officer and pilot, and an active participant in the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising. Therefore, he cannot be suspected of harboring pro-Soviet sympathies. Most importantly, only the "Romanian

¹⁴ M.A. Zhironkov. 2004. *Bombezshka Košice* [The Bombing of Košice]. URL: <http://www.airwar.ru/history/av2ww/axis/koshice/koshice.html> (accessed: November 29, 2023) (in Russian).

¹⁵ Zolcsák István [et al.]; szerk. 1978. Anna Walter de Fehér. *Erdélyi magyarság* [Transylvanian Hungarians]. Fel. szerk. Buenos Aires (in Hungarian).

¹⁶ Balassa Z. Kassa bombázása még mindig rejtély III [Kassa Bombing is Still a Mystery]. *Felvidék.ma*. A hírportál működtetője: Szövetség a Közös Célokért – URL: <https://felvidek.ma/2021/06/kassa-bombazasa-meg-mindig-rejtely-iii/> (accessed: November 29, 2023) (in Hungarian); Sándor G. 2017. Kassa felett az ég... [The Sky above Kassa]. 444. *Történelem*. Július 18. URL: <https://444.hu/2017/07/18/kassa-felett-az-eg> (accessed: November 29, 2023) (in Hungarian).

version” answers the fundamental question in any criminal investigation: *Cui prodest?* (Who benefits?). The fascists had clear motives: German fascists sought to draw Hungary into war with the USSR as quickly as possible; Romanian fascists aimed to force the Hungarian army to retreat from Transylvania’s borders; and Hungarian fascists wanted to accuse the USSR of aggression to justify rapid military advances into the vast territory of the “barbarian country” (Barbárország), as they referred to Russia. Chief of General Staff Henrik Werth had promised that following a swift victory, Hungarian soldiers would be home by August 1941, just in time for the harvest. However, Werth was mistaken: between January 12 and February 9, 1943, the Hungarian Second Army – which was responsible for covering the Wehrmacht’s rear – suffered 148,000 casualties, including killed, wounded, missing, and captured (Grishina, 2009, p. 200).

Conclusions

A historical review of the events from eighty years ago clearly demonstrates that the momentum toward war, set in motion by the Versailles-Washington system, was unstoppable. The Western powers’ unscrupulous concessions at Munich made the outbreak of World War II in Europe nearly unavoidable. Likewise, the Horthists’ aspirations for a “crusade” – an anti-Bolshevik, anti-Russian campaign led by a unified Christian West – were ultimately dashed.

Regarding Soviet diplomatic efforts toward Hungary between 1934 and 1941, their positive significance remains evident today, both in the context of Russian-Hungarian relations and in enhancing security across Europe. Contemporary history shows that, just as it did eight decades ago, strengthening Hungary’s sovereignty – and that of other nations – in European affairs is far more effective when grounded in constructive dialogue with Moscow.

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The author declares the absence of any conflicts of interests.

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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 mezhdu 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 V GK: 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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Soviet Diplomacy: Waging and Winning Its Own War. Introduction to the Forum¹

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Abstract. This editorial introduces a series of papers based on presentations made at the “Soviet Diplomacy during World War II” conference held at MGIMO on June 30, 2023. It draws attention to notable aspects of Soviet diplomacy during the wartime period. First, it highlights the persistence of Soviet diplomats and their negotiating skills despite significant divergences in interests and approaches. Second, it discusses their ability to strike a careful balance between maintaining one’s position and employing flexibility and pragmatism to achieve the ultimate objective of victory over the enemy. Third, the article examines the history of international negotiations during the Second World War as an illustration of the clash between and interaction of prominent political figures, notably emphasizing how Joseph Stalin often outplayed his counterparts in this personalized “diplomacy of leaders.” The history of the Second World War eloquently shows that diplomacy is crucial both in times of war and in the transition to peace, as well as in the establishment of a new global order.

Keywords: Second World War, Soviet diplomacy, Joseph Stalin, USSR, world order

On June 30, 2023, MGIMO University of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a research-to-practice conference titled “Soviet Diplomacy during World War II.” The conference was initiated by A.V. Torkunov, MGIMO Rector and a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the discussions confirmed the topic’s significant relevance.

At the opening, A.V. Torkunov conveyed greetings from Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov, who highlighted the crucial role of Soviet diplomacy in forming the anti-Hitler coalition, securing the second front opening, thwarting efforts to draw several states into the war on Nazi Germany’s side, and ultimately advancing the Great Victory.

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Barsky K.M. 2023. O sovetskoy diplomatii, kotoraya vela svoyu voynu i pobedu. Vstupitel'naya stat'ya. *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. No. 16 (6). P. 7-12. DOI: 10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-7-12

The minister's message also stressed the urgent need to study Soviet diplomatic experience during the war, especially in the current context of renewed aggression against Russia by the collective West, which can be described as an "echo of the times."

In his introductory remarks, A.V. Torkunov underscored that alongside the Red Army's heroic efforts in defeating the enemy, the "diplomatic accompaniment of the war" was equally vital, involving cooperation with allies, neutralizing adversaries, and planning for post-war arrangements.

Overall, it is important to recognize that the diplomatic history of World War II has been extensively researched both domestically and internationally. However, shifts in geopolitical dynamics – such as the strategies pursued by the United States and its allies to reshape global power, eliminate rivals, suppress dissent, and maintain Western dominance; the use of hybrid warfare aimed at delivering a "strategic defeat" to Russia; information warfare targeting our country; efforts to erase Russian contributions; the gross vilification of Russia; and the rewriting of history, including that of World War II – compel us to reevaluate familiar facts with fresh perspectives.

The USSR's fight against Hitler's fascism and later Japanese militarism during the war represents a pivotal chapter in 20th-century international relations that must not be forgotten, regardless of attempts to do so. Beyond this, Russian society increasingly recognizes that the valor of the Soviet people, the Red Army, the home front workers, and the triumph of May 1945 form a crucial part of our historical memory and national identity. Consequently, today we refer to the Great Patriotic War, study it, and explore its various dimensions through new lenses, deeper understanding, and shifting emphases.

Diplomats also played a significant role in achieving the Great Victory. While their contribution should not be exaggerated, it would be equally mistaken to downplay it. Overlooking the role of Soviet diplomacy during the war would not only do a disservice to history but also ignore a crucial aspect of diplomacy, which undertakes important and complex tasks even in wartime. This understanding is particularly relevant today: diplomacy remains active during conflicts and wars, and studying this history allows us to reevaluate the efforts of our predecessors – the war-generation diplomats – and recognize their strategic insight, tactical decisions, and immense dedication. Furthermore, this knowledge can provide valuable lessons and skills.

One key lesson is the capacity and willingness to negotiate despite significant differences in interests and approaches. During the war, the anti-Hitler coalition countries demonstrated their ability to overcome deep inter-state and ideological conflicts to unite against a common existential threat in pursuit of shared goals. Achieving this unity required determination and initiative, qualities first and foremost exhibited by Soviet diplomacy. Our diplomats led the way, maintaining the initiative throughout the war and advancing decisions that served the collective interest.

The diplomatic history of World War II exemplifies an achievement grounded in military strength and informed by frontline realities, striking a careful balance between steadfastly defending one's position and exercising flexibility and pragmatism to secure the ultimate objective – victory over the enemy. This period clearly showcased

the superiority of the domestic diplomatic tradition and fully revealed the defining qualities of our diplomats: unwavering belief in victory, confidence in their cause, resilience and firmness, deep commitment, readiness for self-sacrifice, and formidable intellectual capacity.

The history of international negotiations during World War II is also notable for illustrating the dynamic interplay and strategic psychological maneuvers among key political leaders. It is widely recognized that in this personalized “diplomacy of leaders,” Joseph Stalin often outmaneuvered his counterparts. Nevertheless, the Soviet side consistently prioritized the goal of securing a collective victory over the enemy. Building on the example set by the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam conferences, the evolution of global diplomacy came to be increasingly shaped by high-level meetings.

Another reason for emphasizing the study of the diplomatic history of the Great Patriotic War is the pressing need to give this historical period greater prominence in education. At MGIMO, the teaching of Russian diplomatic history rests on a strong foundation: the course is mandatory at the Faculty of International Relations, delivered by highly qualified lecturers, supported by several reputable textbooks, and supplemented by an extensive selection of historical and memoir literature. Nevertheless, this remains insufficient.

It is important to acknowledge that some young Russians, including MGIMO students, influenced by the current severe deterioration in international relations and the radical shifts in global politics – amid blatant violations of fundamental international law and diplomatic norms by Western countries – sometimes begin to question the effectiveness or even the relevance of diplomacy. The example of World War II clearly demonstrates that diplomacy was, is, and will continue to be essential during wartime, in the transition from conflict to peace, and in shaping a new world order.

For some students today, the war that occurred 80 years ago feels like a distant event with little direct relevance to modern Russia or current international relations. There is sometimes a noticeable lack of engagement among young people in the 21st century with the events of the 20th century. While we live in the Russian Federation, it is crucial to remember that our state is the successor to the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is important for Soviet diplomacy to be understood – both historically and emotionally – as the diplomacy of their own country and homeland. This underscores the need to place special emphasis on teaching the diplomatic history of the Great Patriotic War.

The staff of the Soviet Union’s diplomatic missions abroad and the central offices of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (later the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) of the USSR – those who served in diplomacy during the harrowing war years – should stand as role models for future diplomats in managing complex and critical tasks under the most challenging circumstances. Despite their youth – many advisors, envoys, and even some ambassadors were only in their 30s and 40s – they performed their duties with exceptional skill. Today’s MGIMO students have a responsibility to prepare for future challenges not only by gaining knowledge but also by emulating the wartime generation of Soviet diplomats: building strong character, developing re-

silience to stress, learning to operate effectively under pressure, and being ready to undertake any mission.

The conference's exceptional value lay in its comprehensive focus on various aspects of Soviet diplomacy before and during World War II. It highlighted its activities in both the Western and Eastern theaters, addressed the struggle against historical distortion, emphasized the importance of incorporating the war topic into educational curricula, and underscored the mission of preserving the memory of the Great Victory and its heroes.

The most notable presentations were delivered by V.S. Khristoforov, Chief Research Fellow at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences; N.A. Narochnitskaya, President of the Foundation for the Study of Historical Perspective and Member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation; K.M. Barsky, Head of the Department of Diplomacy (MGIMO); and D.V. Streltsov, Head of the Department of Oriental Studies (MGIMO). Other distinguished speakers included Professor V.O. Pechatnov of the Department of European and American Studies (MGIMO); Professors A.I. Kuznetsov, A.N. Panov, and V.F. Pryakhin of the Department of Diplomacy (MGIMO); Professor Yu.A. Dubinin of the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy of Russia (MGIMO); Professor S.I. Lunev of the Department of Oriental Studies (MGIMO); Associate Professors A.A. Orlov and R.O. Reinhardt of the Department of Diplomacy (MGIMO); Associate Professor S.M. Monin of the Department of World and Russian History (MGIMO); Associate Professors Yu.P. Laletin and I.V. Dyachkov of the Department of Oriental Studies (MGIMO); Associate Professor I.E. Magadeev of the Department of European and American Studies (MGIMO); A.L. Chechevishnikov, Deputy Director of the Institute for International Studies; S.V. Tuzhilin, Expert of the Society for the Study of the History of Domestic Special Services; G.V. Kuznetsov, Deputy Director of the State Protocol Department at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; S.A. Ovsyannikov, Second Secretary of the First Asian Department at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and I.V. Demyanenko, Director of the Historical and Diplomatic Centre of St. Petersburg State University and Deputy Head of the Representative Office of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg.

The conference received high commendation from the university leadership. A collection of conference papers will be published, supporting the upcoming celebrations of MGIMO's 80th anniversary in 2024 and the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory in 2025.

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Conflict of interests:

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