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## Chapter 1

The period from the end of civil war in Russia in 1921 until the rise of Hitler in Germany in 1933 is of limited significance in understanding the development of the Cold War. Russia was virtually isolated in the world and the governments of the West, seeing "the specter of Bolshevism in every sign of unrest, political or social,"<sup>1</sup> feared both the example of a successful communist revolution in Russia and the clandestine, overestimated activities of the Comintern. Yet, Russia's utter prostration after the civil war guaranteed that for some time she could not possibly be a formidable military threat to the status quo in Europe.

There can be no question that in the decade following the civil war Russia had to pursue a defensive foreign policy to counteract the "capitalist encirclement" which came about as a result of Brest-Litovsk, Versailles, and Riga. After seven years of war, the country was virtually devastated and its economy was in a state of collapse. In the midst of reconstruction, a long power struggle ensued after Lenin's death in 1924. Adam Ulam has described the essential and paradoxical principles behind the foreign policy of Soviet Russia in the 1920's:

On the one hand, the Soviet Union more than any large state required peace and international stability, both political and economic. The amount of wartime destruction, both human and economic, had been greater in Russia than anywhere else. Time was required to heal the wounds. Normal and extensive commercial intercourse with foreign countries was required to bring in badly needed capital and foreign specialists....Socialism meant a high degree of industrialization....On the other hand, general prosperity and stability diminished the prospects of Communism.<sup>2</sup>

When Lenin embarked on his New Economic Policy in 1921, he realized that the outbreak of world revolution on which he had long counted was not to be had in the near future. Perhaps he still genuinely believed that the

success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia depended, in the long run, on the overthrow of the capitalist governments of the world. The Comintern remained ostensibly the organ of world revolution, but by the end of 1921 its power and real purpose were debatable. Lenin was a realist as much as he was a communist, and he was far more inclined to be persuaded by immediate needs than by theories of long-range needs. Thus there can be little doubt that what Russia needed most in 1921, peace, international stability, and economic cooperation with the West, is what Lenin wanted the most, and the goal of world revolution or weakening through subversion of the capitalist nations had to be relegated to second place.

Whatever the true role of the Comintern at this time, two facts are undeniable: (1) Comintern policy was a failure in that it did not produce a single revolution anywhere in the world,<sup>3</sup> and (2) The very existence of the Comintern was an irritant in east-west relations; it was perceived by the capitalist nations as a threat against them, often seemingly without realistic consideration of its capabilities and powers. At the very least its presence was regarded as an intrusion by Moscow into the affairs of other nations. Western nations repeatedly lodged formal protests in Moscow against the Soviet Union's use of subversive "propaganda" abroad; the halting of such "propaganda" was usually a condition stipulated by the capitalists in negotiations with the Russians about credits and recognition.<sup>4</sup>

The greatest foreign policy coup under Lenin was the 1922 treaty of cooperation with Germany, Europe's leading industrial nation. The European powers had met in Genoa in 1922 with the intention of working together to reconstruct Europe's economy. The Soviet Union was invited to participate, but it was apparent that she was expected to do so only on Western terms,

and her delegates "were isolated as if they were lepers."<sup>5</sup> Chicherin, representing Russia, and the German Foreign Minister, another outcast at the conference, met at Rapallo on Easter Sunday and negotiated a treaty establishing diplomatic relations, most favored trade status, and mutual assistance in economic matters. Economically, the two nations had mutual aims and interests; yet politically, the treaty had far greater importance for the Soviets as a means "to prevent Germany from coalescing with the West against Russia."<sup>6</sup> According to George Kennan,

For the Western Allies, Rapallo meant the forfeiture of the collaboration of Germany as a possible partner in a united Western approach to the problem of Russian Communism.<sup>7</sup>

The Western Allies were soon to recoup their loss at Genoa. In October 1925, Britain, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany signed the Locarno Pact, a mutual security agreement which guaranteed Germany's Western borders. The treaty was a blow to Russia. "Since she had been excluded from the negotiations, she interpreted the pact...as directed against herself."<sup>8</sup> Yet, in spite of the Treaty of Berlin, a non-aggression pact reaffirming Rapallo and signed by Russia and Germany on April 24, 1926, Locarno represented a more fundamental defeat of Soviet diplomatic aims. According to Ulam, "Germany was no longer a partner in the struggle against the European status quo; she now could and did play the Soviet Union against the West, and her partnership with Russia was no longer the main element but only one of many in her foreign policy."<sup>9</sup>

Without Germany, Soviet Russia had to seek other means of preventing a Western coalition against her. Her geographic position was virtually untenable: "From the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea, (Russia) was fronted by one hostile state after another," the infamous cordon sanitaire.<sup>10</sup> By the

end of 1924, every major power except the United States had accorded diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. This, however, gave little assurance to Moscow. Her diplomatic relations with Britain, established in February of 1924 with the victory of that country's first Labour Cabinet, were broken off at the end of the year after exposure of alleged Soviet interference in British labor problems. The Labour Party was overwhelmingly voted out in October 1924, and the Conservative party, whose hostility to Soviet Russia was well-known and often-voiced, remained in power for the next six years. At the same time in France, "the successive governments did not hide their anti-Soviet prejudices."<sup>11</sup> Thus, by 1926, to ensure the security of its Western frontier, Moscow sought, "in effect, to undermine the French alliance system in Eastern Europe."<sup>12</sup> A treaty of friendship and neutrality was negotiated with Lithuania in 1926, as well as a trade agreement with Latvia in 1927. In 1928 treaties of non-aggression were signed with Poland, Rumania and Estonia, and in February 1929, these nations collectively signed the East Pact in Moscow.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of 1927, Stalin emerged victorious from the power struggle in which Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenov were expelled from the party. Stalin's "socialism in one country" officially acknowledged what was by then obvious: world revolution was not imminent, and the paramount concern of communist leaders was to assure the success of the Russian revolution. The sixth congress of the Comintern, meeting in 1928, openly identified the interests of communist movements around the world with the Soviet Union although it still gave lip-service to the imminence of revolution. According to Issac Deutcher,

With even greater emphasis than hitherto, as if ignoring all the trumpets of the Cominter, [Stalin] made "socialism in one country" the supreme article of faith, obligatory not only in his own party but in the Comintern as a whole....His diplomacy was feeling its way even more cautiously than before and continued to work on the assumption of Russia's prolonged isolation. There was an undeniable contradiction between his two lines of policy, the one he pursued in Russia and the one he inspired in the Comintern. It is easy to guess which of the two policies had the greater weight.<sup>14</sup>

On the surface, the conduct of Soviet foreign policy in the five years after Stalin's achievement of uncontested power is highly erratic and almost defies explanation in terms of rational or systematic goals. This was due almost solely to the peculiar mixing of domestic and foreign circumstances during this period. Russia was still isolated and insecure in the world; the policy of Rapallo did not prevent German realignment with the West, and Stalin had suffered a major defeat in China. All told, Stalin, at the end of 1927, suffered what George Kennan describes as "a sense of frustration" in dealing with the problem of the capitalist encirclement.

It encouraged him to withdraw from the effort to conduct an active foreign policy and to devote himself in the ensuing years to the economic strengthening of the Soviet Union, to the development of Soviet military power, and to the consolidation of his own regime internally. The five years following 1927 might be called, in fact, a period of isolationism in Soviet foreign policy--a period of withdrawal from external affairs during which great internal changes were undertaken.<sup>15</sup>

The explanation of Stalin's foreign policy during this period lies in his own personality and his approach to the domestic problems of his country. To say the least, he was heavy-handed. He was a despot who had in mind the complete reorganization and modernization of a vast and backward society. His programs were radical: a five-year plan for rapid industrialization and the collectivization of the peasantry. His implementation of policy was brutal and uncompromising and aroused an opposition which he smashed with a ruthlessness and violence that shook the country. Stalin's attitude

toward the outside world at this time was one of cynicism and skepticism, and the conduct of foreign affairs occupied little of his time. It was during this period that the West experienced the great depression, which made the capitalist nations more anxious to provide the only thing that Stalin wanted from them at the time: "imports of machine tools and capital goods."<sup>16</sup> Probably counting on the ultimate ruin of the bourgeois states as a result of the depression, Stalin "did not hesitate during those years to abuse Russia's relations with the Western countries for his own domestic purposes."<sup>17</sup> This was the standard practice of an authoritarian leader raising the foreign bogey to preserve himself in the midst of a severe domestic crisis. "A degree of hysteria, a spy and sabotage mania had to be part of the propaganda campaign designed to explain to the Russian people their vast sufferings."<sup>18</sup>

Stalin's almost total preoccupation with domestic matters and his cynicism about foreign affairs during this period further irritated the nations of the West and caused the Soviet leader to misunderstand the significance of events abroad. It was during this period that the Nazis, led by Hitler, triumphed in Germany. Stalin, who undoubtedly did not take time for careful and thoughtful analysis of international developments, apparently "was completely unaware of the significance and the destructive dynamism of nazism. To him Hitler was merely one of the many reactionary leaders whom the political see-saw throws up for a moment."<sup>19</sup> Stalin simply failed, at this time, to understand the difference between Nazism and fascism, which he saw as "the militant organization of the bourgeoisie" based on an alliance with Social Democracy.<sup>20</sup> It was because of this fundamental misunderstanding that Stalin, through his Comintern policy, fatally split the

German left and probably aided Hitler's rise to power.<sup>21</sup>

One of the results of Stalin's first five year plan was that by 1932, Russia was in the midst of one of her worst economic and political crises, with many parts of the country struck by famine. The paramount concern of Soviet foreign policy by 1932 was to avoid war, for even if Stalin still did not understand Hitler, he could not help but be concerned by the reintegration of Germany into the European community and the more serious maneuverings of Japan in Manchuria initiated by the Japanese Army on September 18, 1931. With the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, Moscow feared a war on its eastern front and, while it could not, at this time, realistically expect an attack by Germany alone or allied with the West, a strengthening of the Soviet political/diplomatic position in Europe became essential as a preparation in the event of war with Japan.

Although an actual and significant reformulation of Soviet policy was at least a year and a half in the future, the basis for the 1933-34 policy change lay in Stalin's diplomacy of 1932-33 when he sought through treaties to prevent both war with Japan and the untenable position that might have resulted had Germany allied with the major capitalist nations against Russia. Adam Ulam has described 1932 as "the bumper year for non-aggression treaties ...when the U.S.S.R. signed non-aggression pacts with Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and France."<sup>22</sup> Formal diplomatic relations with the United States were established in November 1933. Furthermore, at the end of 1932, Litvinov proposed a non-aggression pact between Russia and Japan. At first the Japanese seemed receptive, but in February 1933, the Japanese Cabinet decided to withdraw from the League of Nations, indicating "the complete supremacy of the military and a fundamental defeat for the moderate elements

in the country."<sup>23</sup> This was clearly a cause for alarm in Moscow; on August 9, 1933, the British Ambassador reported from Moscow that "Their major fear is from Japan."<sup>24</sup>

After Hitler's ascension to power in January 1933, Stalin was increasingly given cause for alarm over Germany. Hitler withdrew from the League and the disarmament conference, signed a non-aggression pact with Poland, rejected Moscow's proposals for a mutual Russo-German guarantee for the Baltic States, and openly advertised his anti-Bolshevism, an unmistakable appeal to the West. "The last months of 1933 and the beginning of 1934 mark, then, the agonizing reappraisal of Soviet foreign policy that was due to bring about its most basic shift in tactics since 1921."<sup>25</sup>

From 1934 to 1936, as long as Hitler remained unarmed, "the worst danger of all" for Russia, according to Ulam, was "that of concerted capitalist action against the Soviet Union."<sup>26</sup> In 1934, Soviet Russia, faced with a volatile domestic situation, could not seriously contemplate fighting a war; with the immediate threat of war looming on her Eastern front, Russia had to consider how she could consolidate and improve her position vis a vis Europe. Ulam, in describing Soviet aims in this dangerous situation, makes a fundamental error by implying that the Soviet position remained the same after 1936:

For the immediate and foreseeable future, the Soviet aims were not the punishment of aggressors or the preparation of a grand military alliance against them, but the noninvolvement of the Soviet Union in a war. Not a crusade against fascism, but the sensible objective of sparing their sorely tried country a military conflict they secretly realized it could not afford--this was uppermost in the minds of Stalin and his colleagues. To do them justice, the Soviet leaders during the period 1934-39 never made a secret of this objective or tried to pretend that their detestation of fascism was greater than their desire for military noninvolvement.<sup>27</sup>



It is correct that the Soviet Union wished to avoid war; it is also correct, at least as of 1936, that the Soviet government probably realized it was not prepared for war. What seems incorrect, especially for the period after 1937, is the allegation that Stalin did not try to achieve "the preparation of a grand military alliance" against the fascist powers, particularly Germany. I will argue that once Germany rearmed, Stalin genuinely believed that the only effective means of controlling Hitler was the formation of a military alliance so awesome that Hitler did not dare to attack it or, in the unlikely event he chose to attack, his defeat would be assured. If one must isolate a single reason for Stalin's failure to secure the military alliance he sought it is this: Britain's leaders faced the decision of which dictator they would have to come to terms with to avoid war, and they chose wrong. The French, although more ambivalent than the British, were not free agents. From 1936 on, their foreign policy was virtually dictated by the British.

Stalin was not opposed to fascism for reasons of high morality, and he certainly did not seek to join forces against Hitler out of a desire to protect capitalism. He sought cooperation with the West against Hitler only to save his country and, possibly, himself. That Russia and the capitalist nations of the West would have to join forces to effectively oppose Hitler was inevitable, and Stalin knew it. One of the tragedies of the period was that the British leadership was too feeble to meet the challenge that Hitler posed.

A major change in Soviet foreign policy became apparent in 1934 when the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations. Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov, who was essentially Stalin's spokesman at the League, became a

symbol of Russia's advocacy of peace through collective security; "Peace is indivisible" was his constant appeal. Sumner Welles, former Under Secretary of State, has praised Litvinov's record in the League:

When the Soviet Union entered the League, even the most obstinate were soon forced to admit that it was the only major power which seemed to take the League seriously....<sup>28</sup> Litvinov became the foremost prophet of the basic principles underlying the Covenant of the League of Nations....Unfortunately, he proved to be a prophet in the wilderness. His insistence that peace is indivisible fell on deaf ears. His demand that the Western powers join with the Soviet Union in recognizing the dangers inherent in the rearmament of Germany was disregarded....<sup>29</sup> It should never be forgotten that the Soviet Union did not desert the League. It was the great powers which dominated the League in its later years that deserted the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup>

Soviet policy in the League was but a part of Stalin's new diplomacy. Stalin was blunt in recognizing the severe limitations of the League; to him the world organization could serve only as a "brake" or time-buying device on aggression. Beginning during the summer of 1934, Litvinov made the initiative for an "Eastern Locarno", "pacts of mutual assistance" which would have joined France, the U.S.S.R., Russia's Western neighbors, Britain and Germany in a treaty of non-aggression and mutual guarantees. France was interested, but German and Polish opposition doomed the plan.<sup>31</sup> Isaac Deutscher writes that "by the beginning of 1935 Stalin had passed from the futile attempt at creating a regional, eastern European system of defense to plans for alliances with the West."<sup>32</sup> In March 1935, Stalin met with British foreign minister Anthony Eden in Moscow and warned of the dangers of Hitler and the need to form an alliance against him.<sup>33</sup> In May of the same year Russia signed treaties of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia; these treaties were seriously limited by stipulated contingencies and the lack of any military protocol.<sup>34</sup> In July a non-aggression treaty with Poland was signed. These changes in diplomatic tactics, in which the Soviet government openly declared itself opposed to fascism as

the primary threat to peace, necessitated a radical alteration of Comintern policy. At the seventh congress of the International in July and August of 1935, the old and grievously inaccurate dogma about fascism was quietly buried and a new line was adopted: "Social Democrats and Communists were called upon to join hands and form 'Popular Fronts' which were to include all middle-class parties and groups, Liberal and Radical, and even Conservative, who declared themselves willing to stand up against fascism."<sup>35</sup>

In the most skeptical view, Soviet diplomacy in the post-1933 period, involving endless oratorical tirades against fascism and unfulfilled calls for action in response to German and Italian aggression, was deceitful and misleading because, in the end, Russia would not have gone to war unless she were directly attacked. I would take issue with this point of view for two reasons: (1) It is a virtually pointless academic issue because the contingency never arose from 1934-39, that is, the West never called Stalin's bluff by taking action against fascist aggression, and (2) It distorts the basic premises and aims of Stalin's policy.

Soviet diplomacy in the 1934-39, and especially in the 1934-36 period was based on two major premises: (1) A military alliance between Russia and the European powers against Germany and Italy would have been so awesome that Hitler would not have dared strike, especially in Eastern Europe, and (2) To underscore this alliance and to be prepared for the contingency that Hitler decided on war, each nation in the alliance, particularly Russia, must increase its military strength.<sup>36</sup> There is ample evidence to substantiate my assertion that these factors were the cornerstones of Stalin's diplomacy.

In his first speech as the Soviet representative to the League, Litvinov broadly outlined a Soviet policy designed not to make war against fascism but

to prevent the fascist powers from making war. "Now, the organization of peace, for which so far very little has been done, must be set against the extremely active organization of war." Litvinov admitted that of all the delegates he probably best realized the limitations of the League to organize for peace: "I am however convinced that, with the firm will and close cooperation of all its members, a great deal could be done at any given moment for the utmost diminution of the danger of war."<sup>37</sup> When Stalin met with Eden in March 1935, he said that "the only way to meet the present situation was by some scheme of pacts. Germany must be made to realize that if she attacked any other nation she would have Europe against her."<sup>38</sup> During the same visit, Litvinov was more explicit with Eden. He said:

I do not regard mutual assistance as a real guarantee of defense, but rather as a deterrent; as a last resort the Soviet Union has to rely upon her own forces. But if Germany knew that she would find ranged against her a coalition composed of a number of states she might hesitate to risk her fate.<sup>39</sup>

Eden was shown an airplane factory at Fili where the Russians constructed large bombers. "It was clear," Eden later wrote, "that the Soviet authorities wished me to be impressed by this evidence of their ability to support any international assurances they might give."<sup>40</sup> On May 22, 1939, in the midst of negotiations between Britain, France, and Russia for a possible alliance (to be discussed in detail at a later point), the Soviet Ambassador in London, Maisky, told British Foreign Minister Halifax that the "essential thing was to prevent war. Soviet government thought this could be done but only by organizing such a combination of forces that Germany would not dare to attack."<sup>41</sup> According to Deutscher, Stalin's "military and diplomatic advisers were telling him, and they were not wrong, that at that stage (1935-37) Germany's adversaries could stop Hitler, at least for a time, by the mere threat of military action."<sup>42</sup>

Stalin understood that the threat of a military alliance would be meaningless, indeed his whole foreign policy would be paralyzed, unless Russia were prepared for war. His first five-year plan was instituted with a view toward strengthening Russia's military power through rapid industrialization and the elimination of real or potential traitors. In the face of the threatening world situation of 1933-34, military preparations were vastly increased, as Andre Fontaine describes:

In two years, military expenditures rose eight times, the number of men in the Red Army more than doubled and the number of airplanes increased from 2,500 to 4,000. Party control over the army was constantly strengthened.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, in a great reform during 1935-36, the Red Army was modernized and mechanized.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, Stalin's purge of 1936-38 in which a majority of the top army leadership was eliminated had the effect of causing Britain and France to view Soviet military potential with great skepticism and doubtlessly impaired to some degree the army's effectiveness (although the Soviet army's performance in conflicts with the Japanese during and after the purge was excellent). This matter will be discussed at a later point. The essential observation here is that Stalin did undertake the military preparations which would have made his proposed alliances against the Axis powers feasible and effective. As I will discuss later, neither a meaningful effort at rearmament nor an elementary understanding of the threat posed by Hitler was forthcoming from the British.

Stalin's alliance with France gave him a partial assurance that Germany could not form a European alliance against the Soviet Union, but on a relative scale it did little toward protecting Russia's security. Events in Britain and Germany were contributing to a far more threatening situation. In March 1935, in violation of the provisions of Versailles and Locarno,

Germany decreed universal military service. Litvinov protested Germany's action in the League, where London and Paris were silent.<sup>45</sup> On June 18, 1935, Hitler signed a naval treaty with Great Britain. By this treaty, England gave its approval to Hitler's violation of the naval clauses of Versailles and actually provided for a contingency, to be decided by Germany, in which Germany could build up to a hundred percent of British submarine strength. In short, the effect of the treaty "was to authorize Germany to build to her utmost capacity for five or six years to come."<sup>46</sup> No other nation was consulted before the treaty was signed, a tactic which incensed France. Furthermore, it was an act of folly to encourage German rearmament when, for their own political reasons, the British cabinet was deliberately doing nothing worthwhile to prepare England militarily. Perhaps most incredible of all was that the British Admiralty could so soon forget the horrible experience of the first World War when German submarines had threatened to starve Britain out of the war, and only American aid had saved her. Now the isolationist sentiment in the U.S. Congress made such aid an unreliable prospect yet, in the words of D. F. Fleming, "London cheerfully granted a maniacal German ruler with absolute power in his hands the right to build as many submarines as Britain had."<sup>47</sup>

The response to Mussolini's aggression against Ethiopia in 1935 marked the virtual death of the League and provided a preview of the Anglo-French diplomacy of appeasement which would encourage Hitler's expansion in the next four years. At first the League voted sanctions against Italy, but these were meaningless because they "did not apply to the one product that would have made them effective--oil."<sup>48</sup> When the Italian military performance proved ghastly, the British and French became deeply concerned that if

Mussolini were denied a conquest in Ethiopia, he might seek revenge in Central Europe or against the sponsors of the League sanctions. Thus, on December 8, Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, made a deal with French Premier Laval in which the two countries acquiesced in the acquisition by Italy of the major portion of Ethiopia. News of the deal leaked out and caused a major wave of indignation and protest in Britain, forcing Hoare to resign. The British were still determined not to risk war, and they successfully resisted the imposition of oil sanctions by the League. It was not until March 1936 that the Italian campaign in Ethiopia began to achieve success, and the brave resistance of the small African nation was finally broken in May.<sup>49</sup>

The turning point in this period came on March 7, 1936 when Hitler occupied the Rhineland. The Rhineland, which lay between France and Germany and had been demilitarized under provisions of Versailles and Locarno, had been the very foundation of the French strategic position in Europe. "Remilitarization of the Rhineland," as Ulam has succinctly written, "thus at one stroke abolished France's ascendancy on the Continent and deprived her of the possibility of pursuing an independent foreign policy."<sup>50</sup> In the League, Litvinov shrewdly analyzed the meaning of Hitler's action and stated that the Soviet government "is ready to take part in all measures that may be proposed to the Council of the League..."<sup>51</sup> Whether Stalin was genuine in this offer cannot be known, because the French government, fearful of authorizing a mobilization with general elections forthcoming and faced with the British determination to avoid war, decided not to oppose Hitler's action.<sup>52</sup> From the moment of her acquiescence in the militarization of the Rhineland, France's foreign policy was subordinated to British

control, and her agreements of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia and Russia became virtually meaningless. Her only hope for defense in Eastern Europe lay in her pact with Russia, but for Stalin the value of the Franco-Russian treaty of 1935 was seriously, if not fatally, undercut. Now Germany could fortify her Western frontier, and this meant the one thing that the Soviet leaders feared the most--the eastward expansion of Germany.

The Spanish Civil War which erupted in July 1936 when Franco's rightists revolted against Spain's democratic Popular Front Government is one of the more interesting and intricate chapters of the painful history of this time. The struggle in Spain formed the pretext for the union of Germany, Japan, and later Italy into an "Anti-Comintern" pact. The war itself provided little in the way of tangible gains for Hitler or Mussolini, but it was almost a miniature preview of the future. Spain provided a testing ground for many of Germany's new weapons, and as such it was a striking illustration of the horror and brutality of Nazi tactics, such as in the bombing of civilians at Guernica. It showed, as in the case of Ethiopia, that Britain would not risk war to halt fascist aggression; this case was particularly tragic because the League policy of "non-intervention", pushed through at British insistence, actually prevented the legitimate government of Spain from receiving desperately needed military supplies while the rightist rebels were well-supplied by open and unopposed German-Italian intervention. Furthermore, the Spanish War gave Stalin what was probably his first real dilemma in dealing with the volatile anti-Bolshevik prejudices of the West.

When Stalin sought cooperation with the West to curb Hitler, he "tried to disarm the suspicions, the fears, and the prejudices of the west by moderation and pliability. He tried to lay the ghosts of the past, the giant



ghost of world revolution first of all."<sup>53</sup> The dramatic change in the Comintern line in 1935 was clearly a diplomatic gesture to the West. But Stalin could not win on this point, as Isaac Deutscher explains:

No matter how moderate and "purely" democratic, how constitutional and "purely" patriotic, were the slogans he had composed for the Popular Fronts, he could not undo the revolutionary potentialities of those "Fronts." Willy-nilly, he had to develop those potentialities and use them to his advantage. The electoral victories of the Popular Front in France and Spain almost automatically raised the anticapitalist temper and the confidence of the working classes....The French and Spanish Communist leaders could not dissociate themselves from that mood of the masses. France was shaken by strikes, mass meetings, and demonstrations of unseen power. Spain was in the throes of civil war. The whole of Western Europe was laboring under new social strains and stresses. Though the Communist leaders, pressed by Moscow, often did their best to put brakes upon the movement, events struck fear into the hearts of the middle classes, stirring latent sympathy for fascism and fanning distrust of Russia. Thus, by a curious dialectical process, the Popular Fronts defeated their own purpose. They had set out to reconcile the bourgeois west with Russia; but as the strength of their pressure grew, it widened the gulf between the would-be allies. In the eyes of the French and British upper classes Litvinov's calls for collective security and appeals to British and French self-interest became associated with the sit-down strikes, the forty-hour week, the high wages, and the other social reforms which the Popular Front wrested from France's stagnant economy.<sup>54</sup>

The Spanish Civil war presented Stalin with a dilemma that really had no acceptable solution. It was in Stalin's interest to see Franco defeated, both because he had openly committed himself to an anti-Fascist policy and because the already bad French strategic position would have further deteriorated as a result of having a Fascist regime on both of her continental fronts.<sup>55</sup> For the first several months of the war, Stalin strictly adhered to a policy of non-intervention. But as the struggle in Spain rapidly became a rallying point for liberals and progressives throughout the world, Russian non-intervention became "clearly inconceivable" for Stalin.<sup>56</sup> "Yet," as Ulam points out, "the complete identification of communism with the cause of Spain was almost as undesirable as a victory of fascism." Finally, in

October 1936, Stalin intervened in Spain with military advisers, munitions and medical supplies, although he would not commit troops as the Germans and Italians had done openly. He went to pains to assure that his interventions would not be associated with the Communist cause, but committed a familiar excess in his purge of the more radical and anarchist elements of the Spanish left. According to Fontaine,

The "Red" excesses--in particular the profaning of churches and cemeteries, which were helpfully reported by a press that was more discreet when it came to the atrocities of the other side--had awakened a shudder of horror in France and England, comparable to that which stirred public opinion in the West after the Russian Revolution.<sup>57</sup>

Deutscher elaborates:

The prime motive behind all these doings was Stalin's desire to preserve for the Spanish Popular Front its republican respectability and to avoid antagonizing the British and the French governments. He saved nobody's respectability and he antagonized everybody. Conservative opinion in the West, not interested in the internecine struggle of the Spanish left and confused by the intricacies of Stalin's policy, blamed Stalin as the chief fomenter of revolution.<sup>58</sup>

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That Stalin's heavy-handedness and authoritarian excesses alienated public opinion in the West and made alliance with Britain and France more difficult is beyond question. However, without intending or desiring to wash any blood from Stalin's hands, I must judge the impact of his brutal ways in context. Stalin was not the only brutal dictator on the scene at that time. England and France would have to come to terms with Hitler or Stalin. If the practice of frightful atrocities were the sole criterion on which the most preferable dictator were chosen, there is little doubt who would have been more repugnant to Britain. Yet it was Hitler that Britain courted. These were bloody, ruthless days, and if Hitler's excesses were not too much for the British leaders to swallow when they pursued appeasement, then Stalin's excesses could also have been stomachied had Baldwin or

Chamberlain desired cooperation with Russia against Hitler. Sir Edward Halifax, a principal architect of Chamberlain's anti-Soviet policy, had often criticized Anthony Eden, his predecessor as Foreign Secretary, as being "too strong" in his revulsion from dictators since "you have got to live with the devils whether you like them, or not."<sup>59</sup> It was not beyond the capabilities of the intelligence gathering apparatus of a major power to see that Stalin's purge in Spain, however unpalatable, was meant as an expression of his conservatism with respect to world revolution; it was a signal that Stalin could be counted on to control foreign communists and protect Republican governments. Whether or not the British discerned the obvious in Stalin's actions is irrelevant; the essential observation is that they did not want to see the meaning of what Stalin did because they had no desire or intention to come to terms with the Soviet Union.