

the following weeks, "both parties continued to make very cautious and tentative feelers" related to economic negotiations.⁷² On May 20, the German Ambassador in Moscow, Schulenburg, was given orders to inform Molotov, the new Foreign Minister, that Berlin was ready to resume the economic negotiations suspended in February at the cancellation of Schnurre's visit. Molotov replied that the negotiations could resume only when the necessary "political basis" had been established. Despite Schulenburg's probing, Molotov would not elaborate on the nature of the "political basis" he had in mind.⁷³ Throughout, it was the Germans who made the initiatives which lead to the Nazi-Soviet pact; the Russians merely indicated their willingness to talk, and even then they were strongly influenced by British moves which signalled to Stalin that the negotiations for an alliance against Hitler would not succeed.

At first, the British had absolutely no intention of forming an alliance with Soviet Russia. In a letter to Ambassador Phipps of April 21, Halifax outlined British policy toward the Soviet proposal in almost Machiavellian terms. The British Foreign Secretary virtually admitted that Britain needed the Poles to absorb Hitler's fury. He revealed no concern for an effective means of saving Poland; privately the Cabinet Ministers admitted to each other that Britain neither could nor would do anything to save Poland.⁷⁴ His only concern was that the Polish Government have the determination to fight (by this time he knew that it did not have the means⁷⁵):

It is undesirable to do anything to disturb Polish confidence at the present time and it is important that Polish self-reliance should be maintained. To enter into an arrangement with the Soviet Government at this stage by which Soviet assistance would be afforded, whether Poland likes it or not, would have a most disturbing influence in Warsaw which is nearest to the danger, and might jeopardise the success already achieved by His Majesty's Government and the French Government in rallying Poland to the common cause.⁷⁶

Halifax did not mean by this that the British did not desire Russian aid: "On the contrary they are conscious that the support that might be afforded by the Soviet Government to the small East European countries might be of the utmost value in case of war." However, the Governments of these small countries did not wish to be publicly associated with a guarantee by Russia. A month earlier Halifax had told Oliver Harvey that for fear of alienating Poland and Italy "we cannot have Russia in the forefront of the picture, although both for internal reasons and because of her ultimate military value, if only as our arsenal, we must keep her with us."⁷⁷ Halifax elaborated on this problem in his letter of April 21:

It is to meet this difficulty that His Majesty's Government have proposed that the Soviet Government should of their own volition make a declaration which would steady the situation by showing the willingness of the Soviet Government to collaborate and which at the same time would not disturb the possible beneficiaries of Soviet assistance by requiring them to accede to any arrangement to which the Soviet Government was a party. By this proposal the Soviet Government would place their help...at the disposal of States victims of aggression and themselves determined to resist, who wished to take advantage of it.

A week later Halifax wrote Phipps that it is "of such great importance ...to shape any arrangement as to make it clear that Soviet assistance should be given only if desired and in the most convenient form."⁷⁸ Halifax readily admitted that he wanted the Soviet declaration only for the purpose of "steading the situation." Furthermore, his proposal would have laid the basis for a German attack on the Soviet Union in which every European could remain neutral or even anti-Soviet. In the very possible event that Hitler took over Poland and Rumania, with or without resistance, he would be in a position to launch a massive invasion of Soviet Russia and Britain would be bound by no commitments to help.

Of particular interest is a conversation between Chamberlain and Kennedy on April 17, immediately before the Russian proposal was delivered to the British. According to Kennedy, Chamberlain said "he feels he can make a deal with Russia at any time now, but is delaying until he definitely gets the Balkan situation straightened away, because it had been intimated to him that to bring Russia in before the Balkan deals are all completed might cause trouble."⁷⁹ Although this account is not without ambiguity, it does provide evidence that Chamberlain was deliberately procrastinating about reaching an agreement with Russia until the British position in the Balkans could be improved, that is, until Britain was in a better position to block any move by Russia for predominance in that region.

Against this background, it is not surprising that a Cabinet meeting of April 25 resulted in a decision to reject the Soviet proposal and play for time. Arguments were exchanged on the military value of Russia as an ally. Chamberlain expressed the view, which he said was shared by the Foreign Policy Committee, "that our first task must be to erect a barrier against aggression in Eastern Europe on behalf of states directly menaced by Germany. Until that barrier had been erected it was clear that we ought to do nothing to impair the confidence of those states." With respect to the Russians, Halifax concluded that "we ought to play for time."⁸⁰ Cadogan's description of this meeting is concise: "Meeting of F.P.C. at 11 about reply to Soviet. Didn't last long--all agreed to turn them down."⁸¹

The British did not reply to the Soviet proposal until May 8, three weeks after it was made. Those three weeks gave Stalin ample evidence that the British had no real intention of fighting for Eastern Europe. First, Halifax responded on April 29 to Moscow's inquiries of April 16 and 17 about

British determination to fight. He instructed Seeds to convey the following to Litvinov:

I do not understand why...Soviet Government should affect to believe that His Majesty's Government are not committed by declarations they have made to Poland and Rumania. The language of those declarations...makes it clear that in the event of any action being taken which clearly threatened the independence of these countries and which the latter considered it vital to resist, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend them all support in their power. The first condition is that there should be resistance to a clear threat to national independence.⁸²

This response really says the opposite of what it pretends to say. It proves that the British did not interpret their guarantees to Poland and Rumania as automatically requiring aid in the event of German aggression.⁸³ The aggression must constitute "a clear threat to national independence." Certainly this provided Britain with a loophole should she decide, for example, that a German ultimatum on Danzig did not pose a "clear threat" to Polish independence. Furthermore, as the British had always admitted, their commitment held only in the event that the threatened nation decided to resist German aggression. With such a condition stipulated by the nation that had forced Czechoslovakia to accede to German demands and obstructed Czech resistance, the same nation that spoke in terms of using "threats" against Poland to insure her adherence to the former's wishes, any such guarantee was dubious indeed.

Seeds spoke with Litvinov on the morning of May 3, the last day the latter served as Foreign Minister before being replaced by Molotov. Litvinov asked the British Ambassador "whether there would be a declaration of war by His Majesty's Government in the event of aggression." Seeds' reply could only have added to Soviet doubts: "I said that declarations of war were rather out of fashion these days but that under promises made to Poland

and other countries an aggressor on such a country which resisted a clear threat to national independence would find himself in at any rate a state of war with Great Britain."⁸⁴ To begin with, Seeds avoided Litvinov's question. Litvinov did not ask if there would be a declaration of war in the event that a guaranteed country resisted a clear threat; he asked only about the case of aggression, and said nothing about whether or not the country chose to resist. Even so, Britain's apparent unwillingness to commit herself to a declaration of war in fulfillment of her guarantee must have further impressed the Soviets as to the reluctance of England and France to fight in Eastern Europe.

On May 4, Churchill spoke in the House of Commons and strongly urged his Government to accept the Soviet terms, and to spare no time in doing so:

The British people...have a right, in conjunction with the French Republic, to call upon Poland not to place obstacles in the way of a common cause. Not only must the full cooperation of Russia be accepted, but the three Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, must also be brought into association.... There is no means of maintaining an Eastern European Front against Nazi aggression without the active aid of Russia. Russian interests are deeply concerned in preventing Herr Hitler's designs on Eastern Europe. It should still be possible to range all the states and peoples from the Baltic to the Black Sea in one solid front against a new outrage or invasion. Such a front, if established in good heart, and with resolute and efficient military arrangements, combined with the strength of the Western Powers, may yet confront Hitler...and Company with forces the German people would be reluctant to challenge.⁸⁵

The British Government finally replied to the Soviet proposal on May 8. The terms of the original British proposal for a unilateral Soviet declaration were simply repeated, with the addition of one new clause which would make Soviet acceptance even more unlikely. Now the British proposed that

The Soviet Government should make a public declaration...in which, after referring to the...statements recently made by His Majesty's Government and the French Government accepting new obligations on behalf of certain Eastern European countries, the Soviet Government would undertake that in the event of Great Britain and France being involved in hostilities in fulfillment of these obligations, the assistance of the Soviet Government would be available, if desired, and would be afforded in such a manner and on such terms as might be agreed.⁸⁶

As Seeds emphasized to Molotov when he presented this proposal, "Soviet assistance would only be called for in the event of Great Britain and France being involved in hostilities in fulfillment of their obligations."⁸⁷ The Russians had already rejected a proposal by which they were committed to render unilateral aid only in the event that Poland or Rumania decided to resist German aggression and requested Russian aid. Now the British were asking the Russians to accept the same terms with the further limitation that Britain and France would have to be involved in war before Russian aid could be offered. In questioning Seeds about the proposal, Molotov focused on the ambiguous provision that aid be rendered "on such terms as might be agreed." According to Seeds' record of the meeting:

To his question whether it was not intended that military conversations should begin at once, I answered that I thought on the whole such talks were envisioned only as a later development if events called for it; our main idea was that the issue by the Soviet Government of the proposed Declaration would so steady the European situation as not to require any other immediate steps for the moment.⁸⁸

Seeds could hardly have been more explicit in telling the Russians that the British proposal was not intended as a realistic preparation for defense against aggression, but was instead a way to give the British a diplomatic edge in dealing with Hitler.

On May 11, Maisky met with Halifax and voiced some of the Soviet's objections to the British proposal. He concentrated on the need for definite

military plans and probed Halifax on Anglo-French military preparations, suggesting that Anglo-French intervention under the recent guarantees could be delayed by last minute conversations between each country's General Staffs. Halifax recorded that "to this I replied that our guarantee to Poland and Rumania involved us in coming immediately to their assistance, if our conditions were fulfilled, and that, if words meant anything, it was impossible for us to give any assurance more complete."⁸⁹ Halifax was simply being evasive. The experience of the previous year had demonstrated that guarantees and alliances were without meaning unless backed by definite military commitments and prearranged plans for action. So, if the British and the French had made the military plans necessary to live up to their guarantee, it would have been quite possible for Halifax to give the Soviets an assurance "more complete." Yet, Halifax could not even assure his own countrymen on this same issue. In the House of Commons on May 19 Churchill complained:

I want to draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that the question posed by Mr. Lloyd George ten days ago and repeated today has not been answered. The question was whether the General Staff was consulted before this guarantee (to Poland) was given as to whether it was safe and practical to give it, and whether there were any means of implementing it. The whole country knows that the question had been asked, and it has not been answered. That is disconcerting and disquieting.⁹⁰

The Russians replied to the British proposal on May 14. They explained that "the English proposals do not contain the principle of reciprocity with regard to the U.S.S.R. and place the latter in a position of inequality as they do not contemplate an obligation by England and France to guarantee the U.S.S.R. in the event of a direct attack on the latter by aggressors." Furthermore, the Russians stated, because the English proposal covers only

Poland and Rumania, the "north western frontier of the U.S.S.R. towards Finland, Estonia and Latvia remains uncovered," which could "serve to provoke aggression in the direction of the Soviet Union" in that area. In order to provide an effective barrier against further aggression in Europe, the Russians once more insisted that three conditions would have to be met:

(1) The conclusion between England and France and U.S.S.R. of an effective pact of mutual assistance against aggression; (2) The guaranteeing by these three Great Powers of States of Central and Eastern Europe threatened by aggression including also Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. (3) The conclusion of a concrete agreement between England, France and U.S.S.R. as to forms and extent of assistance to be rendered materially to each other and to the guaranteed States.⁹¹

As one historian has noted, these three conditions "coresponded to the first three articles of the treaty proposed by Litvinov on April 17."⁹² The Russians had not changed their terms.

On May 22, Maisky met with Halifax at Geneva, where both were attending a League meeting. Maisky said that the weakness of the British plan was that "it was based on a guarantee to Poland and Rumania alone." If either country or any of the Baltic states allowed the passage of German troops or the establishment of German air fields for an attack on Russia, Britain would not be obligated to act. Maisky stressed that the "essential thing was to prevent war." Here he seemed to repeat what Churchill had said earlier in the House of Commons: "Soviet Government thought this could be done but only by organizing such a combination of forces that Germany would not dare to attack....A triple pact was necessary and (the British) proposal entirely ignored this element in Soviet proposal."⁹³ On the same day, Maisky had a similar conversation with Bonnet and declared that his government would accept no agreement unless it featured a promise of direct British assistance.⁹⁴

Pressure for an alliance with Russia was mounting on the British Government. France was determined to reach an accord, although not quite on Soviet terms. Prior to the British response of May 8, Bonnet had revealed to the Russian Ambassador in Paris France's desire for a triple alliance. Seids was enraged at this "gross and deliberate error of tactics," and Soviet suspicions of British sincerity were aroused by this clear discrepancy between the French and British negotiating positions.⁹⁵ Halifax met with Bonnet and Daladier in Paris on May 20 to discuss the Anglo-French response to the Soviet rejection of the proposal of May 8. The only alternative which they felt might be acceptable to the Soviets was a triple alliance requiring mutual assistance in the event one of the signatories was directly attacked or became involved in hostilities as a result of helping another state. Halifax told Daladier that "it was unlikely that His Majesty's Government would be able to accept such a draft" for fear that the alliance "might well provoke Germany to violent action" and "divide public opinion in Britain." Daladier was taken back, for he found the draft proposal "quite acceptable" and "could not understand Britain's difficulties."⁹⁶

Pressure for an alliance with Russia was mounting in Parliament. The issue was debated in the House of Commons on May 19, and the exchange of views is quite illuminating. Lloyd George opened the discussion with an emotional appeal for alliance. He cited evidence that the Dictators were clearly involved in preparations for war, not for defense from aggression. He raised the familiar point that without Russia, Britain could do nothing to save Poland or Rumania. "There has been a campaign of detraction of the Russian Army, Russian resources, Russian capacity, and Russian leadership," he alleged, pointing out the reluctance "to acknowledge the tremendous change

which has occurred in Russia industrially and militarily." Citing statistics on Russian industrial output, air and tank power, George stated, "They are offering to place all this at the disposal of the Allies provided they are treated on equal terms....Why is that not done?"⁹⁷

In his reply, Chamberlain accused Lloyd George of fabricating an unnecessarily gloomy picture, and outlined his policy:

The assurances which we gave to Poland...Rumania, and to Greece were...what one might call first-aid treatment given to avoid any further deterioration of the situation. It still remains to strengthen them by more permanent arrangements and to try to get more support for them from any other quarters that are able and willing to give that support. I want to make it clear that this policy is not a policy of lining up opposing blocs of Powers in Europe animated by hostile intentions toward one another, and accepting the view that war is inevitable.... We are always trying to avoid this policy of what I call opposing blocs, because it seems to us to be essentially an unstable policy....the direct participation of the Soviet Union in this matter might not be altogether in accordance with the wishes of some of the countries....we are trying to build up, not an alliance between ourselves and other countries, but a peace front against aggression, and we should not be succeeding in that policy if, by ensuring cooperation of one country, we rendered another country uneasy and unwilling to cooperate with us.⁹⁸

Chamberlain was still hiding behind the stubbornness of the Polish junta and Rumanian monarchy; that he could rate the value of Soviet military power on the same level as that of Poland and Rumania revealed what Churchill charitably called a "lack of proportion."⁹⁹ Furthermore, Chamberlain was deceitful when he spoke of his opposition to a policy of creating "opposing blocs." This was his policy when he was courting Germany, but now he was using his opposition to the principle to stall an agreement with Russia.

Churchill voiced his strong disagreement with the Prime Minister's statement of policy:

If you are ready to be an ally of Russia in time of war... if you are ready to join hands with Russia in the defense of Poland, which you have guaranteed, and of Rumania, why should you shrink from becoming the ally of Russia now, when you may by that very fact prevent the breaking-out of war? I cannot understand all these refinements of diplomacy and delay. If the worst comes to the worst, you are in the midst of it with them, and you have to make the best of it with them. If the difficulties do not arise, well, you will have had the security in the preliminary stages....

Clearly Russia is not going to enter into agreements unless she is treated as an equal, and...has confidence that the methods employed by the Allies--by the peace front--are such as would be likely to lead to success....Unless there is an eastern front set up, what is going to happen to the West?...Without an effective eastern front, there can be no satisfactory defense of our interests in the West, and without Russia there can be no effective eastern front.¹⁰⁰

Churchill was candid: Great Britain needed Russia's help to absorb enough of the German military might that Britain and France would be able to defend themselves in the West. Chamberlain and Halifax were sensitive to the need for an eastern front, but they were banking first on the belief that their current policy was sufficient to deter Hitler and then, in the event that Hitler struck, that Poland and Rumania could provide at least enough resistance to tie up Hitler militarily in the east. They were still unwilling to pay the price for an alliance with Russia.

Pressure for a triple alliance including Russia was also coming from the military and the Foreign Office. At a meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee on May 5, there was presented an aide-memoire by the Chiefs of Staff in which a significantly new position was expressed. The Chiefs, as was not uncommon, argued on political as well as military grounds. Now, as they reasoned, the advantages, both diplomatic and military, of a mutual alliance with Russia outweighed the disadvantages: "we should gain more than we should lose" by giving Russia a guarantee of assistance in the event of a direct attack or an attack through the Baltic states. Chamberlain

argued against the Chiefs, implying that they had not appreciated that an arrangement such as they advocated would not be possible without a full alliance. The central fear of the Chiefs, which emerged in the debate, was that Russia would become allied with Germany. Halifax also opposed the Chiefs, and suggested that they were unduly influenced by Russia's pushy attitude; he "felt the greatest reluctance to being bluffed off a good and sound policy by Russian insistence."¹⁰¹ By May 16 Cadogan, Strang and Harvey were coming around to the position that Britain would have to agree to a triple pact. On May 20, Cadogan dictated a Foreign Office paper for the Cabinet favoring an alliance, but presenting the case "warily" because he knew Chamberlain "hated" the idea: "In his present mood, P.M. says he will resign rather than sign alliance with Soviet."¹⁰² On May 20, Halifax told Harvey that Chamberlain "was very reluctant to agree to full tripartite alliance, although many in the Cabinet favoured it." The same day Strang speculated to Harvey "that what is in the back of P.M.'s mind, and especially of Horace Wilson's, is that appeasement will be dead after this. He says that all at No. 10 (Downing St.) are anti-Soviet."¹⁰³

Events of May 22 forced a change in the British position. On that day the German and Italian Foreign Ministers signed the "Pact of Steel", a military alliance in which the two countries promised mutual aid should either become involved in war. The same day, Cadogan submitted his memorandum arguing, as Churchill did a few days before, that if an eastern front "built up on Poland" were to collapse in the event of war, Hitler would be free to strike in the West. "Therefore," the memorandum continued, "it might be claimed that a tripartite pact with the Soviet Union, if that is the only means by which we can be assured of the latter's support, is a necessary

condition for the consolidation of the front which we have been trying to create." The memorandum admitted that in spite of all the profound doubts about Russia's willingness or capability to fulfill her commitments under such a treaty, "the alternative of a Soviet Union completely untrammelled and exposed continually to the temptation of intriguing with both sides" was a greater danger.¹⁰⁴ It was also on this day that Halifax spoke with Maisky at Geneva. After that conversation the Foreign Secretary wrote that the choice was "disagreeably plain": either there would be a complete and formal alliance or the negotiations would break down.¹⁰⁵ Now the British could not forfeit the opportunity for a commitment of Soviet aid.

This is not to say, however, that the British had decided to agree to Soviet terms. Rather, they tried to work out a proposal which might satisfy Soviet concerns as expressed in their April 17 proposal and still deny the Russians a free hand in the Balkans or Eastern Europe. As Halifax explained to Kennedy on May 24, Russian terms would have to be accepted, "but, in order that the humiliation will not be too great in having to step down from their original plan and accept the Russian's plan, they have decided to put it under the cloak of the League platform of anti-aggression and bring in Poland and Turkey and all the rest under the same canopy."¹⁰⁶ The Cabinet meeting of May 24 which produced a decision to offer the Russians an alliance under the Covenant of the League also confirmed the suspicion which Strang had expressed to Harvey four days earlier, that Chamberlain feared an alliance with Russia would preclude any further appeasement. Thomas Inskip, in his capacity as Secretary of State for the Dominions, made the suggestion that "when we had strengthened our position by making an agreement with the Russian Government we should take the initiative in a renewal of the search

for appeasement....We should be in a position to make such an approach from strength....There was more likelihood that Germany would be willing to listen....We might indicate that we...were ready at any time to discuss any matters in dispute." Inskip indicated that this suggestion "had a good deal in common" with a recent statement by Halifax to the German Ambassador Dirksen; Halifax confirmed that at their most recent meeting he had told Dirksen that in spite of Britain's warnings and increased armaments, "there was, however, also a positive side to our policy." Chamberlain felt Inskip's idea "premature", but clearly stated that "he did not reject the suggestion."¹⁰⁷

The new Anglo-French proposal, for which the British were really responsible, was delivered to the Russians on May 27. The proposal was framed within the Covenant of the League and was a clever attempt to avoid almost every commitment deemed vital by the Soviets, while appearing to do the opposite. Its relevant provisions were as follows:

The Governments of the United Kingdom, France and the U.S.S.R. desiring to give effect, in their capacity of Member of the League of Nations, to the principle of mutual support against aggression which is embodied in the Covenant of the League, have reached the following agreement:

I. If France and the United Kingdom are engaged in hostilities with a European Power, in consequence of either (1) aggression by that Power against another European State which they had, in conformity with the wishes of that State, undertaken to assist against such aggression, (2) assistance given by them to another European State which had requested such assistance in order to resist a violation of its neutrality, or (3) aggression by a European Power against either France or the United Kingdom, the U.S.S.R., acting in accordance with the principles of Article 16, paragraphs 1 and 2, of the Covenant of the League of Nations, will give France and the United Kingdom all the support and assistance in its power.
(emphasis added)

Article II was identical except that it provided for Anglo-French aid to Russia should the latter become engaged in hostilities.

III. The three governments will concert together as to the methods by which such mutual support and assistance could, in the case of need, be made most effective.

IV. In the event of circumstances arising which threaten to call their undertakings of mutual support and assistance into operation, the three Governments will immediately consult together upon the situation. The methods and scope of such consultation will at once be the subject of further discussion between the three Governments.

V. It is understood that the rendering of support and assistance in the above cases is without prejudice to the rights and position of other Powers.¹⁰⁸

Within the context of the spring and summer of 1939, this proposal amounted to something short of a commitment for mutual aid between the three Powers. According to Article II, Britain and France were obligated to aid Russia only if she were (1) directly attacked, or (2) went to war over aggression against another State either because of an obligation "in conformity with the wishes of that State", or because the State "had requested such assistance." There was not a single country along Russia's borders that would have desired a military alliance with the Soviet Union; as I have previously discussed, the case was exactly the opposite. So, Britain and France were offering to aid Russia under conditions that apparently had no chance of materializing, whereas Russia would be obligated to aid Britain and France automatically by virtue of their mutual guarantees to Poland, Rumania and Greece, as well as in Western Europe. To make matters worse, should the circumstance arise by which Britain and France could be held to their obligation to aid Russia, they were bound to do so only "in accordance with the principles of Article 16, paragraphs 1 and 2" of the League Covenant. Molotov was not without justification when he immediately protested that such dependence upon the League would render the agreement ineffective: "He put it that the British and French were prepared to visualize Moscow being bombed by an aggressor while Bolivia was busy blocking all action in

Geneva." Seeds tried to dispel Molotov's fears by arguing that the emphasis of the British proposal was meant to be on the principles rather than the procedures of the League.¹⁰⁹ Yet there was nothing in the draft itself to guarantee that this ambiguous distinction would be made when it really mattered; that is, when the time came for decision to go to war. If anything, the draft implied that since the three Powers were acting "in their capacity of Members of the League" they would be bound to act through the League in fulfilling their obligations under this agreement. Likewise, by singling out paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 16, which contain general references to condemnatory steps and a provision that the League Council "recommend" military action to be taken in the event of aggression¹¹⁰, the draft proposal prevented invoking paragraph 3 of Articles 16 and 17, which deal with provision for fellow members granting the right of passage for troops to aid another member.¹¹¹

Molotov also protested that the proposal "evaded the third of the three essential points, the conclusion of a concrete agreement as to the forms and extent of assistance to be rendered mutually."¹¹² Two days later, Molotov reminded Seeds that "the French-Soviet Pact had turned out to be merely a paper delusion; experience in that respect had taught the Soviet Government the absolute necessity in practice to conclude, simultaneously, both a political and a military agreement."¹¹³ Molotov was right. The Anglo-French proposal not only insisted that the political agreement must precede any military arrangements, Article IV of the new draft specifically postponed military consultations until "the event of circumstances arising which threaten to call their undertakings of mutual support and assistance into operation." A state along Russia's border could be threatened, invaded and

overcome before the British, French, and Soviet General Staffs even met to begin talking about what military action to take.

Finland, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania all refused to be included in a general guarantee of which Russia was a part. On March 31, Finland and Estonia further stipulated that such a guarantee extended to them would be interpreted as an act of aggression. On the same day Estonia and Latvia signed non-aggression pacts with Germany.¹¹⁴ For Soviet Russia, the situation became more threatening. A formal response to the Anglo-French proposal of May 27 had to be formulated. In their response of June 2, the Soviets offered a "modification" of the May 27 draft; this modification was in fact a repetition of the terms Moscow had first asked on April 17, amended to correct the deficiencies of the Anglo-French draft and offering a major concession.

The preamble of the June 2 Soviet proposal corrected the Anglo-French invocation of the League Covenant by stipulating that the three Powers had concluded the agreement "with the object of making more effective the principles of mutual assistance against aggression adopted by the League of Nations." With this, both the British and the Soviets could have their "cake". Article I of the June 2 draft required mutual aid in the event a signatory became involved in war as a result of (1) "aggression by (a European) Power against any one of these three States"; (2) "aggression by that Power against Belgium, Greece, Turkey, Rumania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, whom England, France and U.S.S.R. have agreed to defend against aggression"; or (3) assistance to another European State which had requested such assistance in order to resist aggression. According to Article II, "The three States will come to an agreement within the shortest possible

time as to methods, forms and extent of assistance which is to be rendered by them in conformity with paragraph I." Also of concern here is Article VI: "The present agreement enters into force simultaneously with agreement which is to be concluded in virtue of paragraph II."¹¹⁵

The major difference between this Soviet proposal and the original one of April 17 is that now the Russians offered to commit themselves to aid Britain and France in areas not vital to Soviet security. Except for Belgium and Greece, the countries included in the list in Article I were obviously included in the April 17 proposal by the designation "Eastern European States situated between Baltic and Black Seas and bordering on the U.S.S.R." The specific mention of Belgium, Greece, Turkey, Poland, and Rumania made it clear that the Soviets were proposing a genuinely mutual agreement, because the British and French had already identified their own national interests with the defense of these nations. Furthermore, section (3) of Article I provided for mutual aid to other European States who requested it, which would include States unnamed in the agreement which were vital to Britain's and France's defense. This represented a significant Soviet concession by agreeing to take on mutual obligations in Western Europe; the original Soviet proposal involved only Eastern Europe. The Soviets made this concession no doubt to lend weight to their arguments in favor of committing the British and the French to an area vital to Soviet interests--the Baltic. As Churchill wrote in the New York Herald-Tribune on June 7, 1939:

The Russian claim that Finland and the Baltic States should be included in the triple guarantee is well founded....People say, "What if they do not wish to be guaranteed?" It is certain, however, that if Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were invaded by the Nazis or subverted to the Nazi system by propaganda and intrigue from within, the whole of Europe would be dragged into war.¹¹⁶

On June 7, Chamberlain told the House of Commons that he was sending a representative of the Foreign Office to Moscow with the hope of speeding the negotiations. This was done in place of calling home Seeds, who was bedridden with influenza, for consultations. The man sent to Moscow was William Strang, head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office. As one historian has commented, "the sending of a comparatively junior official of the Foreign Office, however able and experienced, on a mission of such paramount importance was surprising."¹¹⁷ Churchill's judgement was more severe: "the sending of so subordinate a figure gave actual offense."¹¹⁸

In his speech to the Commons on June 7, Chamberlain mentioned a problem implicit in preparing to resist "aggression". The British he said--

have made it clear that they are ready, immediately and without any reserve, to join with the French Government in giving the U.S.S.R. full military support in the event of any act of aggression against her in hostilities with a European Power. It is not intended that the military support which the three Powers would agree to extend to one another should be confined to a case of actual aggression upon their territory. It is possible to imagine various cases in which one of the three Governments might feel that its security was indirectly menaced by the action of another European Power.¹¹⁹

On the following day, June 8, Halifax requested a meeting with Maisky in which he specifically drew attention to Chamberlain's June 7 statement and made it "plain" that the guarantee to Russia contemplated by the British Government "was not confined only to a direct attack upon Soviet territory."¹²⁰ Maisky informed Halifax on June 12 that "it was an indispensable condition for any agreement that steps should be taken to meet the indirect menace to Soviet security. The crux of the matter lay...in securing agreement on the substance of the problem raised by direct or indirect aggression against the Baltic States."¹²¹

Strang arrived in Moscow on June 14, bringing with him a new British draft, a detailed memorandum on the British position, and written instructions

for Seeds. The following day, he, Seeds, and Naggier, the French Ambassador, met with Molotov to resume the negotiations and present new British proposals. The major British objection to the Soviet proposal of June 2 was the naming of the states to be guaranteed; the British proposed that instead, the agreement should provide that in the case of states not already guaranteed, namely, the Baltic states, "the three Powers should consult together if one of them considered that its security was menaced by a threat to the independence or neutrality of any other European Power. If the other two Powers agreed that such a menace existed, and if the contracting Power in question was involved in hostilities in consequence, the other two Powers would go to its assistance."¹²²

On June 16, Molotov presented the formal Soviet reply, stating that the Soviets could not tie their hands as the Anglo-French proposal suggested. Russia was being asked to come to the aid of Poland, Rumania, Belgium, Greece and Turkey if any of these countries were attacked, but Britain and France were unwilling to undertake similar obligations to Russia in the event of aggression against Finland, Estonia and Latvia. The Russians suggested, in "view of the existence of differences of opinion further discussion is necessary on the question of simultaneous entry into force of general agreement and military agreement."¹²³

It is necessary at this point to outline the nature of Soviet-German contacts during this period of the negotiations. On June 2, in response to orders from Berlin, Hilger, Counsellor to the German Embassy in Moscow, contacted Mikoyan, the Soviet Foreign Trade Commissar, and assured the latter that Germany really desired economic agreement. Mikoyan pointed to the German obstruction of the negotiations in February and said he was not

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interested in negotiating now, but would reply later. On June 8, Mikoyan told Hilger that the Soviet Government would receive Schnurre in Moscow if Berlin would accept the substance of the last Soviet economic proposal of February; he also stated that his government would consider a visit by Schnurre as a demonstration of Berlin's sincerity in the matter of "politics." Schulenburg, the German Ambassador to Moscow, met with Astakhov, the Soviet charge in Berlin, on June 17 and conveyed Weizsacker's assurance that Germany did not intend to attack Russia, but rather to normalize German-Soviet relations. Astakhov was noncommittal, spoke of difficulties to be overcome, but expressed his opinion that good relations "could not but be advantageous to both countries." On the same day, in Moscow, Mikoyan received Hilger, who reported that Schnurre could visit Russia with the power to negotiate an economic agreement, but that Germany was unprepared to accept the Soviet proposal of February. Mikoyan replied that his conditions were not met. He recalled Hilger on June 25 to deliver a formal reply, which consisted of a request for the specific points on which German and Soviet views differed. While awaiting a response from Berlin, Schulenburg returned to Moscow and met with Molotov (at the former's request) on June 28. He was now prepared to give further assurances that Germany did not intend to attack Russia. Molotov repeated the previous Soviet request for more specific information from the Germans.¹²⁴

At the same time, the intelligence received by the British and the French indicated that the only thing which could stop Hitler from attacking Poland was a triple alliance including Russia. On June 1, Coulondre, now the French Ambassador to Berlin, reported that he had learned "if Poland does not yield, Herr Hitler's decision will depend upon the signature of the

Anglo-Russian pact. It is believed that he will risk war if he does not have to fight Russia, but that if, on the contrary, he knows that he will have to fight Russia as well, he will give way."¹²⁵ On June 8, Daladier told British Ambassador Phipps about Coulondre's report, and Phipps wired London that Daladier felt "further delay may even be dangerous and encourage Herr Hitler to seize Danzig before we reach an agreement with the Soviet....M. Daladier therefore feels that we must rope in Russia as soon as possible."¹²⁶ On June 13, Coulondre reported that Ribbentrop was convinced that the only feasible thing to do with Poland was to divide it between Germany and Russia: "He will not abandon (this idea) until the Anglo-Russian pact is signed."¹²⁷ On June 15, Erich Kordt, Ribbentrop's private secretary, while on vacation in London sent word to the British Foreign Office through an intermediary that Moscow and Berlin were in contact. He offered his view "that an Anglo-Russian agreement would be a strong deterrent to war, and that a failure of the negotiations with Moscow would be a great temptation to the Central Powers to risk another move."¹²⁸ At the end of June, the Kordt brothers spoke with Sir Robert Vansittart, a chief British diplomatic adviser, and informed him that to their personal knowledge, Hitler was ready to make a deal with Russia to free him for war against Poland and then the West, whereas if an Anglo-Soviet agreement were concluded he would "summon a party congress of peace in the fall."¹²⁹

Thus, at the same time that the British and French were feeling the pressure to conclude an agreement with Russia, Russia was receiving signals that Hitler was willing to make a deal with her. As a result, both sides now negotiated in a new context. For Britain and France, the problem was to find a formula acceptable to the Soviets which would not serve as a

blueprint for or acknowledgement of Soviet predominance in Eastern Europe. As Bonnet told William Bullitt on June 5, "France and England could certainly not consent to giving the Soviet Union support for an extension of Bolshevism in Eastern Europe."¹³⁰ For her part, Moscow remained extremely cautious and tentative about negotiating with the Germans until the latter part of July. Schulenburg analyzed Soviet motives on June 25:

Mikoyan does not want to see the talks with us broken off, but wishes to keep the negotiations firmly in hand, in order to determine their course at any time. Obviously it would not at present fit into the framework of the Soviet Government's general policy if a sensation were to be created by a resumption of the economic negotiations.¹³¹

As late as July 10, Schulenburg felt that Moscow wished to keep in contact with Berlin, but "at the moment, they are still chary of entering into actual economic negotiations which could not be concealed from the public."¹³²

Moscow still seemed to attach more importance to its negotiations with Britain and France, and the knowledge that Hitler was looking to make a deal doubtlessly elevated Stalin's confidence that he could get exactly what he was asking from the British and French Governments. There is no evidence that Stalin was ever willing to accept anything less than his original terms, and, faced with the combined forces of Anglo-French efforts to alter and mollify the Soviet proposal and German feelers for a non-aggression pact, he insisted that Britain and France accept a more explicit, better defined version of the April 17 proposal; he never deviated from the substance of that proposal except to extend his commitments past Eastern Europe as a gesture to the West.

On June 19, Halifax instructed Seeds to assure Molotov that Britain was willing to take part in a guarantee of the Baltic States if this could be

done without naming them or appearing to force a highly distasteful guarantee upon them.¹³³ When Seeds and Naggier met with Molotov again on June 21, they presented a new British draft of Article I: The other two countries would at once furnish all possible support should one of the three become involved in hostilities with a European Power as a result of: "(1) aggression by that Power against any one of these three countries, or aggression by it which, being directed against another European State, thereby constituted a menace to the security of one of these three countries, or (2) aggression by that Power against another European State which the contracting country concerned had, with the approval of that State, undertaken to assist against such aggression."¹³⁴ As Halifax admitted to Seeds, this new proposal differed only in language from the British draft presented on June 15, "since no party can impose on the others its own view of what constitutes a menace, and the question would really have to be settled by consultation."¹³⁵ This was not lost on the Russians; Potemkin, Molotov's assistant, immediately asked how it would be decided, according to the new proposal, whether aggression against a European State constituted a menace to the security of one of the signatories. Molotov expressed the position of his government that there was no alternative to naming the countries to be guaranteed, since it would be virtually impossible to be prepared for the contingency of having to aid every European State. Naggier suggested listing the States to be guaranteed in a separate unpublished protocol, and each party agreed to investigate that possibility. When pressed for a Soviet counter-draft, Molotov at this meeting and again the next day stated that the Soviet position was embodied in their proposal of June 2.¹³⁶

On June 24, Seeds wired Halifax that Moscow desired a treaty in which mutual obligations were "set down in black and white and to be clear beyond dispute." He also indicated that Britain would have to deal with Moscow's fear, which he was not willing to concede was genuine, "that the Baltic States may voluntarily, or under pressure, move into the German orbit." What the Russians wanted, Seeds wrote, was "to secure our assistance or at the least apparent connivance should they every find it expedient to intervene in the Baltic States."¹³⁷ For the Russians a treaty with Britain and France could serve little purpose unless it contained such a provision. Cadogan had addressed this point long before, in his May 22 memorandum: "If the Soviet Government really entertain this fear (that Britain would remain uncommitted in the event of a German attack on Russia through the Baltic states), it is evident that we shall have to undertake some commitment to allay it."¹³⁸ As Fontaine has explained, "From the point of view of Russian security, it would seem indispensable to guard against the consequences of a border country's rallying to the Axis....What good did it do to protect the Polish and Rumanian borders if there was still a breach to the north through which the Nazis could sweep from one day to the next?"¹³⁹

Seeds understood why Article I of the British proposal presented on June 21 was unacceptable to the Russians. As he explained to Halifax:

Paragraph I of that (article) did not make it clear beyond question that the Baltic States would be fully covered. It did not specify who was to judge whether an act of aggression against the Baltic States constituted a menace to the security of the Soviet Union. This was a loophole through which Great Britain and France might evade their obligations to assist the Soviet Union. No such loophole for the Soviet Government seemed to exist in the second paragraph of our draft, since the mere fact of Great Britain and France becoming engaged in hostilities on behalf of a country to whom they had given a guarantee would apparently of itself bring into play the obligations of the Soviet Union to come to their assistance and the Soviet Government would have little voice in the matter.¹⁴⁰

Seeds was well aware of the Soviet position, including their precise terms of June 2. Furthermore, he knew, as Halifax had pointed out, that the British proposal presented on June 21 was really the same as that of June 15 which had already been rejected by the Russians. As revealed in the above quote, Seeds understood and appreciated the reasons why such a proposal was unacceptable to the Russians. Indeed, Molotov was not without justification "in his anxiety to make us understand that, in his view, the British and French Governments were treating the Russians as simpletons.... and fools."¹⁴¹

On June 27, Halifax wired Seeds that he still wished "to avoid any mention of States", but that if "a nominal roll of States" were necessary to secure Soviet agreement, he "should infinitely prefer" a secret, unpublished list. Accordingly, Halifax submitted a new draft of Article I which contained a curious ploy. The new draft read as follows:

The United Kingdom, France and the U.S.S.R. undertake to give to each other immediately all effective assistance should one of these countries become involved in hostilities with a European Power as a result of aggression by that Power against any one of these three countries, or aggression by it against another European State which the contracting country concerned felt obliged to assist in maintaining its independence or neutrality against such aggression.¹⁴²

As Halifax's wire to Seeds indicates, the latter part of the revised article I, providing only for aid to States which a contracting country "felt obliged to assist", was intended to replace sections "(2) and (3) in Article I of M. Molotov's draft of June 2." In connection with this, Halifax insisted that the list of States to be guaranteed include Switzerland and the Netherlands. Yet, section (3) in Article I of Molotov's June 2 draft provided for mutual aid to any European State outside of the eight States listed which desired help in the event of aggression against it. This provision clearly covered British and French interests in Western Europe, because both

countries had cordial relationships with and commitments to the countries on Germany's Western border. However, this provision alone was not sufficient to cover Soviet needs, as the British first proposed, because Russia's relationship with her bordering States was not friendly--hence the need for a specific list. When shown Halifax's new draft of Article I, Naggier immediately took exception to it because, (1) the Russians could be expected to resist the specific inclusion of Holland and Switzerland, countries with which they did not have diplomatic relations, and (2) the omission of section (3) of Article I of the Soviet's June 2 draft and its replacement with a list of selected countries seriously limited Anglo-French freedom of action and deprived the proposed agreement of the "necessary elasticity" which might be of use in an unforeseen contingency. Seeds wrote that "there is certainly some force in this argument."¹⁴³ Halifax stuck to his previous position, arguing that, for unspecified reasons, the Soviet draft of Article I (3) was not "a satisfactory method of dealing with Holland and Switzerland."¹⁴⁴

The historian can only speculate on Halifax's motives for dropping Article I (3). The evidence that this was motivated by legitimate Anglo-French interests is unpersuasive, and, to jump ahead a bit, Halifax was soon willing to accept the omission of both I (3) and mention of Holland and Switzerland. In context, Halifax's ploy appears to have been a delaying tactic. In a Cabinet meeting on June 20, Chamberlain expressed his confidence that he could secure an agreement with Russia whenever he wanted and that the best policy would be to drive a hard bargain so the Russians did not think the British were overanxious for an agreement. On June 27, the day he sent his new draft to Seeds, Halifax told Joseph Kennedy that he and

his Government were inclined "to tell Russia to go jump into the Baltic Sea or any other sea they can find, except that they have been under constant pressure from all their friends who say that the failure of a Russian pact would be psychologically bad for England."¹⁴⁵ Perhaps Zhdanov was on the right track when he wrote in Pravda two days later, "It seems to me that the English and French do not want a real agreement or one acceptable to the U.S.S.R.: the only thing they really want is to talk about an agreement and, by making play with the obstinacy of the Soviet Union, to prepare their own public opinion for an eventual deal with the aggressors."¹⁴⁶

When Seeds and Naggier presented the new proposal to Molotov on July 1, the expectable happened. Molotov said the draft "was too vague and that it would be necessary to give it precision by adding" a list of States. Seeds suggested that the list "be embodied in an unpublished annex to the Treaty" and Molotov indicated that his Government would agree to this. Seeds then submitted a draft of the secret protocol, containing the following list: "Estonia and Finland and Latvia, Poland and Rumania and Turkey and Greece and Belgium and Luxemburg and the Netherlands and Switzerland." Molotov immediately remarked that "it would be difficult if not impossible for the Soviet Government to accept obligations in respect of Netherlands and Switzerland" because it "had no diplomatic relations with these two countries." Seeds noted that Molotov "did not seem to bother much about Luxemburg."¹⁴⁷

In the course of the conversation, Molotov raised another objection to the new draft of Article I: "It did not make provision for cases of indirect aggression." He suggested a revision so that Article I would explicitly provide for action in the event of direct or indirect aggression by one

European Power against another which any of the signatories felt obliged to resist. Seeds and Naggier told Molotov "that this was a new point." This was not exactly true; Chamberlain, as early as June 7, had announced his government's willingness and intention to sign an agreement covering indirect aggression, and Maisky had warned Halifax on June 12 that provision for indirect aggression "was an indispensable condition for any agreement." (Halifax had wired this information to Seeds.) Nevertheless, British records indicate that the issue of indirect aggression had not been brought up in the negotiations in Moscow, and in that sense, it could be called "a new point," or perhaps, more precisely, a point which as of then had not been but would inevitably have to be discussed.

It is fairly obvious why Molotov raised the issue of indirect aggression at this point. The British and French had reached the point where they were willing to agree to most of the basic Soviet terms; as Seeds told Molotov at the July 1 session, "our new draft gave the Soviet Government everything they had asked for in their own draft." Seeds was careless in this statement, however, for the British and French now held back on one important aspect of Article I--that the list of guaranteed countries be included in the published protocol. Now, to give the public version of the prospective treaty more force in the absence of specific mention of European States, the provision to act in the event of indirect aggression should be added. Indeed, Molotov told Seeds and Naggier on July 8 "that the absence of any reference to indirect aggression in Article I would deprive the Treaty of a good deal of its value as a deterrent to aggression."¹⁴⁸ At any rate, in view of the history of Hitlerite aggression, no agreement could go far enough toward protecting the security of Britain, France, and especially

Russia unless it provided for a definite response to indirect aggression, and even Chamberlain had admitted this.

Molotov presented the formal reply of his government on July 4. The Soviets "agreed to inclusion of list of States in an unpublished protocol", but refused to include Luxemburg, the Netherlands or Switzerland in the list. They further insisted that Article I mention indirect aggression, to be defined in the secret protocol as "an internal coup d'etat or a reversal of policy in the interests of the aggressor."¹⁴⁹

On July 6, Halifax wired Seeds and outlined the limits of the concessions Britain was willing to make: "we agree to the omission of Holland, Switzerland and Luxemburg from the list of States", "we are prepared to have a list of the other States in the unpublished Protocol", and, "as regards indirect aggression we can go no further than" to allow a definition of the term in the secret protocol "only on condition that Article I should speak only of 'aggression' omitting words 'direct or indirect'". Furthermore, the Soviet definition of indirect aggression "is completely unacceptable." Halifax suggested that Seeds propose that reference to indirect aggression be omitted from Article I and that the secret protocol contain the agreement "that the word 'aggression' (as used in Article I) is to be understood as covering action accepted by the State in question under threat of force by another Power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality."¹⁵⁰

The formal Soviet reply to this new proposal was presented by Molotov on July 9: "The Soviet Government insist on the inclusion of the words 'direct or indirect' in Article I." Furthermore, the British definition of indirect aggression was rejected and a new Soviet definition offered:

The expression "indirect aggression" covers action accepted by any of the (listed) States under threat of force by another Power, or without any such threat, involving the use of territory and forces of the State in question for purposes of aggression against that State or against one of the contracting parties, and consequently involving the loss of, by that State, its independence or violation of its neutrality.

This definition incorporated the British proposal that indirect aggression involve the "threat of force", and attempted to provide for the very possible contingency that a country could be used by another country, without the threat of force, to commit aggression against England, France or Russia, e.g., if Finland permitted the passage of German troops or establishment of German airfields for an attack on Russia. As an apparent gesture toward Britain and France, Russia now officially provided that Switzerland and the Netherlands could be included in the unpublished list in the event that the Western Powers reciprocated by making it possible for Russia to conclude "pacts of mutual assistance" with Poland and Turkey. Molotov reminded Seeds and Naggier that "it was absolutely essential in the view of the Soviet Government that these two Agreements (political and military) should not merely enter into force but also be signed simultaneously. This certainly was not a "new point", for the Russians had insisted on this point from the very beginning of the negotiations and had requested "further discussion" of it at the June 16 session in Moscow. However, as late as July 9, Seeds and Naggier were unable to answer Molotov on this issue and both Ambassadors decided to negotiate no further without additional instructions from their governments.¹⁵¹

On July 15, Halifax wired new instructions to Seeds. He informed the Ambassador that the French Government had authorized Naggier to accept the words "direct or indirect" in Article I, and authorized him to "tell Molotov