

**The Northern Department of the British Foreign Office and the
Soviet Union, 1939-1942.**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the opinions of, and advice tendered by, members of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office during the years 1939-1942. Previous works on this era have focussed predominantly on the role of Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden. However, an in depth and exhaustive analysis of the views of the various members of the Northern Department provides a new and original perspective on the relations between London and Moscow in the critical period from the outbreak of war in September 1939 to the signature of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty in May 1942.

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Introduction.

At the heart of the following analysis will be Great Britain's relations with the USSR from the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939 to the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet alliance of May 1942. Through an examination of the activities of the members of the Northern Department, the Foreign Office unit which dealt with the Soviet Union, it is possible to offer a new and original perspective on the development of relations between London and Moscow during this critical period of the Second World War.

As Raymond Smith notes, there is a growing acceptance by historians of the validity of examining more closely not merely the process of policy formulation but the need to 'highlight the role of permanent officials of the Foreign Office and Foreign Service in that process'.¹ Indeed, as the late Sir Herbert Butterfield wrote in 1949:

The importance of the higher permanent officials of the Foreign Office is now accepted as a matter of common knowledge; and it has often been noted to what degree a Foreign Secretary is in their hands... These sub-governmental, sub-ministerial actors in the drama are bound to be the real objective of a genuine enquiry into British foreign policy; and the real secrets and the real problems are situated in the very nature of things at this level.²

This is in marked contrast to the hypothesis of A.J.P. Taylor who once described what has traditionally passed as diplomatic history as the story of "what one clerk said to another clerk" during a period when great events were happening a long way from Whitehall'.³ However, it is through a close examination of the men of the Northern Department that one can gain a great deal of insight into the reactions and responses

¹ Raymond Smith, 'Introduction', in *British Officials and British Foreign Policy 1945-50*, edited by John Zametica (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 1-7 (p. 1).

² Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951), p. 203.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

of these men to the ever-changing and fluid nature of the war. It is my contention that the belief that the Northern Department was a ‘relative backwater in the Office’⁴ is incorrect. As William Strang noted, although the men working within the various political departments did not finally determine British foreign policy, they would collate the ‘pertinent information upon which the policy may be intelligently established’.⁵ Indeed, ‘a man stationed at one of these geographical desks for a number of years is a veritable goldmine of information on both the region’s problems and the precedents which have been used in past British relations with the area’.⁶ It was the business of the men of the Foreign Office to make themselves expert in the conduct of international relations, and the officials within the Northern Department were no different to other Foreign Office departments.⁷

A second criticism of the men of the Northern Department will be addressed in this analysis of British foreign policy towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War. The charge that these men were ‘neither the best nor the brightest’ is both insulting and erroneous. Interestingly, the main criticisms of the Northern Department that will be dispelled in this study came from Laurence Collier, the Head of the Department between 1934 and 1941. Similar sentiments were expressed by Erik Goldstein in 2006. Goldstein remarked that the Northern Department was a ‘marginal’ entity within the Foreign Office.⁸ Collier, as will be shown, had a penchant for hyperbole and was guilty of self-deprecation and self-pity during his time at the Soviet desk in the Foreign Office. To diminish the intellectual acuity of

⁴ National Archives [hereafter NA], FO371/ 21103/ N2109/ 272/ 38, Collier to Osborne, 29 July 1937.

⁵ Donald G. Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1961), p. 236.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ William Strang, *The Diplomatic Career* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1962), p. 117. Head of the Central Department 1937-39; Special mission to Moscow 1939.

⁸ Erik Goldstein, ‘Sir Laurence Collier (1890-1976)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (October, 2006). Online edition, www.oxforddnb.com/article/64924, accessed 22 February 2009.

these men, and the influence that they did on occasion exert is misleading. The case of Fitzroy Maclean, who was Second Secretary at the Embassy in Moscow during the Stalinist purges prior to his tenure at the Northern Department, dispels both misconceptions. Maclean was highly intelligent with excellent and influential contacts, and in fact requested a transfer to the Moscow Embassy in the mid-1930s.⁹ Although the Central Department was regarded by contemporaries and historians alike as a more prestigious department, one ought not marginalise the work of Collier and his colleagues during this tumultuous period. As will be shown through an analysis of the activities of the Northern Department, influence could be exerted by men of rather junior rank, not merely by the Permanent Under-Secretary and Foreign Secretary, a process facilitated by changes to the structure of the Foreign Office at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1962 Strang wrote that ‘the foreign policy of a state may be defined in a rough and ready way as embodying the purposes, intentions or objectives pursued by its government in the conduct of relations with the governments of other states, and the methods adopted by it in order to achieve those purposes’.¹⁰ For D.C. Watt, Britain is essentially an oligarchic society in which power is exercised by a minority of its citizens.¹¹ At the heart of the formulation of foreign policy lies the Foreign Office, which has been regarded as the ‘headquarters for the administration of foreign relations’¹² and was the place where policy was framed.¹³ It is the job of the Foreign Office to make available to the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister all of the relevant information and recommendations from which future policy may be decided.

⁹ Fitzroy Maclean will be discussed in greater detail in the latter part of this chapter.

¹⁰ Strang, *The Diplomatic Career*, p. 114.

¹¹ D.C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 1.

¹² Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations*, p. 229.

¹³ Strang, *Diplomatic Career*, p. 14.

Although the Foreign Office was ‘not so much a maker of policy as an instrument for its execution’, Strang clearly illustrated the significance of this government department:

It does not ... seek to impose its own ideas in disregard of the democratic principle of ministerial and parliamentary control over a nation’s action; but it does supply, in marshalled and digested form, the bulk of those facts on which alone sound policy can be based, and gives its own opinions on the courses of action which the facts make necessary or indicate as desirable.¹⁴

The Foreign Office is responsible for the conduct of Britain’s international affairs. Working alongside the Diplomatic Service,¹⁵ the permanent officials within the Foreign Office ‘help to fit together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle’.¹⁶ Although an examination of the Foreign Office is at the heart of this study, one must not neglect exploration into the Diplomatic Service which provided the men in Whitehall with the intelligence upon which their recommendations were based.¹⁷ If the Foreign Office ought to be regarded as the headquarters of diplomatic activity, then the embassies abroad were the ‘front lines’ through which the Foreign Office operated. As Strang noted, the Foreign Service may ‘reasonably be regarded as the most reliable of all the possible channels of supply’ for it was a ‘highly-trained body accustomed to scrutinise and assess the trends of the outside world and enjoying the advantages of direct official access to the leaders of the world’.¹⁸ If there was an issue of particular importance, the information would be passed on to the Cabinet who would discuss the matter in detail.

¹⁴ William Strang, *The Foreign Office* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1955), p. 20.

¹⁵ The Diplomatic Service oversaw the staff of Britain’s overseas embassies, and received memoranda, despatches and minutes from the varying ambassadors.

¹⁶ Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations*, p. 242.

¹⁷ Michael Hughes, ‘Diplomacy or Drudgery? British Consuls in Russia during the Early Twentieth Century’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (1995), 176-195 (p. 177).

¹⁸ Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p. 18.

Then as now, within the Foreign Office there were political departments that oversaw Britain's foreign relations. The work was split geographically, with the Northern Department focussing on Britain's relations with Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the Soviet Union. The Southern Department dealt with Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy whilst the Central Department dealt with France, Germany, Holland, Luxemburg, Poland and Belgium. Although the Northern Department dealt primarily with matters concerning the Soviet Union, due to the complex and interconnected issues of the interwar and war years, often the work of the Northern and Central Departments would overlap.

The origins of the Foreign Office are unclear. In 1253 there is mention of a Secretary to the Sovereign whose position was comparable to the present Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. By the mid-sixteenth century two secretaries of equal standing were appointed and were tasked with overseeing the two political departments, the Northern and Southern Departments.¹⁹ However, it was not until 1782 that the name 'Foreign Office' as a separate department of state was first coined.²⁰ The staff making up the Foreign Office in the late eighteenth century staff consisted of the Secretary of State, a Parliamentary and Permanent Under-Secretary, two Senior Clerks and nine Junior Clerks. At this juncture it was the Foreign Secretary and his Under-Secretaries that did the majority of the work. The Foreign Secretary stood at the head of the Foreign Office and was typically an aristocrat who had close ties with the Sovereign. As with all other Departments of State, the Foreign

¹⁹ Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations*, p. 229. These political departments were created in 1640.

²⁰ John Tilley and Stephen Gaselee, *The Foreign Office* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons Ltd, 1933), p. 2. Tilley was the Chief Clerk at the Foreign Office between 1913 and 1918 whilst Gaselee was the Librarian and Keeper of the Papers at the Foreign Office.

Secretary was not a civil servant but a member of the Government, and was 'by custom personally responsible ... for the acts of the government as a whole'.²¹

The Foreign Secretary is a member of the government, working with colleagues in the Cabinet under the general direction of the Prime Minister. He must conform his action to general government policy and see that, on matters of major importance, he carries with him his Cabinet colleagues, each of whom may have his own view to express, fortified maybe by the advice of his officials.²²

Although the Office was regarded as autonomous department of state, it was not until the nineteenth century that the advisory function of the Foreign Office was established.²³ Previously the Office was regarded merely as the Secretary of State's 'clerical organisation' whose remit consisted merely of copying, ciphering and filing.²⁴ In the late nineteenth century, Lord Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary, sought little advice about policy even with leading officials.²⁵ The structure of the 'Old Foreign Office'²⁶ – a term used by Collier in an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* – was pyramidal, with the Foreign Secretary standing at the apex of the Office hierarchy. The Foreign Secretary's chief advisor, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, had been the ranking member of the Foreign Office since the days of Lord Hammond.²⁷ The Permanent Under-Secretary oversaw the running of the Foreign Office and the embassies abroad, supplied the Foreign Secretary with all the relative facts that would help him in the formulation of policy, whilst putting

²¹ Strang, *Diplomatic Career*, p. 117.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²³ Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁵ D.C. Watt, 'The British Foreign Office Between the Wars', in *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895-1939*, edited by B.J.C McKercher and D.F. Moss (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 181-202 (p. 181).

²⁶ The 'Old Foreign Office' spanned the years 1898-1906.

²⁷ Zara Steiner, 'The Last Years of the Old Foreign Office, 1898-1905', *The Historical Journal*, 6, 1 (1963), 59-90 (p. 62).

forward his own recommendations as to what should be done.²⁸ In the period under examination, the Permanent Under-Secretary was Alexander Cadogan, who came from a family well-versed in the intrigues of diplomacy as his father held Under-Secretaryships in the Ministry between 1874-80.²⁹ Cadogan was often praised by his colleagues for his level-headed approach to diplomacy. As Lord Temperley recalled, Cadogan ‘knew everything, was never in a hurry, never ruffled no matter how irritated the caller might be, and he possessed a canny judgement of the right course to adopt in a given situation’.³⁰ Beneath the Permanent Under-Secretary sat the Under-Secretaries who supervised a group of political departments. Under-Secretaries had the authority to comment on the despatches of departments other than their own; for example, the Under-Secretary supervising the Northern Department could minute a Southern Department memorandum. During the period under examination Sir Orme Sargent, a Deputy Under-Secretary, played the key role within the Northern Department hierarchy, and was described by Sir Robert Vansittart, Cadogan’s predecessor, as a ‘brilliant and rather passionate character’.³¹

The heads of department – or Chief Clerk – were the ‘real experts in the Foreign Office’ as they were highly experienced and knowledgeable in the affairs of their geographic region and often remained in post for eight to twelve years.³² The head of department minuted the papers that were supplied to him by the juniors and his minutes often merely provided routine directions. However, he was, on occasion, able to produce more superior drafts. As Tilley noted: ‘... the Senior Clerk was

²⁸ Churchill Archives [hereafter CA], Cadogan Papers, ACAD 4/5, Cadogan to Gilbert, 14 March 1962.

²⁹ David Dilks, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945* (London: Cassell, 1971), p. 1.

³⁰ Arthur C. Temperley, *The Whispering Gallery of Europe* (London: Collins, 1938), p. 108.

³¹ Robert Vansittart, *The Mist Procession: the Autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 399.

³² Steiner, ‘The Last Years of the Old Foreign Office’, p. 71. Heads of Department were also referred to as ‘Chief Clerks’.

supposed to have, and did have, a thorough knowledge of what was going on in his sphere, and was expected to be ready to supply information at the shortest possible notice'.³³ Sources of information ranged from minutes, memoranda and telegrams from the diplomatic missions abroad. Minutes were particularly useful as they were often written in a great hurry, thus revealing the immediate reactions of the author to events. Memoranda, however, were more considered and contained views or proposals that possessed significance in and of themselves. Telegrams from ambassadors possessed a wide variety of intelligence from 'the man on the spot' and would often contain reports on the political situation in the countries where they were posted.

Although concrete figures are impossible to calculate, it has been estimated that the total number of despatches and memoranda that flowed through, and were handled by, the Foreign Office is as follows: in 1821 the number totalled 6,193; in 1849 the number was 30,725 and by the turn of the nineteenth century the number had increased to 44,041 – quite some margin in the space of some eighty years.³⁴ With the approach of the twentieth century it was clear that change was necessary in order to relieve the burden of work from the Foreign Secretary and Permanent Under-Secretary. As Thomas Keene noted, 'if the Foreign Office was too proud to let someone else interfere, it was not too stupid to see that changes to bring more efficiency were required',³⁵ as the strain on the Secretary of State was simply too great. So, in 1889, copying clerks were introduced, though on a very limited basis.³⁶ It was at this time that the staff of the Foreign Office were divided into first and second division clerks. First division clerks did all the important and political work

³³ Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 130.

³⁴ Bishop, *Administration of British Foreign Relations*, p.231.

³⁵ Thomas Keene, 'The Foreign Office and the Making of British Foreign Policy, 1929-35', unpublished PhD thesis (Ann Arbor, 1975), p. 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

whilst the second were employed in the non-political departments.³⁷ This was deemed insufficient for the task of devolution of work from the Foreign Secretary. It was thus decided that the calibre of recruits into the Office ought to be encouraged through the introduction of stiffer examinations.

Entrance into the Foreign Office was first made subject to examination in 1856, with a clear distinction between intellectual and clerical work. In order to sit the examination it was necessary to be nominated by the Secretary of State. One of the chief complaints of the Foreign Office prior to the 1906 reforms was the narrow social stratum from which its members were recruited. In order for the Foreign Secretary to nominate a candidate for examination, they had to be known to either him or one of his close advisors. Strang defended the narrowness of the social base of candidates, believing that there were compelling practical reasons for choosing candidates for the diplomatic career from a restricted social stratum. In any case, the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service 'must and will recruit from the best' that society had to offer.³⁸ D.C. Watt argued that the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service had to reflect the nature of the society in which it served. 'By its nature it must be drawn from the elite groups of Britain, since its job was both to represent the elites abroad, and to represent to them the nature of foreign interests'.³⁹

If the candidate wished to enter the Diplomatic Service he had to prove that he had a private income of at least £400 per year. This 'property qualification' was necessary as diplomats spent their first two years as unpaid attachés, and were then paid £150 on their appointment as Third Secretary.⁴⁰ The property qualification compounded cries of elitism, whilst the fact that candidates had to be proficient in

³⁷ Steiner, 'The Last Years of the Old Foreign Office', p. 60.

³⁸ Strang, *Foreign Office*, p. 72.

³⁹ Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, p. 188.

⁴⁰ Christina Lerner, 'The Amalgamation of the Diplomatic Service with the Foreign Office', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7, 1 (January 1972), 107-126 (p. 107).

both French and German generally necessitated that any potential candidate study abroad prior to sitting the examination. Fitzroy Maclean would have met the criteria for entrance into the Diplomatic Service under the 'Old Foreign Office' era. Born in 1911 to a vast inheritance, Maclean was conceived in Inverness, born in Egypt and had lived in both Florence and Paris by the age of 8.⁴¹

Once a candidate had completed a year or two of study abroad in preparation for the Foreign Office or Diplomatic Service examination, he would spend a final year at the infamous Scoones cramming school on Garrick Street, run by a certain Mr Scoones. John Tilley spoke very warmly of Scoones, who 'knew the tricks of the trade' and ensured that would-be entrants were guided by first-class teachers for both foreign languages and history.⁴² Tilley recalled fondly:

When I went up for examination, I believe that in twenty years there had not been more than one successful candidate for the Foreign Office who had not been to that famous crammer. Of the dozen or so candidates who went up with me, there was one from another crammer, and he got no marks at all. The teaching was certainly very good, and I believe the Private Secretaries had considerable confidence in Scoone's personal opinion of the candidates.⁴³

Owen St Claire O'Malley was one such candidate who attended Scoones, although he ultimately abandoned the school and instead worked with private tutors.⁴⁴ O'Malley failed his entrance examination on his first attempt, yet secured his place on his second attempt. Fitzroy Maclean, in comparison, successfully passed his Foreign Office examination on his first attempt. Indeed, in the written examination Maclean swept the board and in his French and German papers he scored 97%, the highest

⁴¹ Frank McLynn, *Fitzroy Maclean* (London: Frank Murrar, 1992), p. 4.

⁴² Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁴ Owen O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan* (London: John Murray, 1954), p. 33. O'Malley spent five years in the Northern Department from 1919.

marks ever recorded for a would-be entrant.⁴⁵ For Archibald Clark Kerr, who succeeded Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador to the Soviet Union, his experience at Scoones was far more enjoyable than that of O'Malley, and he used the establishment to brush up on his skills prior to sitting the examinations.⁴⁶

Candidates had to speak two languages and were tested on handwriting, orthography, précis writing and translation from French.⁴⁷ In 1871 Latin and German were made compulsory, with optional examinations in Greek, Italian and Spanish, as well as history and 'general intelligence'. By the time that Clark Kerr took his examination for entrance into the Diplomatic Service, it was essential to be proficient in four foreign languages.⁴⁸ The Foreign Secretary implemented further changes in 1904. The minimum age of recruits increased from nineteen to twenty-two; a measure that was praised by Tilley as he felt that 'nineteen was too young to begin a career which was to be made altogether or mainly in foreign countries'.⁴⁹ A key factor that motivated Lord Landsdowne to raise the age limit was to increase the number of university graduates and to broaden the educational backgrounds of the candidates. Landsdowne believed that a special emphasis on foreign languages in the general civil service examinations was paramount following consultation with several heads of Oxford and Cambridge colleges.⁵⁰

Not only were reforms needed to relieve the burden of work from the Foreign Secretary, but there was a pressing need for an 'administrative revolution' in order to bring the Foreign Office 'in line with other great departments of state'.⁵¹ Complaints

⁴⁵ McLynn, *Fitzroy Maclean*, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Donald Gillies, *Radical Diplomat. The Life of Archibald Clark Kerr, Lord Inverchapel, 1882-1951* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), p. 8.

⁴⁷ Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁸ Gillies, *Radical Diplomat*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵⁰ Steiner, 'The Last Years of the Old Foreign Office', p. 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

from Cabinet members necessitated the need for reform. Important despatches were not being disseminated and it was believed that the system of archiving past correspondence was inadequate. Too much time was wasted looking for lost papers, much to the frustration of all involved. Reorganisation of the Foreign Office along the lines of the Colonial System was first recommended by Mr Arthur Otway, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary between 1868 and 1869. Otway was scathing of the fact that clerks had little or no opportunity of giving their opinions and were essentially reduced to mere copyists. He firmly believed that by adopting a similar approach to that of the Colonial Office, clerks could make their observations on the despatches as they arrived and send them to their department head.⁵²

In response to the criticisms of Cabinet members, the so-called ‘Crowe Reforms’ were introduced in 1906. Although these reforms dealt specifically with the Registry of the Office, the Crowe reforms ‘effectively revolutionised the Foreign Office’.⁵³ Whilst the reforms of 1906 were the culmination of a series of steps taken by Lord Lansdowne to improve his diplomatic establishment, it was Crowe who oversaw the implementation of the reforms.⁵⁴

The impact of Eyre Crowe upon Laurence Collier is evident. In ‘Impressions of Eyre Crowe’, found in Collier’s private papers in the archives at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Collier wrote in glowing terms of Crowe who he described as a ‘legend’ who kept a ‘sharp eye on the juniors’, of whom Collier himself was one. It is unsurprising that Sir Eyre Crowe was so deeply involved in the reforms at the turn of the century. Aside from Crowe’s reputation for keeping a sharp

⁵² Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 92. This change involved a redistribution of work that would relieve the first division of virtually all its clerical duties.

⁵³ Keene, ‘The Foreign Office and the Making of British Foreign Policy’, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Steiner, ‘The Last Years of the Old Foreign Office’, p. 88.

eye on the juniors, Crowe's obsession with detail was well known throughout the Office. Collier wrote:

The average Foreign Office clerk might have been excused for supposing Crowe to be a single-minded fanatic when all he had to judge was the copious flood of minutes, notes and memoranda which descended on us from his room, always in a neat and clear handwriting ... No detail escaped his corrective notice, whether it was an accuracy in English grammar or an unsuitable piece of red tape.⁵⁵

The reforms themselves were as exhaustive as Eyre Crowe's eye for detail. Tilley, who entered the Foreign Office in 1893, was particularly critical of the fact that a body of men who were recruited by highly competitive examinations were employed for the first fifteen to twenty years of their career on work that was of the 'simplest possible character'. Indeed, it was a case of revolution from below, stating that there was 'a feeling that the questions with which the Foreign Office had to deal had grown so much in number and intricacy that there was work of a better kind waiting to be done if we could be allowed to do it'.⁵⁶ The introduction of stiffer examinations certainly succeeded in improving the calibre of Foreign Office recruits. However, such highly intelligent men were not content to spend the first fifteen years of their careers as ciphers. It was no longer believed that clerical work was good training for diplomacy, and work of a more engaging and challenging nature was necessary for the men of the third room.⁵⁷

Each political department within Whitehall was organised in a three-room system. The head of department was situated in the first room, his principal assistant was based in the second, and the lowest men in the hierarchy, the Second and Third Secretaries, occupied the third room. Members of the 'third room' spent leisurely

⁵⁵ London School of Economic and Political Science [hereafter LSE], Collier Misc 0466 Files, 'Impressions of Sir Eyre Crowe', p. 2.

⁵⁶ Tilley and Gaslee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 153.

⁵⁷ Keene, 'The Foreign Office and the Making of British Foreign Policy', p. 5.

afternoons. As Collier himself remarked, the Foreign Office could be likened to the fountains in Trafalgar Square because they played from ten until four.⁵⁸ J.D. Gregory aptly conveyed the boredom facing the juniors in the third room: ‘... members of the Foreign Office lived a pleasant routine existence which stultified their education, dulled their wits and deprived them of any kind of initiative’.⁵⁹ The ‘multifarious but simple’ tasks of the juniors included docketing newly arrived letters, ciphering and deciphering telegrams and copying papers as deemed necessary by the department head. Tilley recollected just one instance whereby he contributed to an annual departmental memorandum; yet this was certainly a one-off occurrence.⁶⁰

The Foreign Secretary agreed with the general consensus that reform was necessary. Thus, Landsdowne set up a committee to examine the organisation of the Foreign Office – the process of evolution had begun. The principal aim of the reforms was to ‘relieve the Diplomatic Establishment of the Office by devolving a portion of the work now performed by it on Clerks of the Second Division’. In that way it might ‘be free to devote itself to more important work’.⁶¹ The proposed changes would ensure that memoranda were kept constantly prepared and up to date and that all second division clerks should deal with the minor details. This aim was achieved with the creation of a general registry that was made up of a growing number of second division clerks.⁶²

Under the new system the Foreign Office operated essentially in a collegiate system, with the document starting with the most junior official and slowly escalating

⁵⁸ Arthur Willert, ‘The Foreign Office From Within’, *The Strand Magazine*, 45 (1936), 398-405 (p. 398).

⁵⁹ J.D. Gregory, *On the Edge of Diplomacy, Rambles and Reflections, 1902-28* (London: Hutchinson, 1928), p. 18.

⁶⁰ Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 128.

⁶¹ E.T. Corp, ‘Sir Eyre Crowe and the Administration of the Foreign Office, 1906-1914’, *The Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), 443-454 (p. 443).

⁶² First division clerks did all the political work of the department whilst the second division clerks worked in the non-political departments.

further up the Foreign Office hierarchy to the Foreign Secretary.⁶³ Any incoming despatch was registered to the general registry and covered with a jacket for circulation. Papers were placed in the jacket, with ‘wide and cleanly space [sic] of which allowed full scope for minutes’.⁶⁴ The copying clerks would then summarise its contents, collect all related material and send it to the political departments. There, beginning with the most junior officials, the material was read, and suggestions as to the best course of action were minuted on the jacket.⁶⁵ The junior would perhaps suggest a draft reply which would either be amended or accepted by their superior. Alexander Cadogan appreciated the contributions of officials, even if their suggestions were not taken any further. Officials were not expected to formulate policy, and ‘if he fails to convince, I think he has no real grievance ... he has at least done his duty’.⁶⁶ Under the new system, an ambassador’s despatch customarily did not reach the Foreign Secretary until it had been thoroughly fleshed out and debated and the jacket covered in minutes. As Keene noted, it was not uncommon for an ‘overburdened minister’ to simply approve the action suggested.

The role of the juniors was particularly significant in light of the fact that the information that flowed into the Office – usually in the form of telegrams and despatches sent by the ambassadors and diplomatic missions abroad – was not sifted by specialist intelligence officers. Thus, the varying departments within the Foreign Office were alone responsible for sifting through telegrams and despatches, and relayed what they believed to be the pertinent points to the head of department, who would escalate it further up the Foreign Office hierarchy should it be deemed necessary. It was only papers that related to pertinent matters of policy that reached

⁶³ Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Harold Nicolson, *Lord Carnock: A Study in Old Diplomacy* (London: Constable, 1930), p. 326.

⁶⁵ Keene, ‘The Foreign Office and the Making of British Foreign Policy’, p. 6.

⁶⁶ CA, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 4/5, Cadogan to Gilbert, 14 March 1962.

the Secretary of State. Indeed, approximately only 20% of despatches made it past department heads.

As Steiner writes, following the reforms of 1906, men who had previously been mere copying clerks began acting as ‘true advisors’.⁶⁷ As a consequence of the Crowe Reforms, the Office evolved from a ‘cozy, if sometimes rather tedious family party to that of a great and efficient department of state’.⁶⁸

Even as a training ground for the junior clerks, the Crowe Reforms were deemed a success.⁶⁹ One of Crowe’s aims was for the juniors to impress their superiors through their contributions to papers in order to gain promotion. The possibility of promotion following an impressive piece of work was true for both the men in the Foreign Office and in the Diplomatic Service. Gladwyn Jebb recalled that three memoranda he composed between the summers of 1933 and 1934 caught the eye of R.A. Butler, then a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Butler was impressed with Jebb’s observations and marked the beginning of an illustrious and life-long friendship.⁷⁰

Under the new system, each diplomatic mission abroad had to produce an annual report. The quality of the report was to serve as a guide for the suitability of the writer for transfer or promotion. It must be remembered that within the Diplomatic Service there were certain postings that were far more desirable than others. Ivone Kirkpatrick related it to the ‘inner circle’ joke whereby the Foreign Service was likened to the London underground. It was said that once a man was part of the ‘inner circle’ it was impossible to leave the track. The embassies in London,

⁶⁷ Steiner, ‘Last Years of the Old Foreign Office’, p. 59.

⁶⁸ R. Butler, ‘Beside the Point’, *World Review* (April-May, 1953), pp. 8-13.

⁶⁹ Steiner, ‘Last Years of the Old Foreign Office’, p. 89.

⁷⁰ Sean Greenwood, *Titan at the Office. Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Leiden: Marinus Nijhoff, 2008), p. 19.

Paris, Berlin and Rome made up this 'inner circle'.⁷¹ Thus, by writing a superior paper or suggestion for action, a junior could become an attractive candidate for transfer; with the much desired 'inner circle' the prize. The Crowe Reforms incentivised a previously unmotivated and bored set of men, and not merely restructured the Office but rejuvenated it.

At every level in a political department, the opportunity to impress existed after 1906. For the junior clerks there was a sense of purpose in their analysis and suggestions, whilst the head of department was able to prove his worth and engender a 'sense of self-reliant responsibility'.⁷² On his second day as Permanent Under-Secretary in February 1906, Sir Charles Hardinge informed the Office that he would not personally supervise any of the political departments. This would now be the responsibility of the first division clerks. Hardinge was clearly an advocate of delegation and believed that the heads of department ought to work without the direct supervision of the Under-Secretaries.⁷³ Prior to the Crowe Reforms, the Foreign Office had what Tilley referred to as a 'partial identity'. In the aftermath of the reforms, however, when people spoke of the Foreign Office they were referring 'not to the Foreign Secretary but to the permanent staff in Whitehall'.⁷⁴

Following the 1906 reforms one sees an attempt to increase the number of members of the professional and middle classes that gained entry into the Office. Previously, 'the Foreign Office was the place where political importance and social distinction were most obviously and closely linked, it was this combination which

⁷¹ Ivone Kirkpatrick, *The Inner Circle: Memoirs of Ivone Kirkpatrick* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. xi. Kirkpatrick was in the Western Department from 1919-1929 and occupied the same desk for the entirety of his time there. He moved to the Central Department in 1938 which was under the leadership of William Strang.

⁷² NA, FO366/1136, minute by Hardinge, 3 February 1906.

⁷³ Corp, 'Sire Eyre Crowe and the Administration of the Foreign Office', p. 444.

⁷⁴ Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 3.

gave it its legendary prestige'.⁷⁵ Indeed, between 1898-1907 over half of the successful candidates came from aristocratic backgrounds.⁷⁶ Ivone Kirkpatrick's mother was a friend of Queen Victoria, who was also the godmother of his sister,⁷⁷ whilst Alexander Cadogan came from an extremely wealthy family and fitted the typical Foreign Office mould by attending Eton and Oxford's Balliol College. Robert Vansittart, Cadogan's predecessor, also graduated from Eton. Archibald Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador to the USSR at the time of the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet alliance, came from a family of considerable wealth and was educated in France and Germany prior to sitting his examination for entrance into the Diplomatic Service.⁷⁸ As O'Malley remarked, upon his entry into the Western Department in 1911, four out of six men in his department were the offspring of noble families.⁷⁹

Thus, criticism that the 'Old Foreign Office' had recruited from too narrow a social base was not without foundation. In order to address calls of elitism within the Foreign Office, a Board of Selection was created in 1907. The Board consisted of the Permanent Under-Secretary, the Foreign Secretary's principal private secretary, one or more members of the Diplomatic Service and one of the heads of the political departments of the Foreign Office. It was hoped that the Board would broaden the social base of candidates, and to a degree it did. In the final years of peace before the outbreak of the First World War, there had been a slight widening of the selection pool. However, as Steiner illustrates, nine out of sixteen successful candidates came from Eton and fifteen attended either Oxford or Cambridge.⁸⁰ In 1919 twenty-two out

⁷⁵ O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan*, p. 38.

⁷⁶ Robert Nightingale, *The Personnel of the British Foreign Office, 1851-1929* (London: The Fabian Society, 1929), p. 3.

⁷⁷ Kirkpatrick, *The Inner Circle*, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Gillies, *Radical Diplomat*, p. x.

⁷⁹ O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan*, p. 34.

⁸⁰ Steiner, 'Last Years of the Old Foreign Office', p. 89.

of forty-four office clerks were old Etonians. Clearly, the entrance of men like Collier into the Office was part of a slowly evolving trend.

Laurence Collier, the Head of the Northern Department in the period under examination, did not have the same upper-class credentials as his colleagues. Collier was born in 1890 into a family of considerable artistic and intellectual distinction. His father, John Collier, was a renowned portrait painter. Collier studied history at Balliol College, Oxford, where he was awarded a First-Class Honours degree in 1912.⁸¹ After passing a competitive examination he entered the Foreign Office in 1913 as an apprentice in the ciphering room.⁸² It is interesting to note that between the years 1908 and 1913 the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service admitted thirty-seven recruits into its ranks, and Collier was the only candidate whose father's occupation was listed as 'artist'. He was not the 'typical' recruit amongst those who had been educated at Eton and whose family were of upper-class rank. Thus, whilst his family's credentials must have impressed the selection board, his appointment can be seen as a 'part of a slow trend on the part of the Foreign Office towards a broader social base'.⁸³ In an article for *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1972, Collier pointed out that he entered the Foreign Office because he 'had neither the money nor the social graces then thought necessary' for the Diplomatic Service.⁸⁴ In May 1919 Collier was appointed as Second Secretary to the Embassy in Tokyo, returning to the Foreign Office on 5 January 1921.⁸⁵ Initially assigned to the treaty department where he was promoted to First Secretary in September 1923, he was then posted to the Far Eastern Department. Erik Goldstein wrote that 'it was for his connection with the northern

⁸¹ Paul Doerr, *British Foreign Policy 1919-1939: Studies in Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p. 141.

⁸² *Foreign Office List* (London, 1934) p. 203

⁸³ Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ Laurence Collier, 'The Old Foreign Office,' *Blackwood's Magazine*, 312 (1972) pp. 256-61.

⁸⁵ *Foreign Office List*, p. 203.

department remit that his career was especially notable' as he was promoted to counsellor in November 1932 and was appointed C.M.G. in June 1934, finally becoming head of department from 1933 until 1941.⁸⁶ Whilst he had not studied the Russian language and had never visited the country, it is evident that 'his general training and his long experience with Soviet affairs gave him a strong formal claim, by the later thirties, to speak with some authority on the subject of communism'.⁸⁷ Doerr noted that if Whitehall had continued to draw even more recruits from varying social backgrounds it was conceivable that the Office would have had 'a wider range of more imaginative policies to pursue' by providing great opportunities for men such as Collier, who was often providing analysis that ran contrary to the prevailing Foreign Office consensus.⁸⁸

Far less is known about Warner in comparison to Collier, possibly due to his more relaxed approach to the problem of Anglo-Soviet relations. Educated at Winchester and Magdalen College, Oxford, Warner entered the Foreign Office on 19 November 1920. His first overseas post came in April 1923 when he was transferred to Constantinople. He returned to the Foreign Office in May 1928. By 1940 Warner had been promoted to Acting Counsellor in the Foreign Office. Following Collier's appointment as Ambassador to Norway in May 1941 Warner began his tenure as Head of the Northern Department where he would remain until 1946.⁸⁹

The Crowe Reforms were successful in ushering in a 'revolution from below' and were moderately successful in bringing men like Collier into Whitehall. For the Permanent Under-Secretary, however, the Crowe Reforms merely resulted in an

⁸⁶ Goldstein, 'Laurence Collier,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸⁷ Donald Lammers, 'Fascism, Communism, and the Foreign Office, 1937-39,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971) p. 68.

⁸⁸ Paul Doerr, 'Caution in the Card Room: The British Foreign Office Northern Department and the USSR, 1934-1940', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Waterloo, 1993), p. 671.

⁸⁹ *Foreign Office List*, volume 117 (1944), p. 328.

increase in paperwork. The new system of minuting was highly beneficial for junior clerks and resulted in a more thorough analysis of papers. Yet, as the Permanent Under-Secretary oversaw the running of the Foreign Office, the vast burden of the increased work fell on him. Between 1906 and 1912 the number of despatches increased by a staggering 38%.⁹⁰ As a consequence of this increase in paperwork, a bottleneck developed that threatened to overwhelm the new Registry system.⁹¹

The Royal Commission on the Civil Service, created in April 1914, sought to examine and rectify outstanding issues that were either created by or omitted from the reforms of 1906. The Commission was to study the Foreign Office as well as the Diplomatic and Consular Services. However, this evaluation of Britain's diplomatic machinery did not stem merely as a result of the strained Registry system. Critics of the Foreign Office were vehement in their insistence that the foreign policy-making process ought to be subjected to democratic oversight and control.⁹² Upon the outbreak of the First World War, calls for reform gained momentum and intensity. The lack of transparency in British diplomacy was heavily criticised and more democratic methods of selection and promotion were regarded as essential.⁹³ As James Joll and Gordon Martel highlighted, many diplomats defended the Foreign Office from both the Liberal and radical critics. The men of Whitehall believed that no outsider was qualified to understand the intricacies of their profession and that members of the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service 'must come from a particular class or caste'.⁹⁴ As one senior official of Whitehall put in 1914:

I think your Board of Selection will generally take
what one may call perhaps one type of man, because

⁹⁰ Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, p. 154.

⁹¹ Keene, 'The Foreign Office and the Making of British Foreign Policy', p. 9.

⁹² Zara Steiner and M.L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-21', *The Historical Journal*, 17, 1 (1974), 131-156 (p. 131).

⁹³ James Joll and Gordon Martel, *The Origins of the First World War* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 51.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

he is the type of man who is fit for this international career called diplomacy. All ... speaking metaphorically, speak the same language; they have the same habits of thought, and more or less the same point of view, and if anybody with a different language came in, I think he would be treated by the whole diplomatic service more or less with suspicion.⁹⁵

Members of the British Diplomatic Service shared a reputation for being part of an exclusive club, one that was exceedingly difficult to gain membership, especially if one did not come from the correct social background.

In spite of the attempts of Crowe *et al* to address and reduce the social snobbery associated with the British diplomatic institutions, the reforms of 1906 were evidently regarded as insufficient for critics. As Steiner remarked: ‘All the clichés of the Foreign Office staff were true; it was indeed the stronghold of the aristocracy and everything was done to preserve its class character and clannish structure’.⁹⁶ The Royal Commission, also known as the MacDonnell Commission, of 1914 sought to remove this property requirement, whilst reforming the Board of Selection of 1907. Members from outside the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service were to be members of the Board, which was to meet after rather than before a candidate sat the examination.

A third recommendation of the MacDonnell Commissioners is particularly relevant to this study. It was recommended that the staffs of the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service be amalgamated into one department as it was believed that both services would benefit; particularly the Diplomatic Service. As a consequence of amalgamation it would be possible for officials to be posted at the Moscow Embassy and then be transferred to the Northern Department in London. Both Fitzroy Maclean and Armine Dew had benefitted from the interchangeability between the two services,

⁹⁵ Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 189.

⁹⁶ Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, p 16.

whilst Laurence Collier had been posted to the Tokyo Embassy prior to his transfer to the Northern Department.⁹⁷ Maclean had been posted to Moscow during the show trials of 1937-38 whilst Dew succeeded him following Maclean's transfer to the Soviet desk at the Foreign Office. It is interesting to note that both Maclean and Dew had previously served at the Paris Embassy, one of the 'inner circle' posts, and had been praised for their intellectual acuity and dedication. It is worthy to note that Maclean had made the unusual request to be transferred to Moscow. In his 1951 book *Eastern Approaches*, he described the reactions of his colleagues to his decision to be transferred to the Moscow Embassy:

Everyone whom I consulted about my projects told me that I was deeply mistaken. They assured me that the Moscow Embassy was a dead end. Life there would be even more sedentary and a great deal duller than life in London and Paris. I should see no Russian and gain no insight into the intricacies of Soviet policy.⁹⁸

However, Maclean was not alone in his request to be transferred to the USSR. As will be shown, Sir Stafford Cripps had asked to visit Moscow in order to build bridges with the Soviets – although originally in an unofficial capacity – whilst Archibald Clark Kerr had accepted a posting to the Mexican Legation in 1937 on the proviso that if he did well there, he might be offered a position in Moscow. Although Clark Kerr was offered the more prestigious position of Ambassador to Iraq instead, he had relished the possibility of working at the Moscow Embassy, which he believed to be 'one of the few worthwhile posts'. He himself predicted that it would 'soon be by far the most important embassy in the world'.⁹⁹ The opportunity to work at the Moscow Embassy was relished by Maclean, in spite of the notorious unpopularity of any posting to the USSR. Hence, as a consequence of amalgamation, men who had

⁹⁷ Armine Dew died in 1945 when the plane bringing him back from the Yalta Conference was shot down over enemy territory.

⁹⁸ Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (London: The Reprint Society, 1951), p. 12.

⁹⁹ Gillies, *Radical Diplomat*, p. 80.

first-hand experience of communism and the Soviet state could draw upon that experience whilst working in the Northern Department, thus becoming ‘experts’ in the true sense of the word.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 not only delayed the application of the recommendations but also dramatically increased the workload of the Foreign Office, placing even greater strain on the already overburdened registry.¹⁰⁰ Following a report from the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service in April 1918, the two services were finally amalgamated in 1919. For the purposes of promotions and transfers the two services worked from one common seniority list. Although amalgamation was approved by Parliament, under the leadership of Curzon and Hardinge outstanding issues of recruitment, promotion and training were ignored. Thus, the changes recommended by the Commissioners proved to be less decisive than was hoped.¹⁰¹ A key reason for the lacklustre application of the Commission’s recommendations was simply a lack of public interest in foreign policy following the Paris Peace Conference; the issues raised by the Commission were no longer at the fore of the public consciousness.

Due to the lack of enforcement of the reforms, charges of elitism were once again raised, with the Diplomatic Service returning to its old ways. Although the property qualification had been abolished, it was still very much believed that having private means was almost essential if one wished to pursue a diplomatic career.¹⁰² Interchangeability between the two services certainly increased; almost all lower-level diplomats appointed after 1919 had at least one posting abroad,¹⁰³ yet the educational

¹⁰⁰ Corp, ‘Sir Eyre Crowe and the Administration of the Foreign Office’, p. 451.

¹⁰¹ Steiner, ‘Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-21’, p. 131.

¹⁰² Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 195.

¹⁰³ Valerie Cromwell and Zara Steiner, ‘Reform and Retrenchment: The Foreign Office between the Wars’, in *The Foreign Office, 1782-1982*, edited by Roger Bullen (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1984), 85-108 (p. 86).

and social background of candidates were not as diverse as reformers would have hoped. To be sure, there were recruits who did not come from aristocratic backgrounds. William Strang was one such example. Strang was the son of an Essex farmer and gained admission to the Office on the grounds of his academic ability and his impressive war record.¹⁰⁴ The Tomlin Commission of 1929-31 illustrated that the trend towards a broader social base was declining once again, as it was still the major public schools which were putting forward most of the successful candidates, with Oxford and Cambridge the normal routes for entry.¹⁰⁵

Whilst the role of the Foreign Office is to supply the Foreign Secretary with various courses of action available to him, the role of the diplomatic missions abroad was to supply the Foreign Office with that information whilst conducting the relations between His Majesty's Government and international bodies. Unfortunately for British diplomats stationed in the USSR, there was a veil of secrecy surrounding the Kremlin and information blackouts were common. This was very much a common complaint of all British ambassadors to Moscow in this period.

Diplomatic missions abroad were usually headed by ambassadors, yet under exceptional circumstances it was possible for the embassy to be headed by the chargé d'affaires, as was the case when Sir Stafford Cripps was in London at the time of the German invasion of the USSR. Strang proudly boasted that the British diplomat had 'at all times prided himself, and not without justification, on scrupulously suppressing his own individual viewpoint and loyalty representing the national attitude as embodied in that of the Government of the day'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ William Strang, *Home and Abroad* (London: Deutsch, 1956), pp. 19-22.

¹⁰⁵ Cromwell and Steiner, 'Reform and Retrenchment', p. 87.

¹⁰⁶ Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p. 71. As will be shown throughout this piece, Sir Stafford Cripps was not successful at suppressing his personal political opinions.

During the period under examination, the ambassadors posted to the USSR were Sir Stafford Cripps and Archibald Clark Kerr. Belonging to the radical left of the Labour Party, Sir Stafford Cripps had long argued in favour of an improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations and steadfastly believed that an Anglo-Soviet understanding was key in erecting a barrier to German aggression and expansion. However, Cripps' proclamations that the Labour Party ought to unite with all political parties irrespective of class 'in order to more effectively fight galloping Fascism' were heavily criticised by members of his own Party.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, in June 1939 he was expelled from the Labour Party due to his advocacy of Popular Front policies.

Following the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Cripps wrote an article in *The Tribune*, and, rather than altering his opinions on the Soviet Government, as Collier had done, he instead praised the 'realism' of Molotov and Stalin which had spared the Soviet people the horrors of war.¹⁰⁸ Cripps' pro-Soviet attitudes often exasperated his Foreign Office colleagues, as evidenced, for example, by Sargent's damning criticism of the ambassador in April 1941 following Cripps' refusal to deliver Churchill's warning to Stalin about concentrations of German troops on the German-Soviet border.¹⁰⁹ In his scathing analysis of Sir Stafford Cripps, Sargent stated that the ambassador had the 'political judgement of a flea'.¹¹⁰ This sentiment was generally accepted within the Foreign Office. Cripps' behaviour and vacillations were a source of much frustration to senior officials such as Collier and Sargent.

Archibald Clark Kerr, Cripps' successor as ambassador, was a far more composed individual, much like Christopher Warner. Prior to his appointment to

¹⁰⁷ Eric Estorick, *Stafford Cripps: A Biography* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1949), p. 169.

¹⁰⁸ H. Hanak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow May 1940 to June 1941', *The English Historical Review*, 94, 370 (January, 1979), 48-70 (p. 52).

¹⁰⁹ NA, FO371/29479/N1573/78/38, minute by Sargent, 13 April 1941.

¹¹⁰ Hugh Dalton, *The Fateful Years: Memoirs, 1931-1945* (London: Muller, 1957), p. 41.

Moscow, Clark Kerr had been British Ambassador in both Iraq and China.¹¹¹ As Donald Gillies writes, prior to his removal as ambassador, Sir Stafford Cripps ‘had lost Churchill’s confidence and, having no influence with Stalin, nor backing from the Foreign Office, was ... something of a lame duck in Moscow’.¹¹² Although Sir Stafford Cripps ‘had not enjoyed the best of fortune in the Soviet capital’,¹¹³ it was hoped that Archibald Clark Kerr would be more successful. On 27 April 1942, in a letter to the Foreign Secretary, Clark Kerr confessed that he had ‘said goodbye to those engaging, and often feckless and exasperating, Chinese with some sadness’. The new ambassador predicted that it would prove to be difficult to gain any real insight into the workings and opinions of the Soviet Government, ‘other than those which the official people wish to create’. In spite of such obstacles, Clark Kerr promised Eden that he could ‘count upon me to put everything I have into this harassing job which you have entrusted me with and which, believe me, I am proud to have a shot at’.¹¹⁴ Upon his arrival in Kuibyshev, Clark Kerr received a communication from Cripps, who had himself spoken in glowing terms of the newly appointed ambassador. Cripps expressed his belief that Clark Kerr, with his vast experience and expertise, was a wise appointment. Cripps had welcomed Clark Kerr as his successor for he was ‘convinced that it was essential to have an absolutely first-class man with the right sympathies to deal with what I know is an extremely difficult situation’.¹¹⁵ Cripps was indeed correct. Clark Kerr was a fine successor and was a welcome contrast to many within His Majesty’s Government who had lamented Cripps’ many perceived faults. On 12 June 1942, only weeks after the conclusion of

¹¹¹ *Foreign Office List*, vol. 13 (1942), p. 236.

¹¹² Donald Gillies, *Radical Diplomat: The Life of Archibald Clark Kerr, Lord Inverchapel, 1882-1951* (London: Tauris, 1999), p.121.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹¹⁴ NA, FO800/300, Clark Kerr to Eden, 27 April 1942.

¹¹⁵ NA, FO800/300, Cripps to Clark Kerr, 11 June 1942. The diplomatic corps relocated to Kuibyshev in October 1941 due to the German advance towards Moscow.

the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, Clark Kerr wrote to Warner: ‘I am so strong a believer in the closest cooperation between these peoples [sic] and ourselves, both during the war and after it, and so anxious to make some useful contribution towards it’.¹¹⁶

The First Secretary was the second-in-command in the diplomatic mission and exerted a good deal of influence as all minutes, memoranda and reports had to be read and analysed by him prior to being sent to the Foreign Office.¹¹⁷ Below the First Secretary sat the Second and Third Secretaries. Although not regarded as ‘specialists’ due to their junior rank, their experience would lead them to acquire specialist knowledge of the region in which they were posted. Fitzroy Maclean, who was the Second Secretary at the Embassy in Moscow prior to his transfer to the Northern Department in 1939, had taken the opportunity to travel throughout the USSR during his time there. Thus, in addition to his experiences at the Moscow Embassy this furnished him with a strong impression of the political machinery of the Soviet state, both locally and nationally. Maclean’s background and experience certainly impressed his head of department. Indeed, it has been suggested that Maclean exerted a good deal of influence on Collier, who respected the tenacity in which Maclean tackled his time in the USSR.¹¹⁸

Upon Hitler’s accession to power in 1933, Maclean believed that war was inevitable, as the rise of two opposing political ideologies – Nazism and Communism – could only lead to catastrophic results.¹¹⁹ Maclean informed his biographer, Frank McLynn, of his reasons for requesting a transfer to the Moscow Embassy:

‘... Communists and Communism were very much in the forefront of everyone’s minds. This made me want

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Clark Kerr to Warner, 12 June 1942. Due to the timeframe of this study, a full appreciation of the work of Archibald Clark Kerr as ambassador in Moscow will not be possible.

¹¹⁷ Gillies, *Radical Diplomat*, p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Craig Gerrard, ‘The Northern Department of the Foreign Office and Finland, 1938-40’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Leeds, 2001), p. 14.

¹¹⁹ McLynn, *Fitzroy Maclean*, p. 10.

to see them for myself. I guessed, too, that Russia might feature in a future war ...¹²⁰

Throughout the interwar years the notion of ideological antipathies was a preoccupation of Collier's and was one which was sharpened due to his belief that Nazi Germany represented a more immediate threat to British interests than the Soviet Union.¹²¹

Thus, the Crowe Reforms of 1906 and the reforms stemming from the MacDonnell Commission of 1914 gave members of the Foreign Office a formal channel through which to exert influence.¹²² As Rothwell writes, clerks in the Foreign Office were in a 'different world of information and influence from clerical staff in the normal sense of the term' as they had input into the various debates of the day.¹²³ However, the men of Whitehall were also able to exert informal influence through the contacts made both within the Foreign Office and with colleagues from embassies and missions abroad. Working within the Foreign Office structure gave officials ample opportunity to develop contacts with their political masters. The informal atmosphere within the Foreign Office aided the cultivation of relations between juniors and their superiors.¹²⁴ Indeed, superiors were rarely addressed as 'sir' and it was not uncommon for issues to be discussed in the halls of the Foreign Office. The homogeneity of the men of the Foreign Office allowed for contacts to be established and nurtured; those who attended the same colleges and universities developed long-lasting friendships and confidences, whilst official functions gave men the opportunity to carry out business in a more informal manner. Sir Frank Lascelles, the British Ambassador in Berlin at the time of Clark Kerr's posting to the

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

¹²¹ NA, FO371/ 23697/ N2976/ 1459/ 38, memorandum by Collier, 25 January 1939.

¹²² As Tilley and Gaselee noted, within the Political Departments the work and structure did not change in character since the 1906 reforms. Tilley and Gaselee, *The Foreign Office*, p. 265.

¹²³ Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War, 1941-1947* (London: Cape, 1982), p. 457.

¹²⁴ Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, p. 89.

Embassy there, had viewed it as ‘extremely valuable for his young staff to disport themselves creditably at as many social gatherings as possible’. Clark Kerr was particularly impressive in social settings and was able to move easily at the numerous functions he was expected to attend. Consequently, he ‘gained the ear of many influential personage, picking up important snippets of political and social gossip for the Embassy files’.¹²⁵

As previously mentioned, a key problem facing the ambassador and visiting diplomatic missions in Moscow was the dearth of information emanating from the Kremlin. It was particularly difficult for the men at the Moscow Embassy to provide accurate and reliable information as a result. Fortunately, Clark Kerr had experienced such difficulties during his time at the Embassy in Persia. It was during his time in Persia that he gained invaluable experience in an environment ‘where democratic niceties were not the guiding principles of political activity’.¹²⁶ Hence, it was necessary for these men to establish contacts that could provide useful information for their colleagues in Whitehall. Maclean recalled: ‘In Paris much of our information on the political situation had come to us from our social contacts’, yet this was more difficult to do in Moscow.¹²⁷ Thus, upon his arrival in Moscow, Maclean diligently studied the annual reports whilst improving his knowledge of the Russian language. Once satisfied with his knowledge of what had come before him, Maclean nurtured his relationship with Hans ‘Johnny’ Herwath von Bittenfeld, his opposite number at the German Embassy. As his confidence in Maclean grew, von Herwath slowly began leaking snippets of top-secret information from his own sources.¹²⁸ Von

¹²⁵ Gillies, *Radical Diplomat*, p. 10.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹²⁷ Maclean, *Eastern Approaches*, p. 15.

¹²⁸ Johnny von Herwath, *Against Two Evils: Memoirs of a Diplomat-Soldier during the Third Reich* (London: Collins, 1981), p. 125. Once Maclean transferred to the Northern Department, von Herwath fed information to his successor, Armine Dew.

Herwath informed Maclean that if there were going to be a war, the only hope for Germany would be an agreement with the Soviets. Then, at least, 'we should not have a war on two fronts'.¹²⁹

During his time as Second Secretary at the Embassy in Moscow, Maclean continued to impress his colleagues in London. Oliver Harvey, Private Secretary to Anthony Eden shortly after he became Foreign Secretary, would often discuss matters relating to the Soviet Union with Maclean. In July 1938 he asked Maclean's opinion of the Soviet leader in the wake of the purges in order to ascertain the efficiency of the Red Army.¹³⁰ After witnessing the trial of Bukharin in February 1938, not only was Maclean keen to be transferred from Moscow, but his anti-communism became more pronounced. Fortunately for Maclean, he had so impressed his political masters that he was granted transfer to the Soviet desk at the Foreign Office, where he was regarded as a 'safe pair of hands'. Once stationed in Whitehall, Maclean continued to strengthen his relationship with Winston Churchill, who he had met at an exclusive luncheon club whilst stationed at the Paris Embassy.¹³¹ In June 1939, Churchill's niece Clarissa invited Maclean to dine with Churchill who wished to speak to someone with first-hand experience of the Soviet Union.¹³² This is a clear example whereby members of the Foreign Office could seek to influence the opinions of politicians through more informal channels, as opposed to exerting formal influence through their position within the Foreign Office hierarchy.

Collier, much like Maclean, was able to establish relationships with men of influence within the Foreign Office, in spite of his somewhat controversial views that often ran contrary to the prevailing Foreign Office consensus. Robert Bruce Lockhart

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 143.

¹³⁰ John Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 158.

¹³¹ McLynn, *Fitzroy Maclean*, p. 20.

¹³² Ibid., p. 65.

shared Collier's belief throughout the 1930s that Great Britain should seek rapprochement with the Soviet Union in order to provide a bulwark to German aggression. Bruce Lockhart was regarded as a true expert in matters concerning Russia, due in large part to his time served in Moscow as Vice-Consul prior to the Revolution. Indeed, following the Bolshevik *coup d'état* in October 1917, Lockhart was instructed to return to Moscow in order to establish unofficial relations with Russia.¹³³ By January 1939 Collier had gained the support of another highly influential man in the Office, Gladwyn Jebb, who was at the time Private Secretary to Alexander Cadogan. This is significant in itself. As Cadogan's Private Secretary, all papers of any significance passed through Jebb's hands on their way to his chief's desk.¹³⁴ Indeed, Cadogan expressly instructed Jebb to act as a filter of incoming papers and to 'sort out the ones that don't matter at all'.¹³⁵ Incidentally, Jebb's about-turn with regard to the desirability of *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union coincided with Cadogan's own change of heart, as he too came to support the notion of a Soviet alliance following the German advance into Prague in March 1939.¹³⁶ Previously Jebb had supported the policy of appeasement, yet by the beginning of 1939 he was no longer ascribing to the school that believed that Britain should let Germany move eastwards.¹³⁷ Collier and Jebb's views continued to coincide throughout the war, most notably during the Soviet-Finnish conflict. Gaining the support of influential men in the Office gave Collier more credibility in his assertions. Furthermore, one appreciates that when Maclean transferred to the Soviet desk in the Foreign Office,

¹³³ Kenneth Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, volume 2 1939-1965* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 13.

¹³⁴ Dilks, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan*, p. 89.

¹³⁵ Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, p. 47.

¹³⁶ CA, Cadogan Papers, ACAD 1/8, Cadogan Diary, 20 March 1939.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Collier's second-in-command exerted a good deal of influence on the head of department due to his close and impressive experience with the Soviets.

This would not have been possible if not for the reforms of 1906 and 1919. It was through these formal and informal channels that the men of the Foreign Office could exert influence and help contribute to the debate surrounding British foreign policy. Therefore, claims that the Northern Department was a 'relative backwater' and a 'marginal department' do not ring true, as it did not work in a vacuum. To be sure, one cannot assert that the recommendations and advice tendered would necessarily form the basis of British foreign policy during the war, yet the Northern Department contributed to the discussion and ensured that its political masters had considered all aspects of the debate, thus allowing the Foreign Secretary to make a more informed decision when discussing matters pertinent to British foreign relations with the Cabinet.

Although the coverage of this thesis begins in 1939, the Northern Department sought to exert influence over the direction of British foreign policy in the mid-1930s but was consistently unsuccessful. As far as European affairs were concerned, the views of the Central Department under the tutelage of Ralph Wigram and later William Strang generally compelled attention in view of the threat posed by Nazi Germany. Indeed, there was a certain gravitas associated with Central Department men as their opinions tended broadly to reflect the wishes of the ruling political elite. In December 1935 a debate arising from a telegram received in the Foreign Office from Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador to Berlin, clearly illustrated the existence of inter-departmental disagreement over the thorny issue of Britain's relations with Germany and the Soviet Union. Sargent questioned whether it would be prudent, in order to prevent a Nazi-Soviet *rapprochement* that 'could bring the

downfall of the British Empire and of civilisation as we know it',¹³⁸ for His Majesty's Government to make a 'supreme effort to come to terms with Germany' whilst there was still time.¹³⁹ Collier recommended a different course. He pencilled tersely in the margin: 'France and Russia ask nothing but to be left alone, Germany asks for the moon. Why not come to terms with the former?'¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately for the Head of the Northern Department, his views were unpopular with not merely his colleagues but also to his political masters.

As Michael Roi and Brian McKercher note in their analysis of British foreign policy in the interwar years, the assumption of the Premiership by Neville Chamberlain in May 1937 marked a watershed in the making of British foreign policy in the 1930s. As Eden would soon discover to his chagrin, the new Premier sought to and generally succeeded in directing policy from Downing Street.¹⁴¹ The controversial and irksome views expressed by Collier flatly contradicted the attitudes of the new Prime Minister who was decidedly antipathetic to Soviet Communism and refused to consider an understanding with Moscow. As Chamberlain himself expressed in March 1939: 'I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia ... I distrust her motives, which seem to me to have little connection with our ideas of liberty'.¹⁴² Thus, throughout the interwar years, especially in the final years of peace, it is difficult to discern influence in the activities of the Northern Department. However, as the war progressed and relations with the USSR increased in significance, views that had hitherto been regarded as unacceptable gained a measure of credence and acceptability.

¹³⁸ NA, FO371/ 18860/ C8198/ 134/ 18, minute by Phipps, 10 December 1935.

¹³⁹ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 17 December 1935.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., comment by Collier, 29 January 1936.

¹⁴¹ Michael Roi and B.J.C. McKercher, 'Ideal' and 'Punch-bag': Conflicting Views of the Balance of Power and Their Influence on Interwar British Foreign Policy', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 12, 2 (June, 2001), 47-78 (p. 48).

¹⁴² Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1946), p. 403.

The Russian Revolution of November 1917 marked the introduction of international Communism into the arena of inter-state relations. The emergence of Soviet Communism was met with confusion and apprehension within Great Britain. One Foreign Office official noted as early as 12 November 1917 that ‘Bolshevism is essentially a Russian disease’ and for decades thereafter it was generally treated with great suspicion within the higher echelons of the Foreign Office.¹⁴³ Moreover, as Louise Grace Shaw has forcibly argued, British Cabinet ministers ‘refused for too long to overlook their distrust of and hostility towards the Soviet Union’ in the interwar period.¹⁴⁴

One must remember that the Russian Revolution took place against the backdrop of the First World War. As a result of the revolution the Russian Empire withdrew from the fray, its new masters refusing to take any further part in what they saw as an imperialistic battle in which the Russian people were perceived merely as cannon fodder in an essentially bourgeois conflict. Subsequently the British Government came to the aid of the enemies of the fledgling Bolshevik state partly in an attempt to overthrow the new regime. By the time the Great War and the Russian Civil War had ended, the British Government had to face its own problems, including mass unemployment, labour unrest and political turmoil in the Empire. These not only created a great sense of uncertainty for the future, but made the British authorities even more suspicious of alien political doctrines such as Bolshevism.¹⁴⁵

The political landscape of Britain in the 1920s played an important role in the course of Anglo-Soviet relations. When Lloyd George was defeated in the 1922

¹⁴³ Richard H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921: Intervention and the War*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969) p. 11.

election a new and ferociously anti-communist Conservative Government took office. Without the restraining influence of Lloyd George, the new Foreign Secretary, Curzon, himself deeply anti-communist, was able to pursue a more confrontational stance towards the Soviet Union, leading finally to the 'Curzon ultimatum' of 8 May 1923 which called upon Moscow to cease its revolutionary activities or risk the termination of the recently concluded Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement.¹⁴⁶ Fortunately, for Anglo-Soviet relations at least, the Conservative Government was replaced in January 1924 by a Labour administration, which generated some hope that there would perhaps be an improvement in the atmosphere between London and Moscow.

Unfortunately that was not the case. The 'Zinoviev Letter' crisis of September 1924 once again led to a further rupture in Anglo-Soviet relations. The publication of a letter by Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Comintern, to the Communist Party of Great Britain, only intensified the distrust felt for Soviet Russia by the British political elite. The document instructed British Communists to put pressure on their sympathisers in the Labour Party, lobby the Government to proceed with the ratification of the trade treaty with the U.S.S.R., and to intensify 'agitation-propaganda work in the armed forces'. Whilst the letter was later confirmed to be a forgery, the crisis it provoked has been regarded as 'the greatest Red Scare in British political history'.¹⁴⁷

As the decade progressed relations between the two countries continued to deteriorate. Christopher Andrew has asserted that the legacy of the Zinoviev Letter

¹⁴⁶ John Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Irvine: University of California Press, 1994) pp. 111-13.

¹⁴⁷ Christopher Andrew, 'The British Secret Service and Anglo-Soviet Relations in the 1920s: Part I,' *The Historical Journal*, 20, 3 (1977), 673-706, (p. 673). For more information on the Zinoviev controversy see Sibyl Crowe, 'The Zinoviev Letter: A Reappraisal,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10, 3 (1975), 407-32.

caused a further breach with the Soviet Union in the form of the Arcos raid in 1927.¹⁴⁸ As these examples illustrate, one can justifiably describe the 1920s as a period of intense British hostility towards and suspicion of the Soviet Union, a situation which itself was not helped not helped by fluctuations in the internal politics of Great Britain.

As for Anglo-Soviet relations during the interwar years, Keith Neilson asserted that any analysis of those relations would largely be a 'study in silence'.¹⁴⁹ It seems strange for that to be the case. One might imagine that the magnitude of the threat posed to both the U.S.S.R. and Great Britain by the revisionist states, most notably Nazi Germany, was such as to make Anglo-Soviet unity a clear imperative for the policy makers in both London and Moscow. Yet throughout the 1930s the British government distanced itself from Communist Russia. Indeed, far from seeking to contain Hitler in association with the U.S.S.R., the British consistently sought an improvement in their relations with Germany, despite the fact that Hitler's unilateral violations of international treaties and the increasingly aggressive nature of Nazi foreign policy appeared to make any such prospect ever more elusive and improbable as the decade progressed.

From 1934 onwards the Soviet Government professed to have reversed its foreign policy position. Instead of preaching the doctrine of the desirability of a world-wide communist revolution, the Soviet Union claimed thereafter to have placed its faith in the 'indivisibility of peace', thus firmly positioning the U.S.S.R. alongside Great Britain and France as a *status quo* Power. In discussing these and other issues

¹⁴⁸ On 12 May 1927 the Metropolitan Police raided the premises jointly occupied by the All-Russian Cooperative Society (Arcos) and the Soviet Trade Delegation in an attempt to uncover evidence of Soviet espionage. See Harriette Flory, 'The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), 707-23; Christopher Andrew cited above.

¹⁴⁹ Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 1.

one inevitably becomes drawn into the topic of ‘appeasement’ as an Anglo-French-Soviet alliance would clearly have constituted an alternative to an understanding with Germany during the 1930s.

When assessing the course of international relations in the last years of peace, the questions of the appeasement of Nazi Germany and the neglect of Soviet Russia run alongside one another simultaneously. One cannot consider one without the other. Yet in comparison to the historiography of Anglo-German relations the historiography of Anglo-Soviet relations is surprisingly thin. As Carley has identified, the subject of Anglo-Soviet relations has not received a great deal of attention. Previous work in that area, predominantly undertaken by British and Canadian historians, has viewed appeasement, at least in its somewhat underplayed ideological dimension, as an expression of a pro-Fascist and anti-Communist policy, with an emphasis on the British Government’s ‘culpability for failing to secure an alliance with the U.S.S.R. against Nazi Germany’.¹⁵⁰

This argument has attracted a wide range of support. For example, writing in 1965 Margaret George noted that the obsession with Communism had prevented British leaders from correctly perceiving the Nazi danger.¹⁵¹ More recently, Louise Grace Shaw has forcibly argued that Cabinet ministers and members of the Foreign Policy Committee ‘refused for too long to overlook their distrust of and hostility towards the Soviet Union’. Consequently, ‘this unwillingness, by most, to overlook completely their anti-Soviet prejudices throughout Chamberlain’s premiership meant that all ministers ultimately bore some responsibility for Britain’s failure to secure a

¹⁵⁰ Michael Jabara Carley, ‘‘A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances’: The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-6,’ *Contemporary European History*, 5, 1 (1996), 29-69 (p. 29).

¹⁵¹ Margaret George, *A Warped Vision: British Foreign Policy 1933-1939* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965).

Soviet ally'.¹⁵² Those who place far less emphasis on ideological considerations include Donald Lammers and Robert Manne. Whilst writing decades apart, both Lammers and Manne are in agreement that the failure of Anglo-Soviet rapprochement was not the result of anti-communism.¹⁵³

Thus, the idea that His Majesty's Government was truly desirous of reaching an Anglo-Soviet understanding in the opening stages of the war appears, at first sight, improbable. However, it will be contended in this analysis of early Anglo-Soviet wartime relations that the British Government – more specifically, the British Foreign Office – consistently sought to bring about closer relations with the authorities in Moscow. This desire ebbed and flowed depending largely on the political context of the war. However, it will be illustrated that a central preoccupation of the men of the Northern Department and from 1939 their political masters was an attempt to lay the foundations upon which an improved Anglo-Soviet relationship could be built and strengthened. Discussions centring upon economics undoubtedly had political undercurrents as it was hoped that through a spirit of collaboration a political understanding between London and Moscow would be attained. This was a consistently pursued policy throughout the period under examination, and one that was initiated immediately upon the outbreak of the war with the British request for an economic agreement with the Soviets.

As Martin Folly notes, 'to plan on the basis of friendly relations, let alone close collaboration, was a radical departure for British policy'.¹⁵⁴ This was

¹⁵² Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 3.

¹⁵³ Robert Manne, 'The Foreign Office and the Failure of Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, 4 (1981), 725-755 (p. 750). Donald Lammers, 'Fascism, Communism, and the Foreign Office, 1937-1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971), 66-86 (0. 67).

¹⁵⁴ Martin Folly, 'British Government Attitudes to the USSR, 1940-1945: A Study of British Perceptions of the USSR and the Development of a Policy of Anglo-Soviet Cooperation within the Churchill Government', unpublished PhD thesis (London School of Economics and Political Science, 1997), p. 6.

undoubtedly true, particularly when one considers the poor state of Anglo-Soviet relations in the 1920s and 1930s and the prevalent antipathy to the Soviet regime. However, in his series of memoirs exploring British foreign policy during the Second World War, Winston Churchill argued that British policy towards the USSR was not encumbered by ideological prejudice. Rather, British policy was pragmatic and sought to establish improved relations with Moscow during the war.¹⁵⁵ In the 1940s and 1950s memoirs and histories had depicted Stalin's deviousness as a primary cause of the breakdown of Anglo-Soviet relations during the Second World War. Churchill's 'orthodox' account set the agenda for any discussion of the war for a generation. Thus, an effective critique of Churchill's argument was largely impossible. In the opinion of John Hubbard, writing in 1950, Churchill's *The Second World War* would unquestionably 'become a classic in English literature' as would the author's 'superior foresight and judgement in contrast to the manifold misconceptions and errors of his rivals and contemporaries'.¹⁵⁶ Walter P. Hall, also writing in 1950, fully ascribed to the belief that Churchill 'did everything within his power to aid the Soviets' and that it was only a lack of Soviet cooperation that disrupted the success of the alliance.¹⁵⁷

Following the release of the American official documents, the 1960s was dominated by American 'revisionist' historians who depicted Britain and America as having been constantly ready to betray one another, while seeking to find a common cause in their hostility to the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁸ The fundamental problem with the hypothesis of American revisionist historians such as Gabriel Kolko and Bruce

¹⁵⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, 6 vols (London: Cassell, 1948-1954).

¹⁵⁶ John Hubbard, 'The Second World War', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37, 2 (Sept., 1950), 348-350 (p. 349).

¹⁵⁷ Walter P. Hall, 'The Second World War by Winston Churchill', *The Journal of Modern History*, 23, 4 (Dec., 1951), 390-391 (p. 390).

¹⁵⁸ For example, see V.G. Kiernan, *America: The New Imperialism: From White Settlement to World Hegemony* (London: Zed Press, 1978).

Kuklick is the fact that they viewed British policy as unambiguously anti-Soviet and anti-Communist and were thus unwilling to acknowledge that Great Britain viewed an understanding with the Soviet Union as absolutely imperative if Hitlerism was to be defeated. Indeed, a common trend within American revisionism throughout the 1960s was the belief that the breakdown of relations between Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union was primarily due to the nature of American foreign policy. The revisionist school, although rather incoherent and diverse, generally asserted that Stalin was a cautious and flexible statesman. As such, any blame for the breakdown of the Anglo-American-Soviet relationship was placed squarely on America.¹⁵⁹ Central to Gabriel Kolko's argument was that during the pre-war years the 'so-called Allies lived, in various degrees, in mutual distrust and divisive fear of one another'.¹⁶⁰ Anglo-American hostility towards the USSR continued once hostilities erupted, thus ensuring that collaboration was never truly feasible. Indeed, Kolko argued that Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States did not share a single set of objectives, nor did they have unified political and economic peace aims. Thus, no real measure of cooperation was ever achieved.¹⁶¹ Terry Anderson's analysis of the Anglo-American relationship prior to the Cold War expresses similar revisionist sentiments. Although the British and American governments had a special relationship during the crusade against Nazi Germany, both countries shared tactics in order to contain Soviet expansion whilst limiting the role of Stalin in the relationship.¹⁶² Critics of Anderson have argued that too much emphasis is placed on

¹⁵⁹ See Charles S. Maier, 'Revisionism and the Interpretation of Cold War Origins', *Perspectives in American History*, 6 (1970), 579-612.

¹⁶⁰ Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War. The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 13. See also Bruce Kuklick, *American Policy and the Division of Germany: The Clash with Russia over Reparations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

¹⁶¹ Kolko, *Politics of War*, p. 618.

¹⁶² Terry Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War 1944-1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), p. 176.

Churchill's anti-Soviet feelings and that Anderson too readily dismissed the Prime Minister's statements of a British desire for cooperation with Moscow.¹⁶³ Indeed, as Arthur Schlesinger Jnr noted in his critique of revisionism, placing the breakdown of the Allied wartime relationship on anyone other than Stalin would be futile and illogical.¹⁶⁴

Writing with the benefit of official British documents, F.S. Northedge and Audrey Wells argued in 1982 that ideological bias was prevalent amongst the British political elite. Indeed, both before and during the Second World War, 'almost insurmountable antipathies between the two countries prevented joint action until the last possible moment'.¹⁶⁵ Gabriel Gorodetsky, a prevalent neo-revisionist historian and one of the first scholars to explore wartime diplomacy from a British perspective, developed the theme of anti-Communism within the British Government. In his analysis Gorodetsky both distorted and over-emphasised the importance and indeed the significance of antipathy to the Soviet regime during the Second World War.

In his 1988 article exploring the origins of the Cold War Gorodetsky asserts: 'Historians, misled by Churchill's towering oratory in his speech of 22 June 1941, have tended to cultivate a myth in which Churchill jettisoned his traditional anti-Bolshevik sentiments and welcomed Stalin into a genuine alliance'. This interpretation, in Gorodetsky's opinion, is 'false'.¹⁶⁶ As evidence to support his hypothesis, Gorodetsky unconvincingly argues that the Soviet Union was twice brought to the threshold of war with Britain when the Allies decided to bomb the Soviet oil fields at Baku. These plans, Gorodetsky asserts, were only dropped

¹⁶³ David Reynolds, 'The Origins of the Cold War: The European Dimension, 1944-1951', *The Historical Journal*, 28, 2 (Jun., 1985), 497-515 (p. 502).

¹⁶⁴ Arthur Schlesinger Jnr, 'Origins of the Cold War', *Foreign Affairs*, 46, 1 (Oct., 1967), 22-52.

¹⁶⁵ F.S. Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism. The Impact of a Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 6.

¹⁶⁶ Gabriel Gorodetsky, 'The Origins of the Cold War: Stalin, Churchill and the Formation of the Grand Alliance', *The Russian Review*, 47 (1988), 145-170 (p. 145).

because of the German occupation of Norway, Denmark and France.¹⁶⁷ This is a misleading example of British hostility towards the Soviet Union. As will be shown, the Baku plans were in fact abandoned as it was believed by both the Northern Department and the Foreign Secretary that the inevitable result of such action would be a breach with the Soviet Union.

In later work, Gorodetsky continued to assert that the ‘traditional Russophobia and repugnance towards communism in both the [British] Foreign Office and the armed forces’ ensured that British diplomacy ‘failed to grasp and exploit the intricate Soviet dual policy, aimed at regaining their manoeuvrability while forestalling the crystallisation of a German-British block’.¹⁶⁸ His continued belief that the Foreign Office was driven by preconceived political concepts that consequently barred the way for real collaboration is somewhat baffling in light of clear evidence to the contrary.¹⁶⁹ As Harry Hanak notes in his review of Gorodetsky’s work, the latter tends to overlook the very real difficulties facing British diplomats in their dealings with the Soviets. Indeed, neither Foreign Office officials in London nor the men at the embassy in Moscow were the ‘ogres’ that Gorodetsky portrayed. Their attitudes and policies towards a notoriously secretive and suspicious Soviet Government were formed under difficult circumstances and were not as antipathetic as Gorodetsky consistently maintained.¹⁷⁰ In the period prior to the signature of the Anglo-Soviet alliance of 1942, His Majesty’s Government proved on numerous occasions its ability to put its distaste for Communism to one side in order to fulfil its primary objective: the final defeat of Nazi Germany.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁶⁸ Gabriel Gorodetsky, ‘The Impact of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on the Course of Soviet Foreign Policy’, *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique*, 31, 1 (Jan., 1990), 27-41, pp. 30-31.

¹⁶⁹ Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps in Moscow 1940-1942. Diaries and Papers* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2007), p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ H. Hanak, ‘Review of *The Precarious Truce: Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1924-27*’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 56, 3 (Jul., 1978), 469-470 (p.470).

There is a further school of thought within the neo-revisionist perspective that criticises British policy towards the Soviet Union during the period under examination. Scholars such as Correlli Barnett and Wojtech Mastny argues that the decision-making elite in Whitehall were only too aware of Britain's limited resources, yet 'tried to hang on to great power status by engaging in a kind of diplomacy devoid of any real power'.¹⁷¹ As such, the British in fact appeased the Soviets in order to achieve *rapprochement* and thus perpetuate the delusion that they were still a 'Great Power'. In his study of wartime diplomacy, Mastny emphasises Stalin's central motivation, one of survival. The willingness of Roosevelt and Churchill to grant Stalin territorial concessions merely resulted in a 'limitless craving for security' and set the tone for further concessions as the war progressed.¹⁷² It is quite correct to assert that the Foreign Office was alive to the limited resources of Great Britain, as evident in the refusal during the Winter War to carry out a policy that would likely lead to war with the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Yet to conclude that the British were merely victims of 'wishful thinking' is equally unsatisfactory.¹⁷³

A final strand of neo-revisionist historiographical thought tends to take a less critical approach in its analysis of Anglo-Soviet relations during the Second World War. It is to that school of thought that this thesis belongs. It does not seek to discuss the origins of the Cold War nor does it ascribe blame for the failure of the Grand Alliance to survive after 1945. As Steven Merritt Miner notes, 'looking backward in history to find the causes of later conflicts can distort the relative importance of events and issues'.¹⁷⁴ Although the following analysis explores the underlying

¹⁷¹ Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), p. 594.

¹⁷² Wojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War. Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 282-3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

¹⁷⁴ Steven Merritt Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin: the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Grand Alliance* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 1.

assumptions within Whitehall about Britain's wartime relationship with the Soviet Union, much like the work of Martin Folly, the focus of this analysis focuses only on the earlier stages of the war when British policy was in a far more fluid state due to the pervading uncertainty of the Nazi-Soviet relationship. Whilst Folly argues that during the period of the Churchill Coalition, 'there developed a coherent thesis that the Soviet Union follow a policy of cooperation with Great Britain after the war',¹⁷⁵ it will be argued here that during the period under examination there was far less certainty in London about the motives and intentions of Soviet policy; indeed it was generally believed that the Soviet Union was merely a non-belligerent ally of Nazi Germany.

The number of studies focussing on the topic of Anglo-Soviet relations during the period from September 1939 to May 1942 is surprisingly small, in spite of its obvious significance. The ever-changing war situation greatly impacted upon British diplomacy, thus ensuring that a fluid approach based upon a 'policy of reserve' was maintained by the British Government towards the USSR. Miner's examination of the Anglo-Soviet relationship covers the same early-war period as this thesis and much like the following analysis, it seeks to correct the assertions put forward by Gorodetsky, particularly in his 1984 book *Stafford Cripps' Mission to Moscow, 1940-42*.¹⁷⁶ In his analysis of British foreign policy towards the USSR Miner clearly argues that Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Beaverbrook and Anthony Eden were all too willing to appease the Soviets in order to bring about an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*. Miner is critical of the British decision to grant concessions over the Baltic States, yet fails to acknowledge the fact that there was no real alternative for Great Britain at that time. *Realpolitik* dictated the necessity for *rapprochement* and Miner's work fails to

¹⁷⁵ Folly, 'British Government Attitudes to the USSR', p. 265.

¹⁷⁶ Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps' Mission to Moscow, 1940-42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

appreciate that His Majesty's Government was, at that juncture in the war, at a distinct disadvantage. Following the fall of France the British were left to fight the war alone. Should Germany turn on and defeat the USSR it seemed inevitable that Hitler's full attention and wrath would be directed against Great Britain.¹⁷⁷

Paul Doerr's analysis of the period is less critical of British policy towards the USSR. Doerr argues that 'British policy-makers were driven by a profound ambivalence' in their policy towards the USSR in the opening stages of the war. A deep and abiding mistrust of the Soviets was evident, yet the British 'remained acutely aware of the grave situation they faced and of the overriding need to retain a connection with Moscow'.¹⁷⁸ Although the overall hypothesis of distrust and cooperation put forward by Doerr most closely reflects the arguments contained in this thesis, his belief that 'such ambivalence can be found at the heart of British-Soviet relations during this period' remains unsatisfactory.¹⁷⁹ British policy was not ambivalent. British policy was dictated by a desire to get on better terms with the Soviet Government, as British interests dictated that an Anglo-Soviet alliance was paramount if victory over the Axis Powers was to be assured. This desire for *rapprochement* was originally motivated by economic necessity. However, it is clear that the Foreign Office hoped that improved economic relations would engender a spirit of collaboration that would extend to the political sphere. This is true of the entire period under examination. Soviet aggression in Finland led to a lessening of this desire, yet the unpredictability of the war ensured that British policy towards the USSR was under constant scrutiny and examination. Until the position of the Soviet Union could be ascertained it was impossible for the British to form a definitive

¹⁷⁷ Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 83.

¹⁷⁸ Paul Doerr, 'Frigid but Unprovocative': British Policy Towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36, 3 (July, 2001), 423-439 (p. 423).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

policy. Thus, British policy was fluid, yet underlined by a genuine desire for *rapprochement* with Moscow. Considerations of *realpolitik* dictated that ideological prejudice was relegated in importance and significance.

Thus, to argue that throughout this period ideology drove policy is pure misleading. Michael Jabara Carley's belief that ideological assumptions concerning the spread of communism meant that 'some British officials not want alliance with the Soviet Union, even after the German invasion of the USSR' is equally unconvincing.¹⁸⁰ British policy was pragmatic and unideological, driven purely by British interests. In this life and death struggle for survival, the final defeat of Nazi Germany was absolutely paramount. It was consistently held, following the fall of France in June 1940, that the best way to ensure victory was to seek *rapprochement* with the Soviet Government, no matter how distasteful such an alignment was to the British political elite.

¹⁸⁰ Michael Jabara Carley, 'A Situation of Delicacy and Danger': Anglo-Soviet Relations, August 1939-March 1940', *Contemporary European History*, 8, 2 (Jul., 1999), pp. 175-208 (p. 204).

Chapter One.

‘An act of treachery unparalleled in the history of the modern world.’¹⁸¹

The signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939 has been described as ‘one of the biggest disasters ever to overtake British foreign policy’.¹⁸² When the Triple alliance negotiations collapsed and the Nazi-Soviet Pact was concluded, the reverberations sent shockwaves throughout Europe. The British Foreign Office was in a state of astonishment over this sudden appearance of cooperation between the two ideological adversaries who had spent the years since 1933 locked in doctrinal and other forms of political combat – most obviously during the Spanish Civil War.

In signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact Molotov had ensured that friendly and peaceful relations between Moscow and Berlin were established. Further to the improvement of German-Soviet relations, Molotov had created the legal basis for the Soviet position in September 1939. Article II of the Non-Aggression Pact stated: ‘Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third power’.¹⁸³ In accordance with this provision the signatories were bound to unconditional neutrality in the case of the other party’s involvement in war which negated the Soviet Union’s obligation towards the cause of collective security as stipulated in the Covenant of the League of Nations. This commitment to neutrality in the event of a conflict was of central importance for the Soviet Government and was one of the key Soviet motivations behind signing the pact with Nazi Germany.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ National Archives [hereafter NA] FO371/ 24852/ N5619/ 283/ 38, Collier to Hodgson, 15 May 1940.

¹⁸² D.C. Watt, ‘An Intelligence Surprise’, p. 512.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, ‘The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany’, *Soviet Studies*, 44, 1 (1992), 57-78 (p. 71).

The impact of the pact must not be underestimated. It had a profound effect upon the perceptions of, and attitudes towards, Soviet Russia of the British political elite throughout the war. The distrust of Soviet intentions and actions that had marred Anglo-Soviet relations in the interwar years was redoubled in the aftermath of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Furthermore, it led figures such as Laurence Collier to rethink his opinions of the Soviet Government. Throughout the 1930s Collier had preached the necessity and indeed the desirability of reaching an understanding with the USSR; these opinions were shared by the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Sir Robert Vansittart. The first instance of Vansittart's advocacy of closer Anglo-Soviet relations arose in a memorandum composed in February 1935 in which he stated that the Soviet Union was sincerely desirous for peace due to its deep-rooted fear of German expansionism.¹⁸⁵ The importance of improved relations between His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Government increasingly became a priority in the eyes of Vansittart following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia on 3 October 1935. Anglo-Italian relations had previously been the lynchpin of Vansittart's security policy, yet following Mussolini's flagrant disregard for the League of Nations and the preservation of peace, the Permanent Under-Secretary began to view Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* as crucial as a bulwark to German aggression.¹⁸⁶ Collier also argued that the Soviet Union could act as a bulwark against German expansion which, he felt, was more of an immediate threat to British interests. Alongside his contention that Britain ought to seek a *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union, Collier repeatedly warned throughout the interwar years of the possibility of Nazi-Soviet cooperation. Three questions thus arise: why, then, did the Nazi-Soviet Pact take Collier, as much as his colleagues and superiors within the Foreign Office, by surprise? Did the failure

¹⁸⁵ NA, FO371/ 19460/ N880/ 135/ 38, memorandum by Vansittart, 21 February 1935.

¹⁸⁶ See Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937* (Westport: Praeger, 1997).

of Collier and his colleagues within the Northern Department to anticipate the Nazi-Soviet Pact affect his reputation within the Foreign Office? Finally, how did the Pact influence the attitudes of Collier and his colleagues in the Northern Department towards the Soviet Union?

In signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact, ‘the USSR had executed the most stunning *volte-face* in diplomatic history’.¹⁸⁷ The British Government, and more specifically, the British Foreign Office, felt the weight of the Soviet decision to ally with Nazi Germany. Throughout the interwar years a division of opinion was evident with regard to British policy towards Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia; this was both inter-departmental within the Foreign Office and within the Northern Department itself. While members of the Central Department felt that improved relations between the British and German Government was the most advantageous policy to pursue, Collier consistently argued that an alliance with the Soviet Government would best serve British interests and would constitute a bulwark against Nazi aggression and expansion.

It was generally agreed within the Foreign Office that Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany were equally villainous and that British policy should be cautious when dealing, or attempting to deal, with either Power. The effect of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on Collier was considerable. As a consequence the Head of the Northern Department aligned his attitudes with those of his colleagues in the Foreign Office, an occurrence that in the mid 1930s seemed as unlikely as the signing of the Pact itself. No longer preaching the desirability of coming to terms with the Soviet

¹⁸⁷ Roberts, ‘The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany’, p. 72.

Union, Collier believed that the Soviets had performed ‘an act of treachery unparalleled in the history of the modern world’.¹⁸⁸

Once Britain declared war on Germany in September, ten days after the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the lessons of 1939 played a significant part in the debate surrounding the formulation of British policy towards Soviet Russia. In the opening months of the war, no fighting took place between the allied Powers and the Germans.¹⁸⁹ This period of ‘suspended animation’,¹⁹⁰ otherwise known as the ‘Phoney War’ lasted from the British and French declaration of war to the German invasion of France on 10 May 1940. During this period there were two key dilemmas that British policy-makers faced in the immediate aftermath of the British declaration of war: 1) how Anglo-Soviet relations would develop – politically and economically – and 2) whether the Soviet Government would be willing to deal with the British Government in view of the recent Russo-German alignment. The signing of the Pact conditioned both considerations and shaped the opinions of, and the advice tendered by, members of the Northern Department. A clear example of the ‘lessons of 1939’ can be found in the negotiations surrounding the Anglo-Soviet economic agreement, negotiations that were initiated by Great Britain in October 1939 and were ongoing once Britain and the USSR finally reached a political understanding in 1942. The initial stages of this study, therefore, explore the aftermath of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and will continue to examine the two dilemmas that British policy-makers faced once Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939.

Upon Collier’s appointment as Head of the Northern Department in 1933, correlating with Hitler’s accession to power in Germany, there was a constant flow of correspondence within the Northern Department and the Foreign Office generally

¹⁸⁸ NA, FO371/ 24852/ N5619/ 283/ 38, Collier to Hodgson, 15 May 1940.

¹⁸⁹ References to ‘Allies’ at this stage of the war refers to Great Britain and France.

¹⁹⁰ Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 12.

relating to the state of Nazi-Soviet relations, to which Collier was often a key contributor. An important memorandum penned by Robert Vansittart, then the Permanent Under-Secretary, in February 1935 drew attention to two schools of thought within the Soviet Union. The 'Litvinov School' favoured improved relations with Great Britain whilst the 'Voroshilov School' wanted the Soviet Government to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards Nazi Germany. Vansittart feared that the Voroshilov school would prevail. Should such predictions prove to be accurate, this would be a 'disaster to our present world'.¹⁹¹

Reactions to Vansittart's memorandum varied within the Northern Department. Collier was in full agreement with Vansittart's conclusions. However, the Acting Counsellor in the Moscow Embassy, Noel Charles, argued against the possibility of a Nazi-Soviet *rapprochement* as the predominantly Jewish composition of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs would oppose any such *rapprochement*.¹⁹² Collier conceded that the Voroshilov School appeared unlikely to impact to any great degree upon Soviet foreign policy due to the diverging ideologies of Germany and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, he maintained that it remained a 'possibility with which we must reckon in the present fluid state of European politics'.¹⁹³

What is interesting, and somewhat baffling, is the clear shift in Collier's attitude towards the possibility of an understanding between Germany and the Soviet Union. In the first three years of his tenure as Head of the Northern Department, Collier repeatedly argued that relations between Germany and the Soviet Union showed signs of improvement, even in the face of both opposition from the ambassador in Moscow and members of his own department. Collier was very much

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² NA, FO371/ 19460/ N5520/ 76/ 38, minute by Charles, 17 October 1935.

¹⁹³ Ibid., minute by Collier, 29 October 1935.

guilty of casting aspersions during this period. Yet, between 1936-1939 Collier reversed his position and argued the opposite even in the face of mounting evidence, to the contrary.¹⁹⁴ Whilst one cannot state definitively why Collier changed his position in the latter half of the 1930s, it is possible to make an educated guess as to the probable cause.¹⁹⁵ For Collier, the relationship between France and the Soviet Union was of central importance. Following the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact in May 1935, Collier had stated that this example of ‘collective security’ would serve as a crucial bulwark against improvement of Nazi-Soviet relations. Whilst his colleagues in the Foreign Office – Orme Sargent, for example – warned that British support of the Franco-Soviet Pact would initiate German cries of ‘encirclement’, Collier not only disregarded such arguments as inconsequential but further argued that he had found no evidence to support such a claim. Rather, the Franco-Soviet Pact was essential for His Majesty’s Government as ‘both the French and Germans think that the Franco-Soviet Pact does help to prevent a German-Soviet *rapprochement*’, a sentiment that Collier wholly agreed with.¹⁹⁶

In a letter to Osborne at the Holy See in July 1939, one can appreciate a secondary reason for Collier’s reluctance to believe in the possibility of improved Nazi-Soviet relations. Collier wholly refused to believe in the danger of a German-Soviet understanding as the diametrically opposing doctrines of what were termed Fascism and Communism would not allow for such an eventuality.¹⁹⁷ Certainly, he believed that no such understanding would be possible as long as Hitler and Stalin remained in power. Nevertheless, although he dismissed the possibility of a political agreement, Collier did not discount the prospect of an economic understanding.

¹⁹⁴ For a detailed examination of the warnings, see Watt, ‘An Intelligence Surprise’, pp. 512-534.

¹⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Collier left no private papers for historians to examine.

¹⁹⁶ NA, FO371/ 21095/ N3129/ 45/ 38, minute by Collier, 29 May 1937.

¹⁹⁷ NA, FO371/ 23680/ N2335/ 243/ 38, Collier to Osborne, 3 July 1939.

Indeed, he acknowledged that the Soviet Union would likely adopt a ‘policy of complete isolation’ in the political sphere that would ‘serve German interests in practice’.¹⁹⁸ In essence, Collier could envisage a ‘temporary *détente*’ only.¹⁹⁹

How, then, did Collier justify his failure to anticipate the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, not least as in previous years he had argued that the ‘fluid’ state of European politics allowed for the improbable to become possible? Three days following the signature of that agreement Collier composed a memorandum detailing the reasons why he had failed to foresee the Nazi-Soviet *rapprochement*. Central to his argument was his belief that the reliability of the sources of information received by the Foreign Office was exceedingly difficult to assess. Indeed, as F.H. Hinsley stated with regards to the USSR: ‘intelligence was ... impeded by difficulties arising from the nature and the state of its sources of information, and these difficulties were not only more technical than the administrative obstacles but also more intractable’.²⁰⁰ The availability and indeed the reliability of the intelligence varied depending upon the state of His Majesty’s Government’s relations with the country in question. It was extremely difficult for His Majesty’s Ambassador in Moscow to obtain any information from Soviet sources, a point raised by the ambassador himself in 1938. Chilston reported in October that ‘it is impossible to obtain even an inkling of what is discussed within [the Kremlin’s] walls’.²⁰¹ In early 1939, when Sir William Seeds replaced Chilston, the change in ambassadors coincided with a change in the Soviet Government’s outlook, and, as the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations continued, a wealth of intelligence was being passed on to Seeds that related to the possibility of a Nazi-Soviet agreement, yet much of this was conflicting and difficult to assess.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, vol. I (London: HMSO, 1993), p. 45.

²⁰¹ NA, FO371/ 22289/ N5764/ 97/ 38, Chilston to Foreign Office, 10 October 1938.

Alongside the masses of information that Collier and his colleagues received, the Northern Department had to assess the varying sources of Foreign Office intelligence, and in so doing, divided the intelligence into categories – intelligence coming from direct German and Soviet sources; information received from third parties in touch with German sources; and finally, information from third parties in touch with Soviet sources. Many of the reports that had crossed his desk, he noted, had told against the probability of a German-Soviet *rapprochement*. On the contrary, it seemed that isolation, rather than a *rapprochement* with Germany was the likely alternative policy to one of agreement with the Allies.²⁰²

Indeed, Collier stated that it was believed that very few Soviet personalities were aware of any approaches made by Berlin. The available archival evidence contradicts Collier's belief. Indeed, there is a wealth of evidence of the consistent circulation of rumours within the Central Department of a possible Nazi-Soviet *rapprochement*. The question thus presents itself of whether Collier was not informed of such rumours, or, as is more likely, he simply chose to ignore them as they were an inconvenient truth. Whilst Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, was 'reliably reported' to know nothing of German overtures, it is highly likely that he was preaching ignorance yet was fully aware of the German overtures.

How, then, could Collier justify his lack of foresight when his colleagues in the Central Department predicted an improvement in Soviet-German relations? Collier asserted that a key reason for this lack of foresight was mainly due to the 'contradictory' nature of the intelligence from direct German sources. Some of the reports reaching the Foreign Office showed that certain factions of German opinion favoured some form of understanding with the Soviet Government, but Hitler himself

²⁰² NA, FO371/ 23686/ N4146/ 57/ 38, memorandum by Collier, 26 August 1939.

as well as the members of the upper echelons of the Nazi party ‘favoured the policy of disrupting the Soviet regime’.²⁰³ Hitler’s long-standing antipathy towards the Soviet regime was well known and had been articulated on many occasions. In *Mein Kampf* he referred to the leaders of Soviet Russia as ‘blood-stained criminals’ and, interestingly, stated that ‘you do not make pacts with anyone whose sole interest is the destruction of his partner’.²⁰⁴ Ironically, in signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Molotov had done just that.

Given Hitler’s obvious and frequently advertised hatred for Communism and the Soviet regime, can one blame Collier and his colleagues in the Foreign Office for doubting the validity of sources indicating an improvement in Russo-German relations? Rex Leeper of the Political Intelligence Department exonerated Collier for his lack of insight with regard to the Nazi-Soviet Pact. ‘For the six years that Hitler has ruled Germany he has proclaimed to the world that he is the bulwark against Bolshevism’, he noted, and, as a consequence of Hitler’s anti-Bolshevik utterances, many people in Western Europe were inclined to condone much of what he did in Germany and in Central Europe.²⁰⁵ By signing the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union Hitler had allowed Stalin to get into a stronger position for introducing the ‘Bolshevik virus’ into Europe and, for Stalin’s part, he chose an alliance with Nazi Germany over one with Britain and France as ‘war between Germany and Western Europe suited Stalin best’.²⁰⁶ As the Nazi-Soviet negotiations took place in secret, and reports from the third parties ‘usually came from persons of questionable reliability’, Collier gave proportionally less credence to the alleged evidence of *rapprochement* as it was ‘in the interests of both the Russians and the Germans –

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by R. Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971) p. 604.

²⁰⁵ NA, FO371/ 22985/ C16151/ 15/ 18, memorandum by Leeper, 4 October 1939.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

particularly the latter – to spread rumours of a Russo-German *rapprochement* for purposes of blackmail in their dealings with us'.²⁰⁷

One can understand Collier's ambivalence towards reports of a possible Soviet-German understanding. He could not trust the reliability of his sources nor the intelligence received. Any intelligence indicating a desire from Germany for *rapprochement* was 'reliably reported to be completely at variance with Hitler's own views and intentions' and the Foreign Office had no evidence of a corresponding desire on the Soviet side. Consequently, when the pact was signed and the Soviets allied herself with Germany, Collier could not explain the Soviet *volte-face*. He stated that 'We did not – and could not – know what inducements could be offered to them to make them reverse their previously avowed hostility to German expansion in Eastern Europe and increase the chances of their seeing a German army stand on the Soviet frontier'. The Foreign Office was wholly justified, due to past experience in Nazi-Soviet relations, 'in proceeding on the assumption that, whatever they did, they, [the Soviets] would do nothing contrary to their own vital interests; and it seems to us that, while isolation might be compatible with those interests, any positive encouragement of German ambitions would not be compatible with them'.²⁰⁸

Writing in May 1940 Collier continued to justify his confusion over the Soviet decision to ally with Nazi Germany. It was contrary to Stalin's interests to ally with Hitler as it allowed Germany to dominate Europe and stand on the Soviet frontier with an army capable of knocking out the Soviet Army 'several times over'. Had Stalin been a 'longer sighted despot' he would not have done anything to bring that danger nearer.²⁰⁹ He merely saw the economic advantages of aligning himself with Nazi Germany and in so doing allowed the USSR to remain neutral in the ensuing

²⁰⁷ NA, FO371/ 23686/ N4146/ 57/ 38, memorandum by Collier, 26 August 1939.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ NA, FO371/ 24852/N5619/283/38, Collier to Hodgson, 15 May 1940.

hostilities. Fitzroy Maclean viewed Stalin's policy differently. Whilst he agreed with Collier that neutrality was a motivating factor for Stalin, he disagreed that Stalin ought to have been more long-sighted when formulating foreign policy. What was essential for Stalin was securing the immediate concerns of the Soviet Union. Whilst Stalin most certainly did not desire a German-dominated Europe, he was aware that the Soviet Union was not in a position in 1939 to oppose Nazi Germany militarily. What the Soviet Union needed was time, which is exactly what the Nazi-Soviet Pact offered. In a conversation with M. Fierlinger, the Czech Minister in Moscow until December 1939, Maclean found himself agreeing with the openly pro-Soviet diplomat. In signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact the Soviet Government had only acted in accordance with its own interests. Stalin had to secure the immediate future of the Soviet Union. The most effective means of doing so was to remain neutral whilst doing everything possible to prolong the so-called capitalist war and thus weaken both Great Britain and Nazi Germany. Allying with Hitler and providing economic support for both Germany and Great Britain was the only possible course for Stalin to adopt.²¹⁰ Furthermore, as Max Jakobson noted, 'from his German colleague, Molotov had ... obtained during the night of August 23-24 everything he had worked for during one hundred days of negotiating with Britain and France'.²¹¹

The confusion surrounding the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact was not limited to Collier and his colleagues in the Northern Department. In January the following year, Osborne informed Collier of a conversation between himself and Signor Rosso, the Italian Ambassador in Moscow. Rosso stated that 'while he had never expected the British and French negotiations in Moscow to come to anything, he has been surprised by the announcement of the Russo-German Pact'. On the

²¹⁰ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5639/ 30/ 38, Maclean to Collier, 15 May 1940.

²¹¹ Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 98.

contrary, according to Rosso, the Germans had hoped merely to stall the Anglo-French negotiations in Moscow.²¹² Rosso was convinced that the initiative towards a political understanding with Germany had in fact come from the Soviet side and believed that Schulenburg [the German Ambassador in Moscow] ‘had been as much taken by surprise as he himself by this development’.²¹³

Both Collier and Fitzroy Maclean disagreed with the Italian Ambassador on his final statement. Maclean argued that there could be ‘no doubt that ever since 1933, when he first made advances to Herr Hitler, M. Stalin had been ready for a political agreement with Germany’.²¹⁴ Although for publicity reasons the Soviet propaganda machine had always kept up a howl against Fascism and Nazism, Maclean argued that ‘there is no reason to think that anyone as open-minded as Stalin ever had any fundamental prejudice against a system of government so much after his own heart’.²¹⁵ In signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact, it was the Germans who had made the ‘abrupt *volte-face*’. The obstacle to an understanding was Hitler’s ‘personal prejudice against what he genuinely imagined to be international Marxism’ and it was only due to the German General Staff’s fear of a war on all fronts that the German Chancellor was able to overcome his dislike. The initiative, Maclean believed, came from the German rather than the Soviet side. ‘M. Stalin, always an opportunist, simply made the best use of circumstances which had altered to his advantage’.²¹⁶ For Maclean, Stalin had ensured that should a European war break out, the Soviet Union would not need be involved. In Maclean’s opinion, ‘this in itself would have been a sufficient motive’.²¹⁷ As Soviet policy was fundamentally opportunistic – a point Maclean

²¹² NA, FO371/ 24843/N1151/30/38, Osborne to Collier, 23 January 1940.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 2 February 1940.

²¹⁵ NA, FO371/ 23698/ N6923/ 1459/ 38, minute by Maclean, 7 December 1939.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

consistently raised and reiterated the following year when discussing the possibility of entering into trade negotiations with the Soviet Government – Germany simply offered Stalin a better deal. Germany offered territorial advantages in return for a passive attitude on the part of the Soviet Union, which echoed the sentiment expressed by Collier in his letter to Osborne in July. The Western Powers, on the other hand, required the Soviet Union to engage in a war with Germany, ‘which it was neither capable nor desirous of doing’. This was the crux of the issue. For, in Maclean’s opinion, ‘until the spring of 1939 the dominating factor in Soviet policy has been the fear of Germany and anxiety to enlist the support of the Western Democracies against Germany’.²¹⁸ The signature of the German-Soviet agreement on 23 August 1939 effectively put an abrupt end to the Moscow negotiations between Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union, and had a profound impact on the international political scene. There is great diversity within the historiography of Nazi-Soviet relations during the 1930s which culminated in the signature of the pact. As Geoffrey Roberts has noted, the historiography of the agreement bears ‘eloquent testimony to the fact that it was possible to draw radically different inferences about Soviet policies and motivations from exactly the same set of events’.²¹⁹ Several historians have argued that Moscow was highly duplicitous in its relations with the Western democracies and Nazi Germany. Arguing that Moscow had moved against collaboration with the West at the time of the negotiations and was in fact in favour of concluding a pact with Nazi Germany, they point to Stalin’s speech to the Eighteenth

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) p. 63. For a more detailed assessment of Stalin’s attitude towards Nazi Germany and the probability of eventual conflict with Hitler see S. Pons, *Stalin and the Inevitable War, 1936-41* (London: Frank Cass, 2002). A useful survey of Soviet-German relations in the inter-war years can be found in A. M. Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations 1922-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Party Congress in March 1939 and the Merekalov-Weizsäcker meeting in April 1939 as instances of the Kremlin's insincerity.²²⁰

Gerhard Weinberg offers a less extreme interpretation of the real focus of Stalin's alliance strategy. Concentrating on the contacts between David Kandelaki, the head of the Soviet trade mission in Berlin, and Hjalmar Schacht, the German Minister of Economics, Weinberg argues that, whilst the discussions did not lead to a Soviet-German *rapprochement*, they were evidence of the fact that Stalin merely tolerated the idea of collective security as preached by Litvinov until an understanding with Nazi Germany could be achieved.²²¹ Roberts rejects such a hypothesis, arguing that until mid-August 1939 Moscow believed that the security of the Soviet Union would best be served by a combined front against Germany rather than through an accommodation with Hitler. It was only when the Triple alliance negotiations finally collapsed that Stalin favoured the idea of a *rapprochement* with Nazi Germany. *Rapprochement* with Germany would allow Soviet Russia to remain neutral in the ensuing conflict and would give the Soviets time to prepare for her eventual entry into the war.²²² The Anglo-French guarantee to Poland and Roumania of March-April 1939 had fundamentally changed the situation. As a consequence of these guarantees the Soviets could be comforted by the fact that before the Germans could reach the Soviet frontier, they would automatically be at war with Britain and France. Consequently, 'it only remained for him [Stalin] to extort from the Germans

²²⁰ Louise Grace Shaw, 'Attitudes of the British Political Elite towards the Soviet Union,' *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 13, 1 (2002) p. 65.

²²¹ Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) pp. 220-2, 310; Gerhard Weinberg, *World in the Balance: Behind the Scenes of World War II* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1981) p. 7.

²²² Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War. Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 63.

the highest possible price for the neutrality from which it had never been his intention to depart'.²²³

Collier was in agreement with Maclean that all 'the available evidence goes to show that it was a change of policy on *Hitler's* [emphasis in original] part which brought about the Soviet-German pact'.²²⁴ As Collier believed that it was German rather than Soviet duplicity that led to the Nazi-Soviet pact, one could conclude that he was continuing his relatively forgiving attitude towards the Soviet Union. This was not the case. On the contrary, in the aftermath of the pact, Collier's attitude *vis-à-vis* the USSR radically changed. Whilst he agreed with Maclean that it was Germany that made overtures to the Soviet Union and that Stalin 'simply made the best use of circumstances which had altered to his advantage',²²⁵ Collier no longer placed any trust in Soviet goodwill. For Collier, the Soviets always found 'fresh excuse for refusing to be forthcoming with us – the history of the 1939 negotiations... provide[s] plenty evidence of this'.²²⁶

In the months following the outbreak of war, Collier developed a hard-line attitude towards the Soviet Union, expressing sentiments wholly different from those uttered in the 1930s. 'For all practical purposes, we must treat Russia as an enemy, even if we do not actually declare war on her', he wrote in March 1940.²²⁷ For Collier, the Soviet Union was motivated solely by self-interest and would only enter the war if it suited her. Here one can appreciate a distinct change in Collier's views on the Soviet Union following the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Throughout the 1930s Collier had argued that His Majesty's Government ought to treat Nazi Germany as the enemy of Great Britain. In a letter to Professor Postan of the Ministry of Economic Warfare

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., minute by Collier, 3 February 1940.

²²⁵ NA, FO371/ 23698/N6923/1459/38, minute by Maclean, 7 December 1939.

²²⁶ NA, FO371/ 24852/N6359/263/38, Collier to Postan, 28 August 1940.

²²⁷ NA, FO371/ 24843/N3363/30/38, minute by Collier, 20 March 1940.

in August 1940, he succinctly and clearly illustrated his radical change of opinion with regard to the Soviet Union. In his fifteen years of dealing with the Soviet Government, Collier had learned that Stalin was motivated by self-interest only and no amount of concessions would sway Stalin in favour of *rapprochement* with Britain. If anything, Stalin would regard this as a weakness on the part of His Majesty's Government.²²⁸

Collier's attitude towards the Soviet Union had changed completely as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. He was 'convinced from long and usually painful experience that the only profitable policy to employ with the Soviet Government is to set on the Scotchman's motto: 'Nothing for nothing, and precious little for half-a-crown''. Indeed, it seemed 'odd' to him that the 'same people in this country, who blamed the late government for not adopting that policy towards Hitler and Mussolini, should urge us to adopt the opposite policy towards Stalin'.²²⁹ For Collier, it was 'deeds alone that count'²³⁰ and the USSR's *rapprochement* with Nazi Germany was a 'very black deed of treachery'.²³¹ Such treachery left a permanent imprint on Collier's perception of Soviet sincerity and goodwill, a transformation that was evident throughout the rest of his tenure in the Northern Department.

Once the shock of the Nazi-Soviet Pact had subsided and the war had broken out, the role of the British Foreign Office had altered. The aim of British diplomacy shifted from attempting to avert war, to shoring up Britain's political relations with allies and neutrals in order to gain the most favourable conditions for waging war.²³² The key consideration for British policy-makers was how to treat the USSR, and

²²⁸ NA, FO371/ 24852/N6359/263/38, Collier to Postan, 28 August 1940.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ NA, FO371/ 24845/N7148/30/38, minute by Collier, 10 November 1940.

²³¹ NA, FO371/ 24852/N5619/283/38, Collier to Hodgson, 15 May 1940.

²³² W.N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy since Versailles, 1919-1963* (London: Methuan and Co. Ltd, 1968), p. 234.

indeed, how Soviet policy was likely to develop in the opening months of the war. Britain's political and economic relations with the USSR were central to that debate. In the month following the outbreak of the war Collier was asked by Major Conwell-Jones of the Committee of Imperial Defence to prepare a confidential note exploring what he believed the Soviet attitude to be in the aftermath of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the German invasion of Poland. The nature and extent of Russo-German collaboration was a central consideration for Collier. It was difficult to assess the quality of the intelligence received by the Northern Department, as the 'evidence of German-Soviet collaboration, actual or potential, is so conflicting that it is difficult to strike a balance of probabilities'.²³³ In spite of such difficulties, Collier was able to ascertain that the Soviet Government were offering a good deal of economic assistance to Germany, thus rendering the British blockade of Germany less effective. The USSR had sent large consignments of gold to Germany through the Baltic States; Collier stated that 'it has been suggested that this gold is the Nazis' price for the abandonment of German interests and influence in the North-East corner of the Baltic'. To be sure, there had been large consignments of gold shipped from the Soviet Union to Germany. However, Collier noted that 'there is as yet no evidence that supplies of raw materials on any considerable scale have been sent to Germany'. Nevertheless, the fact that the German Government had sent experts to the Soviet Union to reorganise Soviet heavy industry and communications indicated a worrying level of collaboration between the two countries.

As for Soviet motives behind this cooperation with the German Government, Collier believed that the Soviet's motives 'are as obscure as her actions', but, since she could not reasonably desire the emergence of a strong and victorious Germany, 'it

²³³ NA, FO371/ 22985/ C16324/ 5/ 38, Collier to Major Conwell-Jones, 19 October 1939.

has generally been assumed that her object is to hold the balance between the belligerents with a view to bolshevising Europe at little cost to herself when both sides become exhausted'. Soviet help would stop short of actual entry into the war on the German side, although such an eventuality could not be discounted. However, 'it seems hardly conceivable that any rational Soviet statesman could desire a peace which would leave the Soviet Union to face a victorious and unexhausted Germany, ruled by leaders obsessed with the idea of indefinite expansion, particularly in Eastern Europe, anxious to recover her lost position in the Baltic and possessing armed forces far more efficient than those of his own country'. To conclude, Collier stated that there was as yet no clear evidence of the USSR's motives or intentions, and 'in certain respects she has already revealed herself as an active helper of Germany; but her policy as a whole is, so far at least, susceptible of an interpretation very unfavourable to German interests in the long run'.²³⁴

Therefore, Paul Doerr's assertion that in the period immediately following the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 'British policy-makers [within the Foreign Office] were driven by a profound ambivalence' towards the USSR, an ambivalence that continued throughout the Winter War period, is somewhat misleading.²³⁵ To be sure, it was a difficult task to develop a coherent and firm policy towards such a duplicitous country, yet the archival evidence available illustrates that there was no ambivalence amongst the advisers within the Foreign Office. D.W. Lascelles, the First Secretary at the British Embassy in Moscow, summed up the prevalent attitude within the Northern Department in a minute of 8 December 1939: '[We ought] not to go out of our way to provoke the Soviet Government into active measures against us, but to show them

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Paul W. Doerr, 'Frigid but Unprovocative': British Policy Towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36, 3 (July, 2001), 423-439 (p. 424).

clearly that we are not frightened of their bank'.²³⁶ Should it be in their best interest, the British Government would not be afraid to antagonise Moscow, and would voice opposition to any unsatisfactory action carried out by the Soviets. Such sentiments were also expressed by Maclean when discussing British policy towards Soviet Russia. To be deterred from taking action against the Soviet Union for fear of the Soviet response would be a mistake.²³⁷ British policy was cautious, yet it was apparent that, should definite action be needed against the Soviet Union, His Majesty's Government would stand up for British interests.

British policy towards the Soviet Union in the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-French declaration of war against Nazi Germany was concerned with the likely course of Soviet foreign policy itself. In signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact the Soviet Government had ensured itself a neutral position once war broke out, yet the British Foreign Office had to consider whether that neutrality was likely to continue in the long term. Molotov would often declare that 'the non-aggression pact concluded between the Soviet Union and Germany bound us to maintain neutrality in the case of Germany being involved in war.'²³⁸ The foreign policy of Soviet Russia was dictated not only by an intense desire to remain neutral, but by a very real fear of Germany. Maclean believed that it was not at all surprising that Stalin had decided to continue his cooperation with Germany. Cooperation with Germany provided the added benefit of strengthening the Soviet position, which, ironically, worked against Germany should Hitler decide to attack the USSR.²³⁹ The Secret Additional Protocol of the Nazi-Soviet Pact allowed the USSR to pursue an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy and strengthen her position within Europe. Article II of the Secret

²³⁶ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N7134/ 57/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 8 December 1939.

²³⁷ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 8 December 1939.

²³⁸ V. Molotov, *Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union* (Moscow, 1939), p. 10.

²³⁹ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5888/ 30/ 38, Minute by Maclean, 19 June 1940.

Additional Protocol to the treaty envisaged that a new partition of Poland with the rivers Narew, Vistula and San as the approximate boundaries between the German and Soviet spheres. Any future questions on the maintenance and running of an independent Polish state would be decided by means of a friendly agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union.²⁴⁰

On 17 September the Polish Ambassador to Moscow received a note informing him that the Soviet Government had ordered the Red Army to march into Eastern Poland. The British response to the Soviet move is unsurprising. The British government made no move, as David Dilks noted, 'judging wisely that the defeat of Nazi Germany would provide a more sufficient task'.²⁴¹ As Lancelot Oliphant²⁴² told the Cabinet, a Soviet invasion of Poland was not an eventuality covered by the Anglo-Polish agreement of August 1939. Oliphant had claimed that it was understood by both parties that the 'European Power' referred to in the terms of the Treaty was Germany,²⁴³ thus allowing Britain to avoid intervening on behalf of Poland. Oliphant recognised that the Soviets had 'committed, if possible, a more flagrant act of aggression against Poland than the Germans',²⁴⁴ yet it was politically inexpedient to challenge the Soviet action. As a consequence, Soviet neutrality was confirmed as Britain and France thought it wise not to question it. Lascelles summed up the situation facing the British Government in a response to a letter of complaint from a private citizen: 'It is quite true that our attitude towards the Soviet Government is dictated by funk-fear of their combining with Germany if we annoy them ... Our policy towards the Soviet Union being in fact an immoral

²⁴⁰ R. J. Sontag & J. Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941* (Washington: Department of State, 1948), p. 78.

²⁴¹ David Dilks, 'Great Britain and Scandinavia in the "Phoney War"', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2 (1977), 29-51 (p. 33).

²⁴² Cadogan's deputy and the superintending Undersecretary in the Northern Department.

²⁴³ NA, CAB65/ 1, 18, 3, 17 September 1939.

²⁴⁴ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N4862/ 57/ 38, Oliphant to Cadogan, 25 September 1939.

one thrust upon us by necessity'.²⁴⁵ Sir William Seeds agreed with Lascelles' response, noting that it would be unwise to break off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Government. Once again the British position was very much dependent upon considerations of Nazi-Soviet relations. The presence of a British Ambassador in Moscow would be essential once the Soviet-German friendship began to wear thin, and, for Seeds, the closer the Soviet-German contact became, the more likely a 'desirable friction' would occur.²⁴⁶ Following the announcement of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty on 28 September, the War Cabinet fully agreed with Seeds. Close cooperation over any period of time would be hindered by the well-known antagonism between the two countries.²⁴⁷

Seeds dealt with this issue in some detail in the month following the German invasion of Poland. The ambassador highlighted the difficulties in reaching a conclusion as to whether the USSR was likely to enter the war against Great Britain as 'evidence is not obtainable under Moscow conditions either one way or the other'.²⁴⁸ Indeed, for that reason it was largely acknowledged that in the opening months of the war the value of the British Embassy in Moscow as a listening-post was very slight.²⁴⁹ When composing a reply for the Foreign Secretary for the upcoming House of Lords debate, in which Halifax had expected the subject of Anglo-Soviet relations to be raised, Collier reinforced the sentiments of his ambassador. Collier highlighted the 'obscurity of present Soviet policy' and emphasised the importance of 'proceeding with caution' when approaching the uncertain topic of Anglo-Soviet relations.²⁵⁰ In spite of the obscurity of their policy, Collier believed that Soviet

²⁴⁵ NA, FO371/ 23683/ N5544/ 92/ 38, Lascelles to Miss J.F. Tuke, 22 October 1939.

²⁴⁶ NA, FO371/ 23103/ C14003/ 5/ 38, Seeds to FO, 17 September 1939.

²⁴⁷ NA, FO371/ 22985/ C16324/ 5/ 38, War Cabinet Conclusions 43 (39), Extract 6, 10 October 1939.

²⁴⁸ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N5240/ 57/ 38, telegram by Seeds, 12 October 1939.

²⁴⁹ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N7134/ 57/ 38, minute by Maclean, 8 December 1939.

²⁵⁰ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N5937/ 57/ 38, minute by Collier, 25 October 1939.

Government had made it clear that they wished for no change in their political position of strict neutrality that would be satisfactory for His Majesty's Government. Halifax was in full agreement on this point, and repeated Collier's statement verbatim in the debate in the House of Lords. This not only illustrated that the advice tendered by the Head of the Northern Department was deemed credible by his superiors, but showed that a policy of caution was considered the best course for His Majesty's Government, as it was not wise to antagonise the Soviet Government and risk gaining another adversary.²⁵¹ This policy was drawn up in the Northern Department and adopted within the upper echelons of the Foreign Office.

Alongside the key consideration of the likely course of Soviet policy, the Foreign Office also debated the state of Russo-German relations in the aftermath of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. What level of cooperation could one expect from the newly-aligned aggressors? F.S. Northedge and A. Wells noted that in the months following the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and Russo-German aggression against Poland, 'Stalin and Hitler were depicted by British cartoonists as virtually the same person'.²⁵² For Seeds, each visit by Ribbentrop to Moscow had led to 'greater extravagance' and the meetings between Ribbentrop and Stalin had 'the general atmosphere of gangsters talking to gangsters and must tend to mutual incitement to move to dictatorial action'.²⁵³ Whilst Ribbentrop had hinted that the consultation between Germany and the USSR was likely to lead to something more than merely an improvement of commercial relations, Seeds noted that the Soviet Union could get all she wanted without going to war and that the threat of German-Soviet consultation may be

²⁵¹ It is uncertain whether the British Government was aware of Ribbentrop's offer of a military alliance to Stalin in September 1939, or that it was Stalin's fear of becoming a belligerent in the war was the key reason for his refusal.

²⁵² F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism: the Impact of a Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 76.

²⁵³ NA, FO371/23678/N5240/57/38, telegram by Seeds, 12 October 1939.

‘purely bluff and merely a delusion of Ribbentrop’s’.²⁵⁴ Lascelles was in agreement. Not only had Stalin obtained a great deal from the Nazi-Soviet Pact, but he had done so at Germany’s expense: ‘Apart from paper declarations he has paid nothing so far, and if Germany collapses he never will have to pay’.²⁵⁵ However, Lascelles was fully aware that it was impossible to gauge the intentions of the Kremlin and believed that the best course for His Majesty’s Government was to ‘sit tight and avoid friction as far as possible’.²⁵⁶

It was during this period of uncertainty that the question first arose of sending Sir Stafford Cripps to Moscow. On 18 September Cripps wrote to Halifax stating that there were members of the Labour Party who felt that the Soviets had been treated in a ‘somewhat cavalier way’.²⁵⁷ In the current circumstances Cripps felt that it was necessary that something most urgent should be done as regards the problem of the USSR. Due to his understanding of - and sympathy towards - Soviet politics, he believed himself to be an ideal candidate to be sent to Moscow in order to investigate the situation. Indeed, Cripps had received many invitations from the Soviets in the past to go to the Soviet Union and meet the rulers, yet he had never visited the country.²⁵⁸ Acknowledging that he would be making the trip as a private individual, he was hopeful that he could ‘do something which would eventually be of some assistance to this country’, and that he might possibly ‘get information which would help in the solution of the problem’.²⁵⁹ Lascelles minuted that ‘Our relations with the Soviet Union are now so bad that I doubt whether Sir Stafford Cripps could make

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., minute by Lascelles, 14 October 1939.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N4571/ 57/ 38, Cripps to Halifax, 18 September 1939.

²⁵⁸ NA, FO371/ 23683/ N4571/ 57/ 38, Cripps to Halifax, 18 September 1939.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

them much worse if he tried'.²⁶⁰ Whilst it was generally accepted that a visit by Cripps would not harm the present situation, there were great protestations within the Foreign Office to Cripps' suggestion of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Government. This was first taken up by Ivone Kirkpatrick, the former First Secretary at the British Embassy in Berlin, who reiterated similar points to those put by Cripps to the effect that it would be an ideal way of appeasing those within the Labour Party who felt that the Soviets had been treated unfairly in the months preceding the war.²⁶¹ Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, was in favour of creating alarm in Germany, but felt that 'the words "non-aggression pact" stink somewhat since August 23'.²⁶² For Lancelot Oliphant any attempt to woo the Soviets would be misguided, as 'the Soviet is in no way pro-British and anything they do which embarrasses the Germans will not be for our beux yeux [sic]', a point which met with the full agreement of Sargent. Any British approach of that kind would be regarded by Stalin as 'very naïve'.²⁶³ Sargent then questioned whether His Majesty's Government needed to make an approach to the Soviet Government when Halifax had already seen Maisky to whom he had put certain definite questions. At the heart of Sargent's protest lay his opposition to Soviet aggression in Poland. He believed it would be a mistake to send Cripps to Moscow and to raise the possibility of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Government at a time when the Soviets had committed a 'more flagrant act of aggression against Poland than the Germans, and have seized as a result a larger portion of Poland than have the Germans'.²⁶⁴

As September drew to a close the debate surrounding both Cripps's visit to Moscow and the possibility of a non-aggression pact with Soviet Russia continued

²⁶⁰ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N4571/ 57/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 18 September 1939.

²⁶¹ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N4751/ 57/ 38, minute by Kirkpatrick, 22 September 1939.

²⁶² Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 23 September 1939.

²⁶³ Ibid., minute by Oliphant, 25 September 1939, minute by Sargent, 25 September 1939.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 25 September 1939.

within the Foreign Office, the Soviets were preparing for another act of aggression, with Finland the intended victim. The Soviet Government had turned its attention to Finland following the successful absorption of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, which was made possible as a consequence of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Indeed, on 25 September Stalin told the German Ambassador that he intended to take up the 'solution of the problem of the Baltic States in accordance with the Secret Protocol and expected the unstinting support of the German Government'.²⁶⁵ The absorption of the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – was a smooth and speedy process. On 27 September the Soviet Union had concluded a pact with Estonia for the lease to the USSR of naval bases on the islands of Osel and Dago, whilst on the 5 October, the day that the Soviet authorities had sent the invitation to the Finnish Government in order to discuss 'concrete political questions', the Soviet Government concluded a similar pact with Latvia, again securing naval bases on Latvian territory. By 10 October the process was complete, with the Lithuanian Government granting permission for the maintenance of Soviet land and air forces at agreed points on Lithuanian territory.²⁶⁶ Once Baltic acquiescence to Soviet control was secured, the Soviet Government could set its sights on Finland.

Arguably, Finland was the strongest and most influential Power in the region. Soviet aggression in Finland had a significant impact on Anglo-Soviet relations. As W. N. Medlicott stated, the Soviet attack on Finland had marked Stalin's real breach with British opinion.²⁶⁷ The Foreign Office was aware of the impending Soviet invasion of Finland. This topic raised important questions for those in the Foreign Office. Firstly, what did the Soviet Government want from Finland? Secondly, how

²⁶⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, D, VIII, p. 130.

²⁶⁶ Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London: H.M.S.O., 1962), pp. 12-13.

²⁶⁷ Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy since Versailles*, p. 238.

would Soviet aggression against Finland impact upon Anglo-Soviet economic relations? The Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland and the ensuing Soviet-Finnish War ensured that poor political relations continued between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Whilst the Prime Minister was principally concerned with Nazi Germany, the Foreign Office was very much preoccupied with Anglo-Soviet relations during the opening months of the war. Anglo-Soviet political relations were at a standstill as a result of Soviet aggression against Poland, yet in the economic sphere there was hope of an improvement and indeed it was possible that an understanding could be reached between London and Moscow. An understanding with the Soviet Union would only be possible should they help the Western Powers in the successful application of their economic blockade of Germany. As neither Great Britain nor France was in a position to wage war in September 1939, their chief weapon was the economic blockade of Germany.²⁶⁸ The British Government very much wished for the Soviets to play a key role in this strategy. It was hoped that by signing a trade agreement with Britain the Soviets would no longer act as a source of contraband goods for the German Government. This was a matter of great concern within the Foreign Office. Any goods sent to the Soviet Union by Great Britain could be passed on to the Germans and would thus render the Allied economic blockade ineffective. As Steven Merrit Miner has acknowledged during the period between the outbreak of the war and the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, British analysis of the European situation maintained that Soviet Russia must either be divided from the Germans by means of a comprehensive Anglo-Soviet agreement or

²⁶⁸ W.N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952), pp. 43-58.

through successfully closing off the Soviets as a conduit for contraband supplies to Germany.²⁶⁹

Following the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland on 17 September 1939, a fresh Anglo-Soviet trade treaty was signed on 11 October. The reason for the continuation of economic relations was due to necessity. Britain badly needed Soviet timber for war production, particularly for the construction of aircraft. It was only the Soviets who could provide the necessary levels of timber, as Commonwealth countries such as Canada did not have the capabilities to do so. The Cabinet had insisted that so acute was the British need for Soviet timber everything must be done to ensure that the terms of the 1936 Anglo-Soviet trade agreement were carried out in full.²⁷⁰ Though the agreement was signed on 11 October, it was not without its hardships for the British negotiators. The negotiation process was tedious and drawn-out, with the Soviets proving their insolence through petty actions. During the course of the discussions the Soviets had decided to hold up all British shipments as a demonstration, one would assume, of how crucially important the shipments were for Great Britain. The final agreement was *ad hoc* and limited, yet was evidence that although Anglo-Soviet political relations were strained, there was scope for an improvement of economic relations.

Following a number of conversations with Ivan Maisky, Halifax was convinced that the Soviets were genuinely anxious to conclude a satisfactory trade agreement, as he told his Cabinet colleagues on 28 September, the very day in which the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty was signed.²⁷¹ Halifax was not the only Cabinet member who believed Maisky's utterances, and further believed in the sincerity of his declarations were condoned by his Government. Hugh Dalton

²⁶⁹ Merrit Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 14.

²⁷⁰ CAB62/ 1, 16/5, 15 September 1939.

²⁷¹ CAB65/1, 28 September 1939.

noted in his diary following the Soviet march into Poland that there was a number of prominent politicians – including Anthony Eden²⁷² and R.A. Butler²⁷³ - who had hoped that trade negotiations could be used as a platform to improve Anglo-Soviet relations in both the economic and political sphere.²⁷⁴ However, it was clear any Soviet aggression against Finland would negatively impact upon Anglo-Soviet economic relations.

Reliable information regarding Soviet demands on Finland was exceedingly hard to acquire, ensuring that the task facing those in the Foreign Office was even more difficult. The rumour mill was busy circulating a vast array of information that was supposition at best. Should the Soviet Union invade Finland, how was London to react? Was it possible that the British Government could rouse public opinion to such an extent as to justify involving the country in yet another international quarrel, especially when the Finnish Government refused to say what it was up against? As Lascelles noted, mere sympathy with Finland's desire for independence was academic if that independence was not threatened.²⁷⁵ A further question that arose at that time was how far the German Government supported the Soviet Government in its quest to acquire Finnish territory. Once again German-Soviet relations were at the forefront of British political thought. From the start of the Soviet-Finnish negotiations in October to the Soviet declaration of war on 30 November, these questions were frequently debated within the Foreign and War Office and continued to be discussed once the Finns capitulated to Soviet demands.

Finland had gained independence in 1917 after holding the status of an autonomous grand duchy within the Russian Empire. Relations between the newly

²⁷² Anthony Eden was at the time the Dominions Secretary.

²⁷³ R.A. Butler was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

²⁷⁴ Hugh Dalton Diary, 25 September 1939.

²⁷⁵ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N5388/ 991/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 18 October 1939.

independent Finland and Soviet Russia in the interwar years were marred by mutual distrust, and both political and economic relations were strained.²⁷⁶ The Soviet Government had been attempting to conclude an economic agreement with Finland since the beginning of 1939, with Soviet-Finnish trade talks commencing in March 1939. The Soviet Government had wished to lease Högland as well as four smaller islands off the Gulf of Finland for thirty years. Högland was regarded as crucial for naval observation posts along the approaches to Leningrad. The Finnish Foreign Minister refused to lease the islands off the Gulf of Finland as he believed that action would negatively impact upon Finnish neutrality.²⁷⁷

The conclusion of a second agreement between Molotov and Ribbentrop, which was signed on 29 September, was not only evidence of further Soviet-German cooperation, but indicated that the Soviets were plotting action that would preoccupy the minds of the British and French Governments. The British Chiefs of Staff believed that any such action was likely to take place in the Baltic region, Finland or the Balkans. Thus, when the Finnish Government received an invitation on 5 October to send a delegation to Moscow to discuss the 'concrete political questions' that had been brought about by the war in Western Europe, it did not come as a surprise to Britain or France.²⁷⁸ Stalin's motivation for discussions with the Finnish Government lay in his desire to improve the defences of Leningrad and Murmansk through the acquisition of Finnish territories. On the Karelian Isthmus, the Finnish frontier at its closest point was thirty-two kilometres from Leningrad. This was regarded as a major strategic disadvantage for the Soviet Union, as Leningrad was vulnerable from heavy artillery attack from Finland and other potential Soviet enemies. As a consequence Stalin wanted the Finnish border to be moved further north away from the city.

²⁷⁶ Anthony F. Upton, *Finland, 1939-40* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1974), p. 12.

²⁷⁷ Jacobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*, p. 63.

²⁷⁸ G. Gripenberg, *Finland and the Great Powers* (Lincoln: Macmillan, 1965), p. 75.

Furthermore, on the western coast of Finland, the Aaland Islands gave Finland a dominant position in the Gulf of Bothnia and dominated the sea approaches to Stockholm.²⁷⁹ Consequently, Finnish territories impacted upon Sweden and the USSR and, crucially for Britain, the ability of Germany to wage war. Finland was in a position to control the route along which Swedish iron-ore was shipped to Germany, a point which was taken up by Winston Churchill in the British War Cabinet. In the far north of Finland, the province of Petsamo was of crucial strategic significance for the Soviet Union. Petsamo divided the Soviet Union from Norway and had direct access to the Arctic Ocean. Thus, any Soviet-Finnish conflict had the potential to impact upon British, German, Swedish and Norwegian interests, illustrating why this conflict had dominated the minds of Foreign Office and War Office officials for the first six months of the Second World War.

The first official Foreign Office paper relating to the Soviet threat to Finland was written by Collier at the request of Lancelot Oliphant on 21 September, and following a re-draft – containing no substantial or significant changes – the paper was widely circulated within His Majesty's Government on 25 September. Copies were sent to the Foreign Secretary, the Permanent Under-Secretary and Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary, the Air Ministry, Admiralty, Board of Trade and the Ministry of Economic Warfare. Writing on behalf of Lord Halifax, Collier provided an overview of both the current international situation following the outbreak of war and the views of his superiors in the Foreign Office. Collier believed that the Soviet Government had been encouraged by its success in Poland and was intending to put pressure on Finland in order to secure the cession of the islands in the Gulf of Finland. Furthermore, as a consequence of recent Soviet policy in the Baltic, including the

²⁷⁹ Upton, *Finland*, p. 12.

Soviet Government's attempts to secure the possession of Högländ and other islands off the Gulf of Finland, Collier noted that public opinion in Finland and the Baltic States had been seriously alarmed by recent Soviet manoeuvres as well as the implications arising from the Nazi-Soviet Pact, notably the German-Soviet partition of Poland.²⁸⁰ In the wake of the apparent strengthening of Nazi-Soviet relations and recognising the growing Soviet threat to Finnish independence, Collier believed that the Finnish Government was not disposed to yield to threats and was seeking means for self-defence. This was the crux of the issue for Collier and was a key debating point within the Foreign Office in the coming months – whether His Majesty's Government ought to encourage Finnish resistance and whether Britain could afford to offer any real assistance to the Finns. Collier forcibly argued a case for encouraging Finland and the Baltic States to draw together 'in order to avoid the necessity of complete subservience to either German or Soviet aims'.²⁸¹ His reasons for suggesting such a course of action included the desirability of distracting German attention and German forces from the main theatre of war in Western Europe. It was hoped that German resources would be exhausted as a result, and should Stalin be willing to sign an economic agreement with Britain, the economic blockade would cripple the German war economy. Additionally, there would be the inevitable outcome of increasing the self-imposed 'neutral' Soviet Government's preoccupation through prolonged action in Finland. His Majesty's Government would derive economic advantages as a result of British encouragement of Finnish resistance to Soviet and German pressure. They could ensure the maintenance of supplies of foodstuffs and timber from Finland and the Baltic States that would otherwise be cut off if they submitted entirely to German pressure.

²⁸⁰ NA, FO371/ 23643/ N4712/ 194/ 56, memorandum by Collier, 25 September 1939.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Adopting the advice tendered by Collier, Halifax believed that the Finnish Government and people were ‘genuinely determined ... to defend their independence and neutrality’, which would be possible due to Finland’s comparatively large army of good fighting quality and its frontier which was well adapted for defence.²⁸² British assistance to Finland would come in the form of providing modern equipment – such as war material and tanks – and discreetly aiding the Finnish Government in the construction of a railway to the ice-free port of Petsamo. The question of the supply of tanks to Finland was particularly important for Collier, as the British military authorities had retained six tanks from the Finnish order of thirty-two, which had been placed in 1936. The War Office’s determination to withhold the tanks was baffling for Collier. The War Office’s justification that the tanks would be used for training purposes was quite rightly questioned by Collier as the British Army did not use, and had never used, the same type of tank as the Finns. It was simply a case of the War Office playing games, the consequences of which would have a detrimental effect on Anglo-Finnish relations. Unfortunately for both Collier and the Finns, the issue of the incomplete order was to be drawn out for a number of weeks.

At the end of September Collier received a telegram from the British Ambassador at Helsingfors, Robert Snow, supporting the points Collier had made in his paper. Following a conversation that had taken place in Washington between the Finnish Foreign Minister and the American Ambassador, Mr. Schoenfeld, Snow informed Halifax that Schoenfeld considered that there was a great risk to Finland due to its position of isolation at the end of the Baltic. Their ‘defenceless exposure to the Russian menace’ could tempt the Finns to ‘place its sole hopes in Germany’.²⁸³ Collier disagreed. He noted in a minute on 7 October that the recent developments

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N4835/ 991/ 38, Snow to Halifax, 19 September 1939.

would have convinced the Finnish authorities that they could not rely on Germany for any kind of support, be it moral or material, against the Soviet Government.²⁸⁴ Central to his reasoning was the visit of Ribbentrop to Moscow on 27 September which resulted in the conclusion of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty, demarcating the line between the USSR and Germany. The Treaty promised an improvement in relations and an increasing level of cooperation between the two countries.²⁸⁵ Additionally, whilst Soviet claims on Finland had disturbed Hitler, due mainly to the fact that they undermined German prestige and represented a potential threat to Germany's strategic interests in the Baltic region, Stalin's actions towards Finland remained in the spirit of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.²⁸⁶ The question of German support for Soviet claims against Finland was consistently raised, and once again, as had been the case during the period leading to the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the intelligence received was of questionable reliability. The British Ambassador in Tallinn informed the Foreign Secretary that he learned from a conversation with Andreas Pitka, son of Admiral Pitka, the Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Navy in the Great War, that Germany had promised to give unofficial support to the Finnish Army to resist Soviet aggression. Gallienne had used the recent visit of Admiral Pitka and his son as evidence to support his claims.²⁸⁷ During the course of their visit to Finland they had attempted to arrange cooperation for the defence of Estonia and Finland. Collier disagreed. The Pitka family belonged to the formally pro-German 'Ex-Soldiers' Party' in Estonia and their views were likely to be coloured by their

²⁸⁴ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N4835/ 991/ 38, minute by Collier, 7 October 1939.

²⁸⁵ Doerr, "Frigid but Unprovocative", p. 429.

²⁸⁶ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N5187/ 991/ 38, Seeds to Foreign Office, 11 October 1939.

²⁸⁷ NA, FO371/ 23689/ N5338/ 518/ 38, Gallienne to Halifax, 9 October 1939.

politics. The belief that the Germans would send ships which would attempt to sink Soviet vessels was, in Collier's eyes, 'an example of wilfully wishful thinking'.²⁸⁸

However, Collier was of the opinion that there was one point raised in the ambassador's communication that was worth investigating, namely the possibility of the Germans surreptitiously helping the Finns against the Soviets. Recent information received from Rome indicated that the Germans were to some extent prepared to double-cross Stalin. Collier was verifying the reliability of the information through examining the source of Gallienne's information and determining whether it could be trusted. Should the source prove reliable, Collier would consider the desirability of making indirect use of the Pitka's 'Ex-Soldier's Party' to drive a wedge between the Germans and the Soviets – an idea supported by Halifax.²⁸⁹ How Collier would verify the information is unclear. For Collier, 'it seems to me that the rift that this would tend to cause in Soviet-German relations would be well worth the small concomitant gain to German prestige in the Baltic States, which is at present very low'.²⁹⁰ This was the first time that Collier raised the possibility of driving a wedge between the Germans and the Soviets, and it was an idea pursued by the Head of the Northern Department throughout the crisis. It was crucial for His Majesty's Government to attempt to drive a wedge between the Soviet and German Governments as reports were reaching Collier that Germany had given the Soviets a free hand in Finland.²⁹¹ In order to stop Soviet dominance of the region, the British Government had to do all it could to disrupt Soviet-German relations. Once again Collier did not have the support of his colleagues in the Northern Department. Lascelles argued that one should dismiss the notion that Germany was affording, or

²⁸⁸ NA, FO371/ 23689/ N5338/ 518/ 38, Collier to Major Kirkman, 24 October 1939.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ NA, FO371/ 23693/ N5947/ 991/ 38, Snow to Collier, 4 November 1939.

was prepared to afford, any tangible help to Finland or Estonia against the Soviet Union. Not only did Lascelles dismiss the possibility of Germany aiding Finland or Estonia, he believed that ‘nothing could be better calculated to provoke the Soviet Government to a thoroughly ruthless policy both in Finland and Estonia than a conspiratorial organisation of this sort’. Such a policy may not necessarily be to Britain’s advantage, and one ought not to encourage such action whilst the Soviet Union remained on the fence, not least as it could force them to re-evaluate their neutral status.²⁹²

For his part, Major Kirkman at the War Office agreed with Collier. Any action that could create a rift between Germany and the Soviet Union would be invaluable for Britain, yet the possibility of successfully convincing the Soviets that Finland was receiving German support was slim. Stalin was likely to find out the truth of any rumour that the Pitka organisation had German backing, and may well discover the British deception. Kirkman informed Collier that ‘such a discovery might provide considerable scope for propaganda, both in Soviet and Nazi circles in Germany, to show that perfidious Albion was up to her old machinations again.’²⁹³ Rather than attempting to drive a wedge between the Soviets and the Germans, Kirkman believed the more favourable approach would be to wait for the inevitable crack between the two countries to develop, at which point His Majesty’s Government ought to do all they could to widen it. As Soviet-Finnish tensions intensified in October, the Ministry of Economic Warfare communicated a memorandum to the Foreign Office that related to the possibilities of coming to an understanding with Moscow. Both Collier in the Northern Department and the Foreign Secretary had stated that should Soviet aggression against Finland intensify it

²⁹² NA, FO371/ 23689/ N5338/ 518/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 18 October 1939.

²⁹³ NA, FO371/ 23690/ N5813/ 518/ 38, Major Kirkman to Collier, 27 October 1939.

would consequently put an end to any chance of concluding a more comprehensive Anglo-Soviet trade agreement.²⁹⁴ However, the Cabinet maintained that the British need for Soviet timber was so great that any reaction to Soviet aggression by the British Government had to be carefully considered.²⁹⁵ Should the British protest be too strong the Soviets would likely stop supplying Britain with any materials that were regarded as essential to its war effort. Hugh Dalton wrote in his diary on 18 September following the Red Army's invasion of Eastern Poland that the Soviets ought not be 'publicly slanged', as the likely outcome would be a widening of the Anglo-Soviet rift.²⁹⁶

Such incredible patience was evident in a memorandum by the Head of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, Ronald Cross. He conveyed to the Foreign Office that from an economic perspective it was crucial for His Majesty's Government to keep calm in the face of Soviet aggression. In spite of the political conditions prevailing, Cross argued that London had to reach an agreement with Moscow in the face of mounting evidence that Soviet-German relations, both politically and economically, continued to improve and strengthen. In a recent communication, Ribbentrop and Molotov had agreed that the Soviet Union was to supply Germany with materials essential to her war effort.²⁹⁷ Cross argued that whilst it was unlikely that the Soviets would deprive themselves of products in order to supply Germany, there was no reason to suppose that they would refuse to order raw materials on behalf of the German Government. If they received payment in the form of manufactured goods, it would be advantageous for the Soviet Government to act as a conduit for German war materials. Should the Soviet Union order goods on behalf of

²⁹⁴ NA, FO371/ 22985/ C16324/ 5/ 38, Collier to Major Conwell-Jones, 19 October 1939.

²⁹⁵ Martin Kitchen, *British Policy towards the Soviet Union During the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 5.

²⁹⁶ Hugh Dalton Diary, 18 September 1939.

²⁹⁷ NA, FO371/ 23683/ N5559/ 92/ 38, Ronald Cross to the Foreign Office, 21 October 1939.

Germany, the Anglo-French blockade would be rendered defunct. In order for the British blockade to be effective, therefore, it was essential that the issue of contraband reaching Germany through the USSR had to be seriously considered, and ways to strike a blow to Nazi-Soviet cooperation be discussed. Problems arising were twofold. Firstly, the British Government could not interfere with Soviet imports on the ground that they were suspicious of the consignees, as it would inevitably produce the greatest protest from the Soviet Government. Secondly, Great Britain relied on certain commodities from the USSR. The agreement of 11 October was vital for the British war effort and it was crucial that any serious dispute with the Soviet Government should be avoided until the majority of the timber had reached Britain. As that could take some time due to the inefficiency of the Soviet transport system, it was essential that Britain tread carefully.²⁹⁸ A.G. Marshall, the chair of the Consultative Committee on Anglo-Russian Trade, agreed with Cross. The British Government must not run after the Soviets, but to unnecessarily antagonise them would be unwise. Hence, British contraband control had to be delicately handled.²⁹⁹

In spite of the somewhat precarious position in which the British authorities were placed, Cross acknowledged that 'it is difficult to believe that we shall gain anything by letting the Soviet Government think we are afraid of them'.³⁰⁰ Collier agreed with Cross's conclusions. His Majesty's Government ought not to treat the Soviets with more leniency than other neutrals when it came to contraband control, and advocated that Britain adopt a firm approach to the Soviets. Indeed, it was imperative that Britain should not display any signs of weakness. In Collier's opinion the Soviet Government had made it clear that they fully intended to act as a source of supply to Germany, and any leniency from Great Britain would most certainly be

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

viewed as a sign of weakness. The Soviet Government was fully aware of the importance of its actions in the successful application of the blockade. The Soviet intention to re-export goods to Germany clearly illustrated a lack of goodwill. Therefore, as Britain could not count on Stalin's goodwill, 'we ought to give them nothing for nothing'.³⁰¹

Hence, the issue of the possibility of sending aid to Finland, alongside the desirability of improving Anglo-Soviet trade relations were the key points debated by members of the Foreign Office and the War Office during the Phoney War period. There was a fervour of activity within the Foreign Office once they heard of the Soviet invitation to Finland to discuss the European situation. Previous attempts at diplomacy in the past had often been swiftly replaced by manipulation and threats of action. This knowledge had dictated the response of the Foreign Office. In a telegram by the British Ambassador in Stockholm, Monson, he told the Foreign Office that '[the] Scandinavians as a whole are looking to His Majesty's Government to support the Finnish Government in their resistance to expected Soviet demands'.³⁰² Lascelles questioned how the Swedes imagined that the British could support Finland. It may have been possible to send help via Petsamo, but only at the expense of declaring war on the Soviet Union.³⁰³ There was a consensus within the Foreign Office that to gain another adversary would be highly damaging to the chances of an Allied victory.

As a result, there were officials within the Foreign Office who were becoming increasingly belligerent in their attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Collier was the most outspoken. He continually aired his opinions on the necessity of adopting a hard-line approach to the Soviets. Cadogan agreed with Collier in this matter – a rare

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² NA, FO371/23692/991/38, Monson to Foreign Office, 7 October 1939.

³⁰³ Ibid., minute by Lascelles, 8 October 1939.

occurrence during his tenure as Head of the Northern Department. Cadogan shared with Collier the belief that Britain need not be deterred from taking any advantageous action due to a fear that the USSR would declare war on her. Soviet aggression in Finland and Molotov's approach to the British proposals for a trade agreement illustrated that no amount of British overtures would induce the Soviet Government to cooperate with London.³⁰⁴

Lascelles and Collier agreed with Cross's analysis on the merits of obtaining a trade agreement with the Soviets. Lascelles believed that the British Government must not be paralysed by a fear that any firm approach taken in this matter would lead to a deterioration in Anglo-Soviet relations. As Lascelles had remarked in September when Cripps had first proposed to visit Moscow, Anglo-Soviet relations were in such a terrible state that no action on the part of the British Government could make them any worse. To favour the Soviet Government above 'genuine neutrals' would be unwise.³⁰⁵ Collier reiterated that the Soviet Union did not want to be involved in a war with Britain. In economic matters, however, the Soviets would do all that they could to help Germany short of going to war with Britain. As a result, Collier saw no reason for treating the Soviets with special leniency due to a fear of driving them further into the arms of Germany. Should the Soviets commit another act of unprovoked aggression, this time against Finland, Collier had stated that London ought to look elsewhere for timber.³⁰⁶

Halifax dealt with the issues arising from Cross's memorandum in a War Cabinet meeting on 25 October. As a result of Britain's recent dealings with the Soviet Government – in which the Kremlin had ignored Halifax's proposal to start negotiations over trade matters – he believed that Britain ought to be cautious in

³⁰⁴ David Dilks, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 19 January 1940.

³⁰⁵ NA, FO371/23683/N5559/92/38, minute by Lascelles, 27 October 1939.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 27 October 1939.

approaching them again. If Molotov was to agree to his proposal, Halifax's believed that there were only two ways in which to obtain a trade agreement with Moscow. The safest and preferred option was to conduct negotiations in London. The second course suggested that the first part of the negotiations should take place in London, and for the agreement to be signed in Moscow. Should the second course be adopted, it was suggested that the British delegation should be headed by a Minister of the Crown so that the Soviets would not question British sincerity of, and the importance attached to, reaching a satisfactory trade agreement.³⁰⁷ The advantages of the second course were clear. It offered the best chance of obtaining an agreement that would produce both political and economic benefits for London, thus allowing for a 'big deal' to be made. It was evident that Halifax had hoped that through adopting the second approach there was scope to improve Anglo-Soviet relations generally. However, he did express his belief that a British Delegation would only proceed if political conditions permitted, a comment that was readily understood as a warning that the issue would be halted should the Soviets commit an act of aggression against Finland.

The day after Halifax had proposed to start negotiations with the Soviet Government, an alternative course of action was raised by the Minister of Supply.³⁰⁸ Through bombing the Soviet oil installations at Baku it would be possible to stop the flow of supplies to Germany. This idea was supported by prominent figures within the French military, namely General Gamelin. It was believed that the oil fields in the region were vulnerable to attack, and should Great Britain and France decide to take a more forceful approach, it would have the advantage of cutting off supplies to Germany by naval action in the Black Sea, as well as producing a positive effect on

³⁰⁷ NA, FO371/ 23683/ N5609/ 92/ 38, War Cabinet Conclusions, 38(39) 9, 24 October 1939.

³⁰⁸ CAB84/9, Ministry of Supply to Foreign Office, 31 October 1939.

the neutral Balkan states.³⁰⁹ In this way one need not enter into frustrating negotiations with the Soviets. There would be the added benefit of illustrating British strength and willingness to take drastic measures in order to render the blockade of Germany effective. The Prime Minister was wary of such an aggressive approach whilst Halifax declared that the Chiefs of Staff were far more desirous of the plan than he was. Sargent asked the pertinent question whether the plan was viable, as it was far from sure that Germany in fact needed the Soviet oil.³¹⁰ This being so, the only result of bombing the oil installations would be to rattle the Soviets. Cadogan interjected and stated his opinion that force was 'the only language the Kremlin understands'. As such, bombing the oil fields would be evidence of British strength, and would show the Soviets the consequences of displeasing the British Government. The impact upon Germany would be slight. For it was Germany, not the Soviet Union, who was Britain's enemy.³¹¹

The idea of bombing Baku would impact upon the events in Finland. Though the Soviet Government had not yet declared war on Finland, it was clear that should the Finns not acquiesce to Soviet demands, a declaration of war would soon follow. A Soviet-Finnish war could possibly lead to British involvement on behalf the Finns, and thus the theatre of war would be extended to Eastern Europe, stretching British resources still further. If the British decided to bomb Baku as a means of protestation to Soviet aggression, the inevitable result would be a breach with the Soviet Union. Indeed, Collier and his colleagues in the Northern Department would not contemplate a complete breach of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Government. Relations were most certainly strained, yet a rupture with the Soviet Union would not command

³⁰⁹ Charles O. Richardson, 'French Plans for Allied Attacks on the Caucasus Oil Fields January-April, 1940', *French Historical Studies*, 8, 1 (Spring, 1973), 130-156 (p. 133).

³¹⁰ Kitchen, p. 24.

³¹¹ NA, FO371/24852/N7163/38/5, minute by Cadogan, 12 November 1939.

nationwide support, nor would it command the support of the British Cabinet.³¹² If Britain were to break with the Soviet Government, the most probable consequence would be a Nazi-Soviet alliance, which would be disastrous for the British Government.³¹³

Rather than openly antagonising the Soviet Government in this way, Collier recommended that the Army release the remaining six tanks as requested by the Finns.³¹⁴ Collier, who was supported by the Foreign Secretary, urged the Army Council to release the whole order as a sign of goodwill that would inevitably serve to strengthen Anglo-Finnish relations. Not only would the release of the six tanks illustrate a degree of goodwill, but it would prevent the Finns from turning to the Germans for the tanks. Collier called upon Halifax on 25 October and relayed the details of his conversation with Erkkö, the Finnish Foreign Minister. Erkkö had warned Collier that his Government were considering obtaining arms from Germany as a consequence of the Finnish Government not receiving the entire order of tanks.³¹⁵ This possibility had led both the Permanent Under-Secretary and the Foreign Secretary to respond. Cadogan wrote to Arthur Street in the Air Ministry and stated that for political reasons it was important for His Majesty's Government to provide arms and to encourage the Finns to stand up to the Soviets.³¹⁶ For his part, Halifax had questioned the War Office's assertion that they would be making a great sacrifice in allowing six tanks of a type not suitable for use in the British Army to be exported to a country who was in urgent need of them. Halifax agreed with Collier's belief that supplying the tanks would very much be in the interests of His Majesty's

³¹² NA, FO371/ 23692/ N5522/ 991/ 38, minute by Maclean, 23 October 1939.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 23 October 1939.

³¹⁴ NA, FO371/ 23644/ N5027/ 194/ 56, minute by Collier, 10 October 1939.

³¹⁵ NA, FO371/ 23644/ N5631/ 194/ 56, minute by Collier, 25 October 1939.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Cadogan to Street, 27 October 1939.

Government.³¹⁷ After weeks of negotiating with the War Office, Collier had ensured that the entire order was completed.³¹⁸ The issue of British tanks for Finland illustrated not only Collier's belief that the British Government had to prove to the Finns of their desire to assist them, but also the fact that the Head of the Northern Department had the support of the Foreign Secretary and was in a position to affect the actions of the War Office. In doing so, His Majesty's Government were not involving itself in the conflict. They were simply completing a long-standing order, whilst at the same time allowing the Finns to defend themselves. Collier was aware that neither His Majesty's Government nor the United States' Government would be in a position to afford much assistance to Finland once hostilities broke out. All Britain could do was to maintain trade exchanges 'within the narrow limits imposed by war-time conditions'. More overt assistance could lead to war with the Soviet Union.³¹⁹

Snow disagreed. He believed that 'a complete breach with the Soviet Government would command nationwide support', and continued to assert that Stalin had posed a greater threat to British interests than Hitler.³²⁰ Both Maclean and Lascelles disagreed. Maclean agreed with Collier that a breach with the Soviet Government over Finland would prove unpopular within Britain, and Lascelles reiterated that the British Cabinet had believed that the only result of a breach would be a full-blown alliance between Germany and the USSR. This was regarded as the most satisfactory course of action, as the Finns themselves did not 'propose the hopeless task of resisting Russia by force'.³²¹ Crucially, at that time His Majesty's Government were still unaware of the exact nature of the Soviet demands on Finland.

³¹⁷ Ibid., Halifax to Chatfield, 27 October 1939.

³¹⁸ NA, FO371/ 23644/ N5865/ 194/ 56, minute by Collier, 2 November 1939.

³¹⁹ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N4835/ 991/ 38, minute by Collier, 7 October 1939.

³²⁰ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N5522/ 991/ 38, telegram by Snow, 21 October 1939.

³²¹ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N4835/ 991/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 2 October 1939.

As Lascelles noted, His Majesty's Government was under no obligation to defend Scandinavian independence against any Power, and the Scandinavian states had always fought shy of the slightest suggestion of a guarantee from Britain. As such, to risk war with the Soviet Union for Finnish independence was a gamble not worth taking.³²²

Thus, as the situation in Finland was escalating, British policy towards the Soviet Union was far from certain. It proved to be a highly divisive topic within the Cabinet as well as the Foreign Office. On 24 October Halifax read a letter written by Sir Stafford Cripps to his War Cabinet colleagues. Cripps did not mention the problems in Finland, nor whether London should come to Finland's aid in the event of a Soviet declaration of war. Instead he once again argued that Anglo-Soviet economic relations were of paramount importance and that an agreement was urgently needed. Cripps advised Halifax that His Majesty's Government ought to negotiate an agreement in Moscow, as the Soviets would take no interest in trade negotiations that were conducted entirely in London.³²³ Recent indications of a German desire to improve its economic relations with the Soviet Union had influenced Halifax decision to conduct part of the negotiations in London, with the final stages occurring in Moscow. However, to publicly announce such a plan would be unwise as it was likely to antagonise Hitler and accelerate any German plans to consolidate its relations with the Soviet Union. The War Cabinet, however, concluded that 'nothing would be gained by half measure[s]' and that any risk associated with the second course was worth taking, a conclusion wholly different to those reached by members of the Northern Department. Collier and Maclean agreed that a breach with the USSR would be disastrous, yet Halifax's preferred course would give the appearance of

³²² NA, FO371/ 23692/ N5074/ 991/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 8 October 1939.

³²³ NA, FO371/ 23683/ N5609/ 92/ 38, War Cabinet Conclusions, 38(39) 9, 24 October 1939.

British desperation and a British anxiety to appease Stalin in order to gain an economic understanding.

Consequently, Halifax decided to inform the Soviet Ambassador that his Government would be willing to contemplate a much larger trade deal following the conclusion of the recent barter deal. There were numerous obstacles facing the British Government, the most important of which was the uncertainty surrounding Finland as well as the extent of Soviet-German economic collaboration. As Gabriel Gorodetsky has noted, the British had to be wary of conducting talks with the Soviets following the triple alliance negotiations, in which the Soviets had used the negotiations as ‘bait to extract better terms from the Germans’.³²⁴ ‘Caution’ was an oft-quoted word when discussing any approach – be it in the economic or political realm – to the Soviet Government. There was a widespread fear within both the Foreign Office and His Majesty’s Government of Soviet game-playing and time-wasting, as was evident during the triple alliance negotiations. It was clear from the War Cabinet discussions and the memorandum composed by Halifax that an overriding consideration was a fear that the Soviets would prolong any negotiations with the British Government in order to extract the ultimate advantages from London. In this way, the Soviets would use negotiations with Great Britain to improve its relations with Germany, as was the case during the 1939 negotiations. Halifax succinctly summed up this predicament: ‘...it is obvious that any trade negotiations with the Soviet Government would need to be conducted with great caution, both to avoid risk of commodities of value to Germany being sent on from the USSR to that

³²⁴ Gabriel Gorodetsky, ‘The Impact of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on the Course of Soviet Foreign Policy’, *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 31, 1 (January-March, 1990), 27-41 (p. 28).

country, and to ensure that any visit to Moscow arising out of negotiations would not merely result in the public humiliation of the visitors'.³²⁵

With the obvious limitations in the British position, coupled with their clear desire to reach an economic understanding with the Soviets, it was necessary for the Finns to make preparations and anticipate the demands placed upon them by Moscow. The Finns offered a group of Eastern islands, which they had previously refused to concede, in return for economic concessions. Lascelles admitted that whilst any other line taken by the Finns would have been sheer folly, 'such folly might have benefited us!'³²⁶ When the Soviet-Finnish negotiations commenced on 12 October and were concluded on 14 October, very little information was disclosed as to the nature of the negotiations or what the Soviet demands included. Such secrecy only served to solidify the British belief that aiding Finland would be foolhardy and that Britain should instead attempt to improve her economic relations with the USSR. It was not until the end of October that details of the Soviet demands were made known to His Majesty's Government. The demands included the cession of the islands in the Gulf of Finland and the cession of the Finnish half of the Ribachi peninsula which would allow the Soviets to dominate the Finnish arctic post at Petsamo. The Soviets also wanted a base at Hangö as whoever controlled that part of the coast could block the Gulf of Finland and all sea access to Leningrad.³²⁷ Snow had informed Collier that the previous demand for a military alliance between the Soviet Union and Finland had been dropped and that no demands had been made in connection with the Aaland Islands. Collier believed that the prospect of a peaceful settlement did not look promising. Should the Finns approve the cession of the Ribachi peninsula and to

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ NA, FO371/ 23692/ N4912/ 991/ 38, minute by Lascelles, 2 October 1939.

³²⁷ NA, FO371/ 23693/ N5732/ 991/ 38, minute by Collier, 30 October 1939.

allow a Soviet base at Hängo, Finnish independence would be seriously undermined.³²⁸

When Halifax met with Maisky on 16 November, rather than ascertaining whether the Soviets were likely to remain on peaceful terms with the Finns, he asked the ambassador whether the Soviet Government was ready to start negotiations for a trade agreement. Predictably, Maisky was noncommittal and informed the Foreign Secretary that he had hoped to make a communication within the course of the next few days. Many within the British Government feared that once again the Soviets were drawing out the issue in order to place themselves in a better strategic position. However, Cripps believed that the Soviet Government would carefully consider Halifax's proposal. Unfortunately, Cripps had also believed that Moscow would not proceed with their negotiations with London until a settlement had been reached over their difficulties with Finland. It was those 'difficulties' that were being represented to the Soviet public as largely due to the support given by Britain to the Finns in their opposition to the Soviet proposals.³²⁹ Cripps was convinced that the Soviet Government did not wish the delay to affect the prospect of securing a trade agreement with Britain. Although he appreciated that Halifax's patience was being tested, he believed that it was in Britain's interest to continue the policy of tolerance towards the USSR.³³⁰

Unsurprisingly, Collier was less tolerant of Soviet game playing than Cripps, and did not believe that one could trust the Soviets. He accepted that Britain must remain tolerant of the Soviets, yet was growing tired of the increasingly virulent anti-British tone in the Soviet press and was frustrated that Moscow continued to delay its response to the British proposals of 21 October. Following a meeting attended by

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ NA, FO371/ 23683/ N6384/ 92/ 38, War Cabinet Conclusions 85(39), 16 November 1939.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Collier, Halifax and the President of the Board of Trade on 24 November, the way in which Halifax was to approach Maisky was discussed. It was no longer debated as to whether negotiations with the Soviets were desirable, as the British need for Soviet timber was a matter of urgency. The question was once again how to approach the Soviets. It was agreed that when the Soviet Ambassador next called upon the Foreign Secretary, Halifax should not give him the impression that he was sent for because His Majesty's Government was in a rush to start trade negotiations, nor that they were chasing the Soviet Government over this matter.³³¹

It was at this time that the details of the most recent Soviet demands on Finland reached the Foreign Office. On 6 November, Snow was once again championing the Finnish cause, much to the annoyance of his colleagues in the Foreign Office. In communication with Halifax, Snow repeated statements previously made by Collier regarding the relative threat of Nazi and Soviet aggression. Snow stated that he fully agreed with Collier's belief that the democratic neutrals hated the Bolshevik form of totalitarianism far more than the Nazi variety. Indeed, British propaganda should emphasise that British war aims were directed towards the 'preservation of all nations from the perpetual threat of unprovoked attack'. This included an unprovoked attack by the USSR.³³² Snow had entirely agreed with Collier's statement made on the 20 October, yet was at a loss to understand why Collier had altered his opinions by the end of the month. By that time, Collier argued that Britain was fighting the Germans and not the Soviets, and whatever he and his colleagues in the Foreign Office felt about the latter, His Majesty's Government could not afford to antagonise the Soviets directly so long as there was any risk of them joining up with the Germans. Snow seemed to attach no

³³¹ Ibid., minute by Collier, 25 November 1939.

³³² NA, FO371/23693/N6667/991/38, Snow to Halifax, 6 November 1939.

importance to that fact, and argued that ‘as regards the risks of bringing Russia and Germany into closer contact, I venture to suggest that we are in the presence of two poisonous but mutually destructive elements’. British policy ought to recognise that fact.³³³ In response to Snow’s confusion as to the change in his position regarding the Soviet and German threat, Collier asserted that he was simply being realistic. The British Government could not antagonise both totalitarian powers, as its resources were not equal to it. Nothing would have pleased Collier more than to ‘take on’ both Germany and the Soviet Union.³³⁴ However, once the Soviet demands were circulated and war between the USSR and Finland was imminent, Britain needed to be realistic and aware of its limitations. To declare war on the Soviet Union would only strengthen her relationship with Germany. Collier had consistently argued that it was necessary to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and Germany and, not, on the contrary, to provide them with a common enemy in Great Britain. Barclay of the Central Department agreed fully with Collier. The Chiefs of Staff had decided that on the whole Britain ‘should not be justified in adding to our present burden by declaring war on the USSR unless and until the USA has definitely ranged herself on our side’.³³⁵ Challenging Snow’s notion that His Majesty’s Government had simply washed its hands of Finland, Barclay pointed out that Great Britain had already supplied a great deal of the Finnish armament requirements and that Maisky had been informed that any Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations would have to be suspended should the Soviet Union make an unprovoked attack on Finland. Lascelles succinctly summed up the British situation: ‘... through attempting to protect a certain small Power [Poland] whom we were bound by treaty to assist, we have become engaged in a life-and-death struggle ourselves’. If the British Government were to adopt Snow’s

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid., minute by Collier, 15 November 1939.

³³⁵ Ibid., minute by Barclay, 15 November 1939.

line they would be guilty of biting off more than they could chew. Consequently, there would be no hope for any small state should its independence be threatened by either Stalin or Hitler. The only way in which Great Britain would be victorious in this life-and-death struggle would be through restricting her field of operations to manageable proportions.³³⁶ In his response to Snow, Halifax reiterated the points made by Collier, stating that ‘if our resources were adequate we should not hesitate to take on both Germany and Russia in the last resort’.³³⁷ It was now Snow’s turn to be the odd man out in the Foreign Office rather than Collier, who was now part of the Foreign Office consensus.

Following the transmission of the Finnish counter-proposals, the Soviet Union declared war on Finland. The Finnish terms had stipulated that they were prepared to move the frontier of the Karelian Isthmus twelve kilometres further from Leningrad, yet were not prepared to agree to the cession of the Ribachi peninsula or for the Soviets to control the naval base at Hangö.³³⁸ In Molotov’s speech to the Supreme Council of the USSR, he reviewed Soviet foreign policy and placed the responsibility for the breakdown of the negotiations solely on the shoulders of the Finns. Finland had refused a mutual assistance pact and would not grant any concessions. Finnish rejection of the Soviet proposals would merely ‘do harm to the cause of peace and to themselves’.³³⁹ Unsurprisingly, those in the British Foreign Office did not accept Molotov’s justification and saw his speech for what it was – propaganda covering a barely veiled threat, intended to scare the Finns into capitulating to the very demands that would compromise their independence. As Seeds noted, the only reasonable explanation for the Soviet invasion of Finland was that the failure of the Soviet

³³⁶ Ibid., minute by Lascelles, 15 November 1939.

³³⁷ Ibid., Halifax to Snow, 24 November 1939.

³³⁸ Upton, *Finland*, p. 34.

³³⁹ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 35.

campaign of threats and intimidation was greatly damaging to the prestige of the Soviet Union and of Stalin himself.³⁴⁰ Maclean believed that Stalin had not expected the Finns to fight for their independence and predicted that the Finnish war could mark a turning point in the history of the Soviet Union and quite possibly of Stalin's regime.³⁴¹

Leo Amery, an MP in the House of Commons, communicated to Halifax that with regard to the Finnish question, if the Soviet Union was seriously held up over the Finnish war she would not be able to make much trouble in Roumania or against Turkey, who were two countries with whom His Majesty's Government had hoped to come to terms with. However, much depended on the actual state of Nazi-Soviet relations. For Amery, 'my own view is that the two gangsters will continue to cooperate so long as there is loot to be got' and that 'there is no doubt an element of gamble in whatever decision we take, but as between the risks of the bolder and more moral policy, and that of the policy of waiting, I believe we should be wise to lean in the former'.³⁴²

Maclean once again took up the issue of Britain's policy towards the Soviet Union following the outbreak of the Winter War on 30 November. Reiterating points made by Collier in previous minutes, Maclean noted that the principal reason for British reluctance to become involved in hostilities with the Soviet Union was due to a desire not to take on another adversary. It was not due to a belief that the Soviet Union did not constitute a real threat to British interests.³⁴³ As for the problem of German-Soviet cooperation, it was clear that their economic relations were improving as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and, whilst German and Soviet conduct had been

³⁴⁰ NA, FO371/ 24791/ N183/ 1/ 56, Seeds to Halifax, 7 December 1939.

³⁴¹ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 9 January 1940.

³⁴² NA, FO371/ 23695/ N7224/ 991/ 38, Leo Amery to Halifax, 6 December 1939.

³⁴³ NA, FO371/ 23678/ N7134/ 57/ 38, minute by Maclean, 8 December 1939.

equally reprehensible, it did not follow that cooperation between the two governments would become closer simply because they were both following an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. Creating a rift between Germany and Soviet Russia, as suggested by Collier on 15 November, would be difficult. Hence, the only option for His Majesty's Government would be to damage Soviet interests by indirect means. It was improbable that a blockade or economic sanctions would greatly prejudice the position of the Soviet Union as it was largely self-supporting and had a comparatively small foreign trade. The best way to damage Soviet interests would be to send armaments to the Finns and to any other victims of Soviet aggression.³⁴⁴ His Majesty's Government should not refrain from adopting such an approach out of fear of Soviet retribution. If Stalin decided to pick a quarrel with the British Government as a consequence of the shipment of arms to the Finns, Maclean believed that it would show conclusively that he was deliberately seeking a pretext for declaring war on Britain. There was, however, no reason to believe that Stalin had any intention of breaking from the neutral status of the Soviet Union. Therefore, any suggestions of breaking off relations with the Soviet Union, as suggested by both Snow in Helsingfors and Seeds in Moscow, would be a rather meaningless measure with no positive benefit for the British Government.

During a War Cabinet meeting on 12 December, Halifax argued that it was in the interest of Great Britain to send armaments to the Finns even in the face of reports stating that Germany was 'hand in glove' with the USSR.³⁴⁵ Consequently, it was decided that the Secretary of State for War should arrange for the despatch of munitions to Finland, including the despatch of one hundred high calibre guns.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ NA, FO371/ 23645/ N7276/ 194/ 56, Snow to FO, 11 December 1939.

³⁴⁶ NA, FO371/ 23645/ N7359/ 194/ 56, Extract from War Cabinet Conclusions, 112(39), 12 December 1939.

While Britain was readying herself to send aid to Finland, a previously ignored problem was discussed. It was noted that any British aid to Finland would be redundant unless the Swedish and Norwegian Government agreed to do the same. Unfortunately for both Finland and Britain, the Swedes were paralysed by fear of Soviet-German collaboration and of German retribution should Sweden intervene in the Finnish conflict. This was a problem of great significance for it was only from Sweden that the Finns could receive immediate help. The Germans would not forcibly aid the Soviets should Sweden come to the aid of the Finns.³⁴⁷ The role of the Swedish and Norwegian Governments was one of the key considerations within the Foreign Office when discussing the extent of possible British aid to Finland. Great Britain could only reach the main area of operations in Finland by passing through Norway and northern Sweden, and without the active help of these two Powers it would be almost impossible for British munitions to reach Finland.³⁴⁸ From the outset the Swedish authorities were hesitant to lend any support to Finland. Whilst Sweden dreaded a German descent on Scandinavia, Sargent welcomed the prospect of a German invasion as it would give the British an absolutely cast-iron case for sending an expeditionary force to Norway and Sweden.³⁴⁹ He further believed that it was in the interests of Great Britain that Finland should be saved, 'if only because she constitutes a barrier between Russia and her control over the Swedish iron-ore and her ambitions to reach the Atlantic'.³⁵⁰ Before Britain could attempt to save Finland, the Chiefs of Staff had to consider what assistance could be

³⁴⁷ NA, FO371/ 23645/ N7442/ 194/ 56, minute by Collier, 15 December 1939.

³⁴⁸ Sweden was of further strategic significance for the British Government due to the iron-ore fields of Kiruna and Gallivare which supplied two-fifths of Germany's iron-ore supplies Churchill had first suggested blocking this winter route on 19 September.

³⁴⁹ NA, FO371/ 23646/ 194/ 56, minute by Sargent, 27 December 1939.

³⁵⁰ NA, FO371/ 23696/ 991/ 38, minute by Sargent, 27 December 1939.

provided to Sweden and Norway should their direct or indirect assistance to Finland antagonise the Soviets.

The Chiefs of Staff were fully aware that they ought to consider Soviet action in Finland as a possible prelude to the spreading of operations to Scandinavia. Should operations spread to Scandinavia, His Majesty's Government could not directly protect southern Scandinavian cities against air attack, nor could they protect a land invasion of southern Norway or Sweden.³⁵¹ Whilst the Chiefs of Staff doubted Britain's ability to prevent Scandinavia should the Soviet Union attack, they still recommended the despatch of arms to Finland and encouraged the Swedish and Norwegian Governments to do the same. In spite of the possible problems associated with such a course of action, it was deemed important to intervene. The Finnish need was urgent. Should they allow the opportunity to assist slip by, the British Government may well lose Norwegian and Swedish confidence in its ability and determination to help them should their independence be threatened. Such a loss of prestige was deemed an unacceptable risk.³⁵² Collier agreed with the conclusions reached by the Chiefs of Staff. In a paper entitled 'Consequences of the Soviet-Finnish War', Collier related a conversation with Chabonnier in the French Embassy in which they were in agreement that the success of the Soviet attack on Finland would, in the eyes of the world, be a serious blow to the British cause. Collier recommended that Britain should go 'all out' to help Finland regardless of Stalin's reaction and regardless also of the timidity of the Swedish and Norwegian Governments.³⁵³ Here one can appreciate Collier's desperation in his desire for action. Indeed, Collier believed that it was in the interests of His Majesty's Government to prolong the Finnish conflict as it would make it difficult for the Soviets to either

³⁵¹ NA, FO371/23646/194/56, War Cabinet Conclusions, W.P.(39) 173, 26 December 1939.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ NA, FO371/24791/N1/1/56, minute by Collier, 29 December 1939.

afford help to Germany in her war with the West or to embark on any further military adventures elsewhere.³⁵⁴

When Collier was informed on 17 January 1940 that a further strengthening of Soviet-German trade relations had occurred, he became more adamant that Great Britain should come to the aid of the Finns. Maclean noted that the news was not at all surprising as a number of sources had circulated rumours of an impending agreement. However, the Nazi-Soviet agreement of 11 December 1939 had ensured the continued delivery of cotton from the USSR to Germany, leading members of the Northern Department to express its dissatisfaction with British policy towards the USSR. Not only was His Majesty's Government still waiting for a Soviet response to the proposals put forward on 21 October 1939, but the Soviets continued to trade with the Germans. Thus, the British blockade was weakened further.³⁵⁵

A glimpse of hope was evident when the Ministry of Economic Warfare informed the Foreign Office that the wintery conditions had meant that large quantities of goods would not be shipped to Germany from the USSR. The memorandum stated that 'the agreement may ... be described as little more than an expression of pious hope', but warned that in six or eight months' time the general situation may be very different.³⁵⁶ Timing was everything, and His Majesty's Government could not let the opportunity pass by. Hence, it was believed that they must act while the weather was in their favour.³⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the fact remained that the Soviets continued to consolidate her economic relations with the German Government. A commercial agreement was reached during Ribbentrop's visit to

³⁵⁴ NA, FO371/ 24843/ N504/ 30/ 38, minute by Maclean, 15 January 1940.

³⁵⁵ NA, FO371/ 24853/ N9627/ 360/ 38, minute by Maclean, 26 January 1940.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, memorandum by MEW, 17 January 1940.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Moscow in August 1939, yet the British proposals continued to be ignored by Moscow.

At the start of 1940 Maclean argued strongly that by standing up to the Soviets the British were just as likely to frighten Stalin out of close cooperation with Germany as to drive him into it. Furthermore, Soviet-German cooperation was probably as close as circumstances and the mutual interests of the two countries would permit.³⁵⁸ Furthermore, Maclean argued that through helping Finland in their resistance to Soviet Russia, His Majesty's Government would in turn be acting in their own best interest.³⁵⁹ Prolonging the war in Finland would damage Soviet interests and would take an economic toll on the Soviet Union. More crucially, however, her relationship with Germany would be negatively affected. Preoccupation with Finland would ensure that Soviet imports and exports to Germany would be reduced, as all essential war materials would be used to ensure Soviet victory. Any reduction of Soviet economic assistance to Germany was vitally important for His Majesty's Government.³⁶⁰ A memorandum composed by Sargent explored this in greater detail. He agreed with Maclean that close cooperation was not the most likely outcome of the Finnish conflict. Should the deadlock continue, the Soviet Government might be forced to accept German help in order to reorganise and strengthen the Soviet economic and military machine, and thus hasten the overthrow of Finnish resistance. Consequently, Germany would obtain a foothold in the USSR that it had hitherto failed to secure.³⁶¹ Furthermore, it would not be to the German good for the Winter War to be decided without the intervention of the German Government. Consequently, it was probable that Germany would find adequate

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ NA, FO371/ 24843/ N1147/ 283/ 38, memorandum by Maclean, 17 January 1940.

³⁶⁰ NA, FO371/ 24843/ N1151/ 30/ 38, memorandum by Maclean, 2 February 1940.

³⁶¹ NA, FO371/ 24793/ N2306/ 1/ 56, memorandum by Sargent, 21 January 1940.

reasons for helping to destroy Finland for the benefit of the Soviet Union, even though it would mean the 'establishment of the Soviet Government as the ultimate rival of Germany in the Baltic'. Sargent concluded that it was clearly in the interests of Great Britain and France to prevent German mediation from materialising. Possibly the most crucial point made by Sargent in this memorandum was that the only way in which Great Britain and France could realistically prevent such German involvement was to encourage the Finns to make a formal appeal to the British and French governments for help.³⁶²

Collier expanded upon the points made by Sargent in a memorandum that was circulated to Oliphant, Cadogan and Halifax. Collier dealt with the effect of the Great Britain involving itself in a war with the Soviet Union. Once again, central to the issue was the state of Nazi-Soviet relations. German statements had reached the Foreign Office that had indicated that the German Government would welcome a state of war between Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union in the hope that it would lead to a stronger Soviet-German alliance. This would give Germany, as the predominant partner, greater influence over of Soviet policy and Soviet resources. Collier believed that an actual breach between the German and Soviet Government was unlikely as it was simply not worthwhile for the Germans to quarrel with the Soviets. As a result, 'the two robbers will probably continue to hang together until they both hang separately'.³⁶³ If Great Britain and France found themselves at war with the Soviet Union it would be due to closer German-Soviet collaboration and not the result of any British aid to Finland.

As the debate continued within the Foreign Office as to the nature and extent of German-Soviet collaboration and how it would impact upon British aid to Finland,

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ NA, FO371/ 24845/ N1360/ 40/ 38, memorandum by Collier, 31 January 1940.

the war was taking its toll on the Scandinavian country. Although Finland had withstood the initial Soviet onslaught remarkably well, a fact that had surprised the Western Powers and Soviet Union alike, it was clear that without reinforcements Finland would not be able to withstand the Soviet advances indefinitely. Le Rougetel in the Moscow Embassy informed the Foreign Office that the main Soviet offensive against Finland was due to start on 28 February.³⁶⁴ As Seeds had asserted, the Soviet invasion of Finland, though planned on the German model, had not been executed with totalitarian efficiency. The invasion had been improvised once it had become clear that the Finnish Government was not prepared to yield to bluster and intimidation, unlike Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.³⁶⁵

News of the impending Soviet offensive spurred the failing League of Nations into action. At the beginning of February, the Assembly urged every member of the League to provide Finland with as much humanitarian assistance as was in its power and to refrain from any action which could weaken Finland's power of resistance.³⁶⁶ It was at this time that the British Cabinet authorised the Chiefs of Staff to work out a detailed plan in which an Allied expeditionary force would land in Scandinavia. This scheme was met with emphatic support in the Northern Department. Lacy Baggallay urged his superiors in the Foreign Office to do all they could to avoid a Finnish collapse,³⁶⁷ a sentiment to which Collier fully concurred. Many within the Northern Department were far from convinced that the Finnish forces could withstand another Soviet offensive. Consequently, Swedish and Norwegian assistance was of the greatest importance. Their aid would make a Soviet victory far less likely, as the combined force of Finland, Sweden and Norway would overwhelm them.

³⁶⁴ NA, FO371/ 24792/ N1343/ 1/ 56, Le Rougetel to FO, 2 February 1940.

³⁶⁵ NA, FO371/ 24791/ N191/ 1/ 56, Seeds to Halifax, 20 December 1939.

³⁶⁶ NA, FO371/ 24792/ N1356/ 1/ 56, minute by Barclay, 3 February 1940.

³⁶⁷ NA, FO371/ 24845/ N2736/ 40/ 38, minute by Baggallay, 6 February 1940.

The British Ambassador in Stockholm, Mallet, informed Collier of his conversation with the Head of the Swedish armed forces. The Swedish Secretary-General had stated that the Germans had made it clear that they would regard any official Swedish participation in the war in Finland as an act of aggression and the German Government would implement immediate counter-measures. However, should Swedish help to Finland continue to be unofficial, then the German Government would not raise any serious objections.³⁶⁸ Collier was scathing of the Swedish mentality. He did not know of any German *démarche* to which the Swedish Government could identify that would support the assumption that the Germans would attack them if they sent units of the Swedish army to Finland, even if they were in the guise of volunteers. Rather, Collier suspected that they were making that assumption ‘merely to excuse their own timidity’. On the other hand, he was satisfied that the Swedish Government would not dare to refuse passage to volunteers, however numerous. Collier then suggested the rather radical idea that His Majesty’s Government ought to send as many volunteers as possible through Sweden in order to force their hand.³⁶⁹

Collier regarded such drastic action to be necessary. Following a meeting between August Zaleski, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs,³⁷⁰ and Halifax, there was a general consensus that something must be done to stop Finland from meeting the same fate as Poland. During the course of the meeting, during which the Polish Ambassador, Cadogan and Strang were present, a variety of topics were discussed. The first of these was the nature of Nazi-Soviet collaboration. Zaleski had previously believed Germany to be ‘enemy number one’. However, following the Soviet

³⁶⁸ NA, FO371/ 24801/ N2069/ 9/ 56, Mallet to FO, 7 February 1940.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 20 February 1940.

³⁷⁰ All subsequent references to Poland will be referring to the Government in Exile, based in London. This Government was officially recognised by His Majesty’s Government and dealt with it as the legitimate Government of Poland.

advance into Poland and her invasion of Finland, Zaleski believed that both Powers were equally dangerous. The ambassador was thus determined to find means of halting the possible improvement of Soviet-German relations.³⁷¹ Both British and Polish intervention in the Finnish conflict could provide an opportunity for action that would have the desired effect. As Poland was already in a state of war with the USSR, there would be no question of any possible effect on Soviet-Polish relations. Whilst that action may damage Anglo-Soviet relations, Zaleski believed that the advantages of intervention outweighed the disadvantages. Halifax agreed that it was desirable to disrupt Nazi-Soviet relations, yet was hesitant about irreparably damaging Anglo-Soviet relations and risking the possibility of adding the Soviet Union as an adversary. One must remember that Halifax still sought an Anglo-Soviet economic agreement in spite of Molotov's refusal to respond to British overtures. Indeed, Halifax was convinced of the necessity of keeping the Soviets occupied with Finland for as long as possible, as they would consume the resources and supplies that might otherwise be directed to Germany. War with the USSR, however, would involve Britain in new commitments and would dissipate its resources. Collier had made that point on 15 November 1939. Halifax stated that fear of Soviet displeasure should not dictate British policy, a point that had first been raised by Collier. One can appreciate that a consensus of opinion within the Foreign Office was slowly developing as a result of the Winter War. As Lascelles had stated in December 1939 in defence of British policy towards the Soviet Union, it was prudent for Great Britain to avoid provoking the Soviet Government into active measures against them. What the British Government could not afford to do, however, was to display any signs of

³⁷¹ NA, FO371/24801/N1966/9/56, memorandum by FO, 8 February 1940.

weakness or fear when dealing with the USSR.³⁷² On the issue of British aid for Finland, Halifax informed Zaleski that the British had sent much more material to Finland than had been made public, but was equally aware that should British aid prove insufficient and Finnish resistance collapsed, British prestige would be severely damaged.³⁷³ It was the intention of the British authorities to continue to send as much material as possible. What was crucially important, however, was manpower.

To this end, His Majesty's Government had been unofficially preparing and organising the despatch of volunteers. Once again, the anxiety of the Scandinavian governments was a barrier to the successful despatch of British volunteers. Halifax hoped that as the danger of German encroachment into Scandinavia increased, the governments of Sweden and Norway would be more willing to assist Britain in their attempt to aid Finland. The Polish Government in exile was facing similar difficulties. General Sikorski was willing to send some 4,000 men to Finland by April, yet it was difficult to ensure their arrival. Halifax had hoped that public opinion in Sweden and Norway would become outraged by the situation in Finland as this public outrage could induce the Swedish and Norwegian Governments to send a large measure of assistance and allow the safe passage of troops through their territory. The Polish Ambassador in Washington, Ciechanowski, interposed that the Swedish Minister had recently told him that their chief anxiety was not simply that they might be dragged into war, but that Great Britain and France would not be able to protect them should the German or Soviet Government declare war on them. Halifax's response was curiously evasive, which was no doubt due to his previous

³⁷² NA, FO371/23678/N7134/57/38, minute by Lascelles, 8 December 1939.

³⁷³ NA, FO371/24801/N1966/9/56, memorandum by the Foreign Office, 8 February 1940.

admissions that British resources would be stretched too thin should such an eventuality occur.³⁷⁴

Swedish determination to avoid aiding Finland was confirmed at the end of February. Following a meeting with the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mallet gained the impression that the Swedish Government had decided that any help that they could give to Finland would only serve to delay their inevitable defeat.³⁷⁵ Maclean and Collier could not hide their disgust. Maclean minuted that 'the Swedes are in a deplorable state of mind' whilst Collier reiterated his belief that Britain ought to present a *fait accompli* to the Swedes. An Anglo-French landing of volunteers at Narvik was believed to be the best course of action. Collier was convinced that should His Majesty's Government ask Sweden and Norway for permission to send a force through to Finland they would get 'nowhere'.³⁷⁶

On the day of the rumoured Soviet offensive against Finland, Collier prepared a memorandum outlining his key arguments regarding Swedish and Norwegian aid, and how their support would impact upon the aid that Great Britain could provide for Finland. Once again Collier's memorandum was widely distributed, with copies sent to R.A. Butler, Vansittart, Cadogan and Halifax. Vansittart praised the conclusions reached by Collier, believing that there was a good deal of force in what he had written, and that his suggestions ought to be carefully considered.³⁷⁷ In his memorandum Collier asserted that should His Majesty's Government wish to incite the Swedish and Norwegian peoples against their governments, then the proposed Finnish appeal for aid should be publicly made by 5 March. It was hoped that this would spur the Swedish and Norwegian Governments into action. Unfortunately,

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ NA, FO371/ 24802/ N2331/ 9/ 56, Mallet to FO, 24 February 1940.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., minutes by Maclean and Collier, 26 February 1940.

³⁷⁷ NA, FO371/ 24804/ N2813/ 9/ 56, minute by Vansittart, 1 March 1940.

there was an obvious downside. The appeal could give the German Government the opportunity to publicly threaten Norway and Sweden with dire penalties if they were to allow British or French troops across their territory.³⁷⁸ If the German Government was foolish enough to use British support for Finland as reason to escalate from threats to action, it was likely that it would have a positive effect on the relations between Great Britain and Sweden and Norway. As a consequence of German bullying the Scandinavian governments might decide to appeal to Great Britain for help, which would be favourable for His Majesty's Government. Collier noted that such an appeal was possible, but not at all likely. Rather, His Majesty's Government ought to expect 'an intensive campaign of intimidation from both Berlin and Moscow' and as a consequence the Norwegian and Swedish Governments would be too 'terror-stricken' to allow Anglo-French troops to pass through their territory.³⁷⁹ Only decisive action by the British could redeem the situation. In Collier's opinion, if the Swedish and Norwegian Governments knew at once that Britain would be prepared to protect them from a German attack, it was just as likely that they may in fact yield to British requests for free passage for their 'volunteers'. Acquiescence would most likely occur under duress, yet assent would allow the passage of troops across their territory without experiencing either passive resistance or sabotage. In order to bring them to that frame of mind quickly, it was essential that the Swedish and Norwegian authorities should, when called upon to make their decision, be already in possession of all the facts regarding the help which Great Britain was prepared to give them. Collier stated that General Lewin should be 'on the spot' by 5 March and ready to give complete explanations of British plans to the Swedish and Norwegian soldiers.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., memorandum by Collier, 28 February 1940.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

Whilst this suggestion held the best chance of a successful outcome, Collier was not optimistic. Rather, he believed that the most likely outcome of an appeal would be the categorical refusal of the Swedish and Norwegian Governments. Hence Collier boldly asserted that London had to decide whether they were to ‘take this lying down on the ground’. Collier clearly believed that they should not. Although the conclusions of a joint Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff paper of 18 February stated that Great Britain was not in a position to risk issuing an ultimatum and seeing it through, Collier believed that Britain would have to risk an ultimatum and trust that Anglo-French troops would be able to land and use the Narvik-Lulea railway without any active resistance or sabotage by the Norwegian and Swedish authorities. Collier was once again guilty of letting his emotions dictate his opinions and the advice he tendered. He was desperately anxious to avoid a Finnish defeat. Collier continued to advise that it was prudent to make immediate provisions to send out the relevant men who would be needed to work the railway in the event of the Norwegian and Swedish Governments withdrawing their railway staff. Collier stressed the importance of immediate and decisive action in the face of such a possibility.³⁸⁰

As Halifax was considering the advice put forward in Collier’s memorandum, Collier penned yet another paper on the subject of Swedish and Norwegian assistance. This time the Permanent Under-Secretary was the recipient. The tone of Collier’s memorandum was frantic and desperate. Collier apologised to Cadogan for troubling him with yet another communication regarding the proposed expedition to Finland. His concern over the discouraging answers given to the Finnish Government by His Majesty’s Government had motivated him to seek Cadogan’s support. Maclean

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

shared Collier's concerns.³⁸¹ For his part, Collier accepted that Britain could not follow the French example and promise things which they were incapable of fulfilling – Daladier had sent a message to the Finnish Government without consulting his British ally, in which he promised 50,000 men and 100 bombers to be in Finland by the end of March, yet urged that action was necessary.

Collier feared that there was a real danger that the Finns would submit to Soviet demands and argued that it would not be in the interest of His Majesty's Government for the Finns to capitulate. Collier proceeded to advise Cadogan to encourage Halifax to override the objections of the Chiefs of Staff and to inform Marshal Mannerheim that he could be in command of the British expedition to Finland. Collier then proposed that Cadogan should convey to Mannerheim the 'most, rather than the least encouraging account of the numbers of that force which might be available for Finland'.³⁸² Collier's behaviour was unacceptable. To advise his superior to ignore expert advice was wholly inappropriate and no doubt made Collier look erratic in the eyes of Cadogan. Collier informed Cadogan that the French had misled the Finns with the projected numbers of men who could be sent to Finland in the immediate future, and believed that they could very well send 50,000 men in total. Furthermore, it was conceivable that more than 12,000 of these could proceed from Sweden to Finland. Collier feared that the British Government was positively going out of its way to paint the gloomiest picture possible of the expedition's prospects.³⁸³ Cadogan's reply to Collier was short and succinct and was limited to the practicalities of the difficulties facing potential forces in Finland. Any force that was sent to Finland had to be supplied over a single-track railway. That was the key factor

³⁸¹ NA, FO371/ 24803/ N2645/ 9/ 56, Collier to Cadogan, 1 March 1940.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

that had limited British aid to Finland rather than any hesitation or pessimism from the War Office.³⁸⁴

As the Soviet attack on the Mannerheim Line continued, time was most certainly of the essence. The intelligence that had reached the Foreign Office suggested that a new Soviet offensive was imminent. When the Finns failed to make an official appeal to Great Britain, Sargent asked Collier to compose a memorandum relating to the implications of British policy towards Finland. In spite of Collier's inappropriate behaviour throughout the crisis, his overall argument in the 1 March paper had appeared to hold sway amongst his superiors. Collier relayed the details of the original plan of action, whereby Great Britain and France were to ask the permission of the Norwegian and Swedish Governments to send forces across their territory. However, they could not do so without the consent of Sweden or Norway. Collier criticised the original plan as he believed that no consideration had been given to the effect on public opinion in France and Britain. The most likely result of such a policy would be a desperate appeal by Finland to the Western Powers as well as to Norway and Sweden. Any appeal would inevitably be made public. Britain and France would announce that they had prepared an expedition and had asked the permission of the Swedish and Norwegian Governments to send the volunteers across their territory to Finland. Collier predicted that the Swedish and Norwegian Governments would refuse. In that case, all that the Allied Powers could say was that the blood of Finland was on the hands of Sweden and Norway. For Collier, that was unacceptable.³⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the Germans would publicly state that they would not tolerate the passage of the expedition and it would appear that the Swedish and Norwegian Governments refusal for passage was the result of German opposition to

³⁸⁴ Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 3 March 1940.

³⁸⁵ NA, FO371/24804/N2813/9/56, memorandum by Collier, 6 March 1940.

the plan. Collier feared that the world would believe that Britain had abandoned not only Finland, but Scandinavia as well, to Russo-German domination. According to Collier, this was the opinion held by the French Government. Should such this occur as a consequence of any action or inaction by His Majesty's Government, a very severe strain would be placed on Anglo-French relations. The reputation of His Majesty's Government in France and in the world at large would be damaged, which was why Collier had argued that the original plan should be abandoned.

Instead, His Majesty's Government should face the Scandinavian Governments with a *fait accompli* in the form of landing the first contingent of troops quietly at Narvik in the guise of further volunteers, without waiting for the consent of the Norwegian Government. Gladwyn Jebb, previously Cadogan's private secretary prior to his appointment as to the Special Operations Executive, had first suggested such a plan; Collier fully approved of it. If the contingent of 'volunteers' were sent to Narvik, Collier did not believe that the authorities at Narvik or the Swedish frontier guards would oppose their landing. The Germans would most certainly object to an Anglo-French force moving towards the source of their supplies of iron-ore and would take counter measures. Scandinavian public opinion would hardly permit the Norwegian and Swedish Governments to become active allies of Germany in turning out the Anglo-French forces on their territory. If the Germans persisted in adopting forcible measures, they would have to fight the Swedes and Norwegians as well, which would be advantageous for the British Government. Collier was aware that the military authorities had stipulated that Scandinavian cooperation and not merely acquiescence was essential, as anything short of that would make it almost impossible for the expedition to arrive in Finland at the time planned, yet he did not feel that an adequate reason to oppose his proposed *fait accompli*. If the Finns maintained their

current position, Collier argued that the delay in the expedition's arrival would not necessarily be fatal. A delay was far more desirable than a failure to send any aid whatsoever. The consequences of the latter would be extremely grave, and could very well mark a turning point in the war. In conclusion, Collier wrote: 'in such circumstances I hope I may be forgiven if I have in any way trespassed beyond my province or spoken my mind more frankly than is proper'. Collier further hoped that his paper had illustrated to his superiors in the Foreign Office that a decision of some sort was urgently required.³⁸⁶ Collier believed that the British Government was guilty of moving in a vicious circle, refusing to tell the Finns what action Great Britain would take unless they first make their formal appeal, whilst the Finns refuse to make their appeal until they know what His Majesty's Government would do once it had been made.³⁸⁷

Collier's appeal for speedy and decisive action proved to be unnecessary. On 8 March news reached the Foreign Office that negotiations had begun. There was a general consensus that His Majesty's Government ought to keep out of the negotiations as they had no business interfering. It was decided that the only peace terms which the Soviets were likely to accept would gravely discredit the reputation of any foreign government that had helped to bring about their acceptance.³⁸⁸ Should the Finnish Government reach a settlement with the Soviets, His Majesty's Government would have nothing more to say on the matter.

If, on the other hand, they failed, the Finnish Government would have to decide whether they would make the suggested appeal for the help of the military forces of Great Britain and France. Should such an appeal be made, the Finnish

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ NA, FO371/ 24804/ N2815/ 9/ 56, minute by Collier, 7 March 1940.

³⁸⁸ NA, FO371/ 24793/ N3130/ 1/ 56, minute by Collier, 8 March 1940, minute by Sargent, 10 March 1940.

Government would have to do so by 12 March, the date of the alleged new Soviet offensive. Halifax made it clear that in the event of a Finnish appeal, His Majesty's Government could afford to send fifty Blenheim Bombers.³⁸⁹ Collier maintained that 'the Swedes are the chief villains of this piece', whilst Sargent doubted that the British could have altered the decision of the Finnish Government even had His Majesty's Government made the offer as regards the immediate despatch of bombers.³⁹⁰

The peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union was signed on 13 March 1940. The terms were transmitted to the Foreign Office and contained nine articles. The most pertinent terms in the Treaty included the amassing of Finnish territory in the Karelian Isthmus, the fifty-year lease of Hangö to the Soviet Union and the understanding that neither party would attack the other. Nor would they conclude any alliance or participate in any coalition against the other Power.³⁹¹ Barclay was scathing about the peace treaty, and stated that the terms were 'appallingly severe',³⁹² whilst Collier was scathing about the Swedish response following the signature of the treaty. During a speech by the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs on 13 March, Gunther, had stated that the Swedish Government had attempted to assist the Finnish Government to find a basis for fresh negotiations with the Soviet Government. In their position as intermediary, the Swedish Government had attempted to utilise every opportunity to promote Finland's interests and had never exercised any pressure on the Finnish Government.³⁹³ Again, Collier was guilty of letting his emotions run wild. Writing that 'this is one of the most dishonest

³⁸⁹ NA, FO371/ 24804/ N2994/ 9/ 56, minute by Halifax, 10 March 1940.

³⁹⁰ NA, FO371/ 24804/ N3064/ 9/ 56, minute by Sargent, 12 March 1940.

³⁹¹ NA, FO371/ 24794/ N3182/ 1/ 56, Le Rougetel to FO, 13 March 1940.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, minute by Barclay, 14 March 1940.

³⁹³ NA, FO371/ 24794/ N3263/ 1/ 56, Mallet to FO, 14 March 1940.

speeches ever made outside a totalitarian country', Collier proceed to examine the 'more flagrantly disingenuous passages'.³⁹⁴

The first of these related to the fact that the Swedish Government, especially the Foreign Minister, had exercised the strongest pressure on the Finnish Government to accept peace on any terms. Collier further asserted that he had reason to believe that the German Legation in Stockholm had urged the Swedish Government to proceed with their pro-German mediation. Finally, and most crucially, Collier asserted that the Swedish Government knew that they could intervene in Finland by themselves without provoking any German action. They chose to believe that their intervention would not be decisive without Anglo-French aid. Furthermore, the Swedes had clearly feared that any intervention would involve them in the main war. In spite of his outrage, Collier did not suggest that the British Government expose Gunther in its propaganda, but he did believe it essential to prevent public opinion abroad from believing that the Swedish Government was blameless in the matter. For Collier, the fundamental fallacy underlying the policy adopted by the Swedish Government was the assumption that a neutral state ought never to run the slightest risk of being involved in war by helping the victim of aggression, even if the aggressive party threatens its own interests.³⁹⁵ Sargent agreed generally with Collier, yet wanted to make it clear that it should be the object of His Majesty's Government to show that the Germans were the ultimate villains of the piece, rather than the Swedes.³⁹⁶

Following the conclusion of the Winter War, there was a swell of ill-feeling towards the Soviet Government within British public and official opinion. Those in the War Office, much like those in the Northern Department, were increasingly

³⁹⁴ Ibid., minute by Collier, 16 March 1940.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 17 March 1940.

belligerent in their attitudes towards the Soviet Union. The War Office's opinions were similar to those held by Collier. They had dismissed the arguments of those sympathetic to the Soviets. A *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union was neither possible nor desirable.³⁹⁷ Once again the idea of bombing the oil fields in Baku was raised. Maclean had no doubt that the recent conciliatory and friendly attitude adopted by the Soviet Government towards Britain was due to the Soviet victory over Finland. Now that the Soviets were no longer preoccupied with the war with Finland, they could turn their attention to their economic relations with Great Britain after months of ignoring the issue. More crucially, Maclean attributed this more conciliatory attitude to the 'fear of the Soviet Government that we were preparing to bomb the oilfields'.³⁹⁸ Once again it was Collier and Maclean who were in favour of maintaining a hard-line policy towards Moscow. It was in the economic sphere that the British could effectively show their displeasure of recent Soviet conduct. Aside from any action at Baku, the best way to strike a blow at the Soviets was through the detention of Soviet ships carrying contraband to Vladivostok. As Maclean noted, Vladivostok had 'constituted a bad gap in our blockade of Germany'. In view of the apparent close collaboration between the Soviet Union and Germany, and alongside the present unsatisfactory state of Anglo-Soviet relations, it was in the British interest to prevent war material from reaching the Soviet Union itself. Maclean had held this view prior to the Winter War. The loss of British prestige that resulted from the conflict had made the success of the British blockade infinitely more crucial. Maclean had doubted Soviet sincerity in their renewed desire for an Anglo-Soviet economic arrangement. If Britain was to agree to commence negotiations, 'after their experience of last summer, the Russians doubtless hope to be able to keep us in play

³⁹⁷ NA, FO371/ 24850/ N3288/ 132/ 38, War Office to FO, 7 March 1940.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, minute by Maclean, 23 March 1940.

for a considerable period'.³⁹⁹ In a review of the current state of Anglo-Soviet relations and Soviet policy towards Britain and Germany, Collier believed that there was no reason to suppose that the Soviet Government would be willing to purchase a political *détente* with France and Britain by abandoning their economic collaboration with Germany. At the heart of the Nazi-Soviet economic cooperation was the desire to render the Anglo-French blockade ineffective.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, the only real means of disrupting the trade levels between the USSR and Germany was through the detention of the ships.

Maclean expanded upon this point a fortnight later following a discussion with Sir William Seeds. Seeds had told Maclean that the Soviet Government's present policy of cooperation was based solely on Soviet interests. Consequently, there was no hope improvement in that respect. However, Seeds had felt that the British Government would be well advised in entering into trade negotiations with Moscow, but warned that they ought to 'adopt a firmer attitude than would have been called for last autumn'.⁴⁰¹ Seeds' statement is somewhat surprising. As the former British Ambassador in Moscow, one would expect that his experience in dealing with the Soviet Government, not to mention the fact that he was withdrawn from his post due to Soviet aggression in Finland, would result in a far less accommodating attitude towards the Soviets. Indeed, during his final meeting with Molotov in January 1940, Seeds had complained of the way in which the Foreign Minister spoke to him, and expressed his disbelief in Molotov's assertion that 'Finland would never have been so openly hostile to the Soviet Union even during the negotiations [prior to the war] had she not been instigated by us [Great Britain]'.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ NA, FO371/ 24846/ N3485/ 40/ 38, minute by Maclean, 21 March 1940.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 25 March 1940.

⁴⁰¹ NA, FO371/ 24846/ N3794/ 40/ 38, minute by Maclean, 3 April 1940.

⁴⁰² NA, FO371/ N40/ 40/ 38, Seeds to Foreign Office, 1 January 1940.

Maclean promptly aired his objections to Seeds' suggestion. Maclean doubted whether any useful purpose would be served by such negotiations if there was no prospect of preventing the Soviet Government from continuing their support of Germany and thus prolonging the war indefinitely. Aside from that, what could Great Britain obtain from the Soviets that would be of any use? It was Maclean's belief that the Soviet Union would not declare war on Britain, as it was to the interest of neither Germany nor the Soviet Union that the latter should be involved in hostilities with Britain. But that was all that Britain could hope for from the Soviets.⁴⁰³ Maclean acknowledged that should His Majesty's Government move forward with the negotiations, a possible outcome would be the restriction of Soviet exports to Germany, as Britain would offer to take the greater part of Soviet export surplus themselves. Restriction, not prevention, of Soviet exports was the pertinent point. Whilst that constituted the only possible approach for the British at that time, Maclean fully believed that it would only constitute a temporary solution to the problem. Maclean argued that the Soviets were once again raising the possibility of a trade agreement in order to manipulate the British Government into refraining from any drastic action against the Soviet Union. Should an Anglo-Soviet economic agreement be reached, the Soviets would simply keep the British in play for as long as was convenient. Once inconvenient the Soviets would then cease to fulfil their obligations under the agreement and the bulk of Soviet exports would once again be sent to Germany. Maclean concluded by stating that there was little probability that the benefits of any agreement for Great Britain would bear any relation to the 'very considerable advantages' which the Soviets and Germans would gain by keeping the British in play. In addition, it would prevent the British from taking any initiative

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

against the Soviet Union until it was too late. That was the real object of direct and indirect approaches by the Kremlin to His Majesty's Government at that time.⁴⁰⁴

Collier very much doubted the worth attached to any economic agreement with the Soviets, unless it specifically stated that the Soviet Union would stop supplying Germany. All that would be achieved was a prolonged negotiation process that would ultimately result in British disappointment, as was the case in the summer of 1939.⁴⁰⁵

On 27 March Maisky had called on Halifax and informed him that the Soviet Government would be prepared to enter into negotiations 'without delay', yet only along the lines suggested by the Foreign Secretary in October 1939.⁴⁰⁶ Evidently, once Stalin was no longer preoccupied with the Finnish crisis, he was ready to conclude a general trade agreement. No mention of a war trade agreement was mentioned, merely a desire to improve Anglo-Soviet trade relations. Maclean was dissatisfied with the Maisky's communication, as it failed to include any concrete information as to what the Soviet Government wanted to achieve from the agreement. Whilst considering the motives behind the Soviet offer, Maclean recalled the 'unsatisfactory character of Anglo-Soviet trade relations in the past', in which the failed triple alliance negotiations of 1939 were once again referred to.⁴⁰⁷ When the political and military negotiations broke down prior to the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet Government had failed to respond to the British offer of sending a trade delegation under Mr Hudson to Moscow, an offer that had been made at the beginning of 1939. There were clear parallels between Soviet game playing that had shrouded the trade negotiations of 1939 and the tactics being used during

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., minute by Collier, 4 April 1940.

⁴⁰⁶ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N5246/ 5/ 38, Telegram: Le Rougetel, 29 April 1940.

⁴⁰⁷ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N4155/ 5/ 38, minute by Maclean, 4 April 1940.

Britain's second attempt at opening trade negotiations with Moscow. As the Soviet Government had failed to respond to the British trade proposals of October 1939, Maclean asserted that the Soviet Government did not attach any real importance to their trade relations with Britain. The sudden appearance of a war trade agreement proposal at the end of March 1940, therefore, was seen by Maclean as dictated by purely political considerations. It was clear to Maclean that rumours had reached Moscow of the possibility of British action against the oilfields at Baku. One could assume that the new course of Soviet policy was met with the full approval of the German Government, as it was a well-established belief within the Foreign Office and His Majesty's Government generally that the Soviet Union would not take any action that would antagonise the Germans.⁴⁰⁸

Should the British Government decide to proceed with economic negotiations with the Soviets, in spite of the dubious motivations on behalf of Moscow, what benefits could Britain derive from a trade agreement with the Soviet Government? The only understanding of any value would be a war trade agreement, which would require the Soviet Government to cease their economic support of and cooperation with Germany for the duration of the war.⁴⁰⁹ Collier qualified Maclean's statement by commenting in the margin that the most that the British Government could expect was a reduction of Soviet supplies of certain raw materials to Germany, such as oil and non-precious metals.⁴¹⁰ It was noted by Maclean that Germany was the natural market for the Soviet Union, and both Powers would benefit from continued economic cooperation. Soviet raw materials could be exchanged for German arms and machinery. German technical assistance would prove particularly valuable in the reorganising of Soviet industry; assistance that would be even more crucial following

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., minute by Collier, 4 April 1940.

the departure of foreign experts from the Soviet Union. It was questionable what His Majesty's Government could offer the Soviets in order for them to renounce such a beneficial economic agreement, a policy that also boasted the added benefit of prolonging the war and thus weakening both Britain and Germany. The arguments put forth by Maclean in his memorandum were consistently held and did not waver as events unfolded. His distrust of Soviet intentions and his belief that the British Government would not be able to induce the Soviets to renounce their economic cooperation with the Germans did not change throughout his tenure at the Northern Department.⁴¹¹

In spite of the advice tendered by Maclean and Collier, it was apparent that their superiors in the Foreign Office felt it prudent to move forward with plans to improve Anglo-Soviet economic relations. Although aware of the Soviet Government's tendency to draw out negotiations and use negotiations with London as a means of getting the most out of the Germans, Halifax decided to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of the recent Soviet proposals for an economic agreement. Phillip Kerr, the British Ambassador in Washington, took up the question of the proposals made by Moscow in a telegram to Halifax on 8 April following a discussion with Cripps. During their conversation, Cripps relayed the details of his tour to India and China that had taken place at the end of November 1939. Whilst in Chungking, Cripps had a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador. During the course of the conversation between Kerr and Cripps it was suggested that the latter visit Moscow in order to discuss the issue of Anglo-Soviet relations with Molotov.⁴¹²

Cripps arrived in Moscow on 15 February. Cripps recorded in his diary the details of his meeting with Molotov that had taken place on the day of his arrival to

⁴¹¹ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 4 April 1940.

⁴¹² H. Hanak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow May 1940 to June 1941', *English Historical Review*, 94 (1979), 48-70 (p. 53).

Moscow. During the course of their conversation, Cripps had informed the Foreign Minister that he had hoped that their two Governments would be able to come to some agreement following the conclusion of the 'Finnish incident'. The issue of the nature and extent of Nazi-Soviet relations was discussed in conjunction with possible future Anglo-Soviet cooperation. For his part, Molotov insisted that 'the German association was only looked upon as a temporary expedient'. Molotov's reassurances were readily accepted by Cripps. He was convinced that the Soviets were 'anxious for a *rapprochement* with Great Britain and indeed that they were anxious for it at as early a moment as possible'. Why, then, had the Soviet Government ignored the British proposals for a trade agreement, proposals that could have served as a platform for future discussions? Molotov had complained about the generally unfriendly attitudes of the British and French Governments, and of their equally unfriendly actions towards the Soviet Union. In spite of such grievances, Cripps left Moscow with the belief that once the political situation stabilised, the Soviet Government were sincerely desirous for an Anglo-Soviet agreement to be reached at the earliest opportunity.⁴¹³ Kerr was also convinced of Molotov's keen desire of the Soviet Government to make a trade agreement with Britain.⁴¹⁴

Cripps' account was discussed at length during a Cabinet meeting on 6 May, in which the principle problems arising from Cripps' communication were discussed. In the first instance, Molotov had not suggested that by concluding an Anglo-Soviet trade agreement there would be a modification in Soviet policy towards Germany. Rather he wished to trade with both sides to the advantage of the Soviet Union. Molotov had insisted that such a policy would prevent a monopolisation of Soviet

⁴¹³ Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps in Moscow 1940-1942. Diaries and Papers* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), p. 23.

⁴¹⁴ NA, FO371/24839/N4114/8/38, telegram by Kerr, 8 April 1940.

imports and exports by Germany.⁴¹⁵ In a barely veiled threat, Molotov had warned Cripps that should the United Kingdom not be prepared to negotiate by the end of April, the Soviet Government would be likely to make a decision that would be ‘highly unfavourable to us [Great Britain]’.⁴¹⁶ Rather than expressing displeasure at the Soviet strategy of threats and manipulation, Cripps drew three conclusions: 1) that the Soviet and German Governments were fundamentally antagonistic; 2) a belief that the Soviet Government would prefer to see peace rather than risk being drawn into the conflict; and finally, that apart from foodstuffs, the Soviets were not likely to provide Germany with any pertinent materials necessary to wage war against Great Britain. Thus, any attempts to blockade Vladivostok would not derive any real benefit for Britain and France, as the present imports via Vladivostok were merely replacing those goods normally imported through European ports. Any such blockade would merely risk war with the USSR. Cripps was able to convince the Cabinet that his arguments held considerable force and it was recommended that the Foreign Secretary talk to Cripps upon his return to London.⁴¹⁷ Halifax supported Cripps’ initiative and was in favour of sending him on an official mission to Moscow to explore the possibilities of reaching an agreement with the Soviet Government.

The same day, Ingram from the Ministry of Economic Warfare communicated to Sargent his views as to the desirability of negotiating once again with the Soviets. Ingram enclosed a memorandum detailing the kind of agreement that would be satisfactory for the Ministry.⁴¹⁸ This memorandum served as the British counter-proposal to the Soviet overtures of 27 March. In a minute attached to the memorandum Ingram drew attention to the administrative inefficiency of the Soviet

⁴¹⁵ CAB65/7, 6 May 1940.

⁴¹⁶ NA, FO371/24839/N4114/8/38, telegram by Kerr, 8 April 1940.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ NA, FO371/24839/N4141/5/38, Ingram to Sargent, 8 April 1940.

Union and the fact that one could not place any reliance on assurances from Moscow, making one take pause before recommending the commencement of negotiations. The memorandum itself laid out the terms that the Ministry of Economic Warfare believed to fulfil British requirements. Ingram clearly stated in the opening paragraph that the writers were told that they need not explore the question of whether a policy of concluding a war trade agreement with the Soviets would be desirable or undesirable. Questions of policy were to be decided by higher authorities.⁴¹⁹

The paper was to concentrate solely on the outline of a possible war trade agreement with Soviet Russia with the object of furthering Anglo-French measures of economic warfare against Nazi Germany. Any such trade agreement must restrict goods passing to Germany across the USSR – a point held by Collier and his colleagues in the Foreign Office, one of the few instances of agreement over policy – and the restriction of the export of Soviet domestic produce to Germany. It was noted that protracted and indecisive negotiations with the Soviet Government would be undesirable for London, who would not want a repeat of the humiliating triple alliance negotiations. Rather, the best course would be for the immediate agreement upon the principles of a war trade agreement, with the details to be worked out at a later date. For the Ministry of Economic Warfare, ‘the obstacles to a war trade agreement with Russia are mainly political and sentimental; the purely economic ones are comparatively simple’.⁴²⁰ Two days later it was decided to accept the Soviet offer of commencing trade negotiations and that Halifax would indeed discuss this with Cripps when the latter returned from Washington.⁴²¹

During a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador on 19 April, Halifax attempted to explain the British predicament with regards to the possibility of

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., ‘Proposal for Anglo-Soviet Trade Negotiations’, undated memorandum.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ NA, FO371/24839/N4114/8/38, minute by Maclean, 10 April 1940.

reaching an understanding with the Soviet Government. Noting that Britain had throughout the opening months of the war attempted to recognise the position of the Soviet Union as a 'limitrophe' neutral of Germany, but that the most significant point that the British Government had to consider was the effectiveness of the British blockade. With this in mind, Halifax had hoped that exploratory talks could be held and way in which to overcome difficulties could be discussed.⁴²² He then gave Maisky the memorandum that had been prepared by the Ministry of Economic Warfare that had laid out the British proposals for a war trade agreement in full. Maisky was once again noncommittal in his response, stating that whilst he would give the proposals to his Government, but did not know what their reaction would be. The ambassador believed that his Government would take issue to the fact that His Majesty's Government wanted assurances of Soviet internal products. As Maisky had stated, the Soviet Union intended to maintain its position as a neutral. As such, the Soviet Government was at liberty to send supplies to Germany if she wished to. The British demands were likely to be problematic and would thus reduce the chance of reaching an understanding. Maisky then asked the Foreign Secretary why the British proposals for trade talks were different from those made in October. Rather than emphasising a desire to build upon existing barter agreements, the most recent proposals spoke of a war trade agreement. It was the latter that his political masters in Moscow would have an issue with. The exchange of timber against rubber, copper or machinery would not raise any problems with Moscow. In justification for the change in scope, Halifax informed Maisky that the reports reaching London of the economic aims of Germany in regard to the USSR, and the general policy of the British blockade of Germany, had made it necessary to introduce of the war trade

⁴²² NA, FO371/ 24840/ N4749/ 5/ 38, Halifax to Le Rougetel (Moscow), 19 April 1940.

aspect to the question. Halifax did not shy away from the fact that he wanted to see talks start for trade as well as for political reasons, but he ‘had little doubt that the Soviet leaders would make criticisms of any formula’ since he had ‘already found them adept at this art’.⁴²³

Although Maisky had insisted on 27 March that the Soviet Government would be prepared to enter into negotiations with Britain ‘without delay’, it was not until 29 April that the Soviet Ambassador handed Halifax a communication from Moscow. John Hellier Le Rougetel, who had been the Chargé d’Affaires in Moscow between 1930 and 1939, transmitted Maisky’s recent communication to the Foreign Office. As scathing as ever – Le Rougetel’s dislike of the Soviets was well known – he wrote that the Soviet Government maintained that as a neutral power they were within their rights to trade with both belligerent and neutral countries according to its own requirements in imports and exports.⁴²⁴ Furthermore, the Soviet Government intended to carry out its trade agreement with Germany. The Soviets were, however, prepared to re-establish trade relations with Great Britain in commodities of interest to both sides on the basis of reciprocity, providing that any agreement concluded would not demand from either side the violation of its trading obligations *vis-à-vis* other countries.⁴²⁵ The Soviet reply was far from satisfactory. Moscow had not put forward any concrete proposals covering the desiderata of His Majesty’s Government as set out in their memorandum of 19 April. It was clear that Nazi-Soviet trade relations would continue, ensuring that British remained fearful that Germany would receive the goods imported under a general agreement. Collier correctly identified that the Soviet Government had not changed their policy of supporting Germany against Great Britain by every means short of going to war with them. The only

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N5246/ 5/ 38, telegram: Le Rougetel, 29 April 1940.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

apparent change that the Soviets had made was that they were putting slightly less public emphasis on it.⁴²⁶ Indeed, it was hopeless to expect the Soviet Union to act as a counter-weight to Germany, or to convince them of the prudence of reaching an understanding with London under the terms desired by the British Government.⁴²⁷

As was the case throughout the Finnish crisis, Collier and Maclean were in agreement with one another. There was no advantage in concluding an agreement expressly designed to safeguard German interests, which was evidently what the Soviet Government were offering London in their memorandum of 29 April. Consequently, in Maclean's opinion, 'the Soviet note cannot be said to furnish a basis for discussions'.⁴²⁸ Should the British Government settle for a simple barter agreement it would produce a disastrous effect on Allied and neutral opinion. To acquiesce to this would be regarded as a display of weakness – something that they were desperate to avoid during the Soviet-Finnish conflict. It was essential that Britain avoid giving the impression that in return for timber the British Government was prepared to overlook Soviet aggression against Poland, the Baltic States and Finland, as well as Soviet cooperation with Germany. As such, Maclean reiterated his oft-stated belief that Soviet neutrality was advantageous for both the USSR and Germany, and that the Soviet Government would not jeopardise her relationship with Germany.⁴²⁹ Sargent concurred with Maclean's analysis. Only a war trade agreement would suffice, as 'anything short of this would not merely be of no use to us but might do us positive harm'. The Ministry of Economic Warfare had made that much clear, and if the British entered into negotiations with Moscow, it was highly likely

⁴²⁶ NA, FO371/ 24847/ N5129/ 40/ 38, minute by Collier, 29 April 1940.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., minute by Collier, 25 May 1940.

⁴²⁸ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N5449/ 5/ 38, memorandum by Maclean, 1 May 1940.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

that they would be ‘dragged into doomed negotiations’, the breakdown of which would inevitably be blamed on the British, as was the case in August 1939.⁴³⁰

Following a discussion with Sargent and Collier, Halifax agreed that the Soviet reply was unsatisfactory and seemingly barred the way to further negotiations. However, he was anxious to find out whether it also barred the possibility of an agreement with London. It was Halifax’s hope that any such agreement would replace the Soviet agreement with Germany when the latter expired.⁴³¹ Somewhat tentatively, Halifax questioned whether one could discover Soviet opinion on this point by simply asking the Soviet Government for the particulars of their agreement with Germany. It was agreed by Halifax, Sargent and Collier that the Soviets would not disclose the particulars of their arrangement with the Germans. Thus, any further Anglo-Soviet discussions would inexorably reach a deadlock, unless the British Government was prepared to limit the scope to a simple barter agreement. Not enthusiastic with such an outcome, Halifax asked the Ministry of Economic Warfare and the Board of Trade to weigh in and help the Foreign Secretary draw up a reply to the Soviet memorandum.⁴³²

The European situation alongside Britain’s war strategy had dictated British policy. As Germany was preparing to send troops into France, the Foreign Secretary believed that the need to reach a satisfactory agreement with the USSR had become far more urgent. As such, it was necessary to have a British Ambassador in Moscow once again. It was at this juncture that the question of sending Sir Stafford Cripps arose once again, who was regarded by Halifax as a better candidate than Sir William Seeds, the previous ambassador in Moscow. Cripps’ successful visit to Moscow and the cordial manner in which he was received by Molotov had made him the obvious

⁴³⁰ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 1 May 1940.

⁴³¹ Ibid., minute by Collier, 1 May 1940.

⁴³² Ibid.

candidate. At the time of Cripps' personal visit to Moscow, Maclean was far from impressed that he had taken it upon himself to discuss policy with Molotov, without the consent of His Majesty's Government.⁴³³ In spite of the objections of the Northern Department, it was decided in the Cabinet on 6 May that Cripps would go to Moscow, accompanied by Professor Postan of the Ministry of Economic Warfare and Lascelles of the Northern Department. Whilst there were doubts as to whether the mission would be successful, Halifax had hoped that the negotiations would at least create a rift in Soviet-German relations. He assured the War Cabinet that as the mission was exploratory only, it would not involve the British Government in any commitment towards the Soviet Government.⁴³⁴

For Ingram, any war trade agreement that could be negotiated with the Soviets was unlikely to meet the British requirements, and was sceptical that they would in fact fulfil its obligations should they succeed in signing an agreement.⁴³⁵ In spite of the advice tendered by Ingram, Sargent and Collier, Halifax was determined to explore every possibility of concluding a war trade agreement with the Soviet Union. As May drew to a close, Sargent informed Le Rougetel in Moscow of the decision reached in London. Justifying the decision to send Cripps, Sargent informed Le Rougetel that Maisky recently had indicated that the current deadlock could be broken if the exchange of notes between Government's was abandoned in favour of personal contact. He further hinted that a change in procedure such as this could very well induce the Soviet Government to discuss political issues alongside economic ones. One ought to question whether Maisky was sincere in his proclamation or merely manipulating the Foreign Secretary.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Kitchen, p. 22.

⁴³⁴ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N5499/ 5/ 38, War Cabinet Conclusions, 113(40), 6 May 1940.

⁴³⁵ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N5554/ 5/ 38, memorandum by Ingram, 9 May 1940.

⁴³⁶ NA, FO371/ 24840/ N5499/ 5/ 38, Foreign Office to Le Rougetel, 25 May 1940.

By the time of Ingram's telegram to Le Rougetel, the 'Phoney War' had come to an end, following the German invasion of France. The fall of France did little to improve the likelihood of attaining an economic agreement with the USSR, as it was believed that Britain could very easily – and swiftly – follow in France's footsteps. Should Moscow sign an agreement with the United Kingdom only for the British to fall at the hands of Germany, the Soviet Government would be left in an extremely difficult position. Consequently, as a German victory on the Western Front became more likely, Anglo-Soviet negotiations were yet to start. Indeed, the Soviet Government had not responded to the British counter-proposals delivered to Maisky on 8 May. It is entirely likely that the French capitulation, coupled with the ease and speed of the German success, contributed to Stalin's eagerness to remain on good terms with the Germans.⁴³⁷ Consequently, as the Phoney War was drawing to a close, Europe was in a state of flux and Britain's desire to simultaneously improve its economic relations with the Soviet Union whilst strengthening the Allied blockade against Germany was theoretical at best, and no progress to this end had been achieved.

⁴³⁷ Gorodetsky, 'Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact', p. 32.

Chapter Two
From the fall of France to ‘Operation *Barbarossa*’
‘The question for a British Ambassador here is not how much he can do, but
merely how much he can stand’.⁴³⁸

As the German *Wehrmacht* swept through Western Europe in the summer of 1940 the Governments of Great Britain and the Soviet Union were forced to review their respective wartime relationships. The suitability of the British ‘policy of reserve’ that had hitherto been adopted towards the Soviet Government had to be scrutinised as a consequence of German successes in Western Europe and the subsequent collapse of France. Britain had lost its main ally, and, with America’s continued adherence to non-belligerency, the necessity of improving relations with the USSR had to be considered once again by those within the British Foreign Office. Furthermore, the pertinent question of Soviet policy towards Germany and its impact upon Anglo-Soviet relations was again raised within the Foreign Office. Many officials believed that the German Government would inevitably turn its attention to the USSR following the German successes in the Netherlands, Belgium and France.⁴³⁹ Should such predictions prove to be accurate, how would Stalin react? Would the Soviet leader consider the implications of Hitler’s successes in Europe and deem a continuation of the policy of neutrality to be in the best interest of the USSR? The key question for Stalin was whether the German Führer was now likely to turn the tables on the Soviet Union, or would he instead seek to dominate Western Europe in its entirety before contemplating an attack in the East? Should Stalin fear such an eventuality, would an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* be viewed as the most advantageous course, or would he continue to adhere to the policy of benevolent neutrality whilst consolidating the position of the Soviet Union in anticipation of a

⁴³⁸ NA, FO371/ 29475/ N941/ 29/ 38, minute by Collier, 10 March 1941.

⁴³⁹ David M. Crowe, *The Baltic States and the Great Powers. Foreign Relations, 1938-1940* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), p. 149.

German attack? Consequently, one can appreciate the sense of urgency that had gripped British policy-makers as they began to reconsider the wartime relationships of both the belligerents and non-belligerents.

In the months following the fall of France the possibility of obtaining a war trade agreement with the Soviet Government continued to be pursued within the Foreign Office. Intrinsicly linked to Anglo-Soviet trade relations was the question of the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States that had taken place over the summer of 1940. The question of whether His Majesty's Government was to grant *de facto* or *de jure* recognition of the most recent act of Soviet aggression dominated discussion within the Foreign Office at that time. British policy-makers were faced with an inherently irksome dilemma – a refusal to appease Stalin over the Baltic States would undoubtedly put an end to any chances of obtaining a war trade agreement with the Soviet Union which would serve to strengthen the British blockade of Germany. Yet to grant *de jure* recognition of this latest act of aggression would be viewed worldwide as buying off the Soviet Union at the expense of three independent nations.⁴⁴⁰ Could His Majesty's Government appease one dictator in an attempt to defeat another?

A review of British policy was undertaken in the immediate aftermath of both Germany's subjugation of France and the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States. This had culminated in a lengthy document with contributions from the Permanent Under-Secretary of State and his Deputy, as well as members of the Northern Department. In a minute penned on 18 June 1940, only days prior to the signing of the armistice between France and Germany, Sargent had expressed his conviction that the Soviet Government would not abandon its present policy towards Germany. Stalin would

adhere to the policy of neutrality whilst fulfilling the terms of the various Nazi-Soviet economic agreements.⁴⁴¹ The rapid increase in deliveries of Soviet raw materials to the Reich following the fall of France had clearly illustrated the importance that Stalin placed on economic support to Germany.⁴⁴²

Sargent's minute rebuffed the arguments put forth by Sir Stafford Cripps in his most recent communication to the Foreign Office. Following a meeting with the Soviet Foreign Minister on 13 June, at which the French Ambassador, Erik Labonne, was also present, Cripps stated that he had been surprised by the readiness of Molotov to consider the points put to him and was struck by the apparently genuine interest and appreciation of the British and French point of view. Cripps believed that the German *fait accompli* in France was likely to force the Soviet Government into adopting a more conciliatory and friendly attitude towards Britain, as Stalin would need British assistance to prevent German hegemony over the continent. As a consequence of this meeting, Cripps believed that a significant shift in Stalin's thinking had occurred, and that an improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations would be possible.⁴⁴³

Whilst Cripps had erred on the side of optimism in the aftermath of his meeting with Molotov – which was unsurprising as his sympathy towards the Soviet Union was well-known – Sargent took the opposing line, one of caution and doubt. He argued that although Stalin had undoubtedly been caught unawares by the rapidity of the German successes in Western Europe, the only viable option was for the Soviets to keep on friendly terms with Germany, however much they may have feared her. Indeed, Stalin would no doubt hope for the Reich's future discomfiture, yet

⁴⁴¹ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5808/ 30/ 38, minute by Sargent, 18 June 1940.

⁴⁴² *Documents on German Foreign Policy* [hereafter *DGFP*], D, X, document 206, 'Memorandum by an Official of the Economic Policy Department', 22 July 1940.

⁴⁴³ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5808/ 30/ 38, Cripps to FO, 13 June 1940.

Sargent believed that he would do nothing to encourage any such development himself.⁴⁴⁴ He also believed that Stalin feared the consequences that might ensue from anything other than Soviet acquiescence in German demands, both economic and political. Stalin had certainly intensified his economic appeasement of Germany and to that extent Cripps' optimism was unfounded. Sargent contended that in the months prior to the fall of France the Soviets could have quarrelled with the Germans without any severe repercussions, due mainly to German preoccupations with the campaign in Western Europe. Under present circumstances, however, the situation was radically different. As a consequence of the successful absorption of the Netherlands, Belgium and, imminently, of France, the resources of the Reich had multiplied and freed up the *Wehrmacht* for campaigns elsewhere. Indeed, as Hitler informed Molotov when the latter visited Berlin in November, following the conclusion of the French campaign, Germany was 'extraordinarily strong'.⁴⁴⁵ There was little doubt in Sargent's mind that Hitler would now turn his attentions to the Soviet Union. The Führer's anti-Soviet utterances throughout the 1930s had made his ultimate intentions clear enough. Should the Soviets do anything to upset the Germans, Hitler could send anything up to forty divisions to the Soviet frontier within a fortnight. Rather than quarrelling with Germany, in Sargent's opinion, Stalin had 'wisely chosen to mop up the Baltic States' in the hope of creating a strong strategic frontier, both on land and sea, against the day when he may be forced to defend himself against Hitlerite aggression.⁴⁴⁶ Although Sargent questioned why Hitler had allowed Stalin to strengthen his position in the Baltic, he believed that it was no doubt 'part of some comprehensive bargain, the object of which is to enable Russo-German collaboration to continue unimpaired for the time being'. Alternately, Hitler may

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 18 June 1940.

⁴⁴⁵ R. J. Sontag & J. Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, p. 219.

⁴⁴⁶ NA, FO371/24844/N5808/30/38, minute by Sargent, 18 June 1940.

have assessed the Soviet army and navy as being so inefficient that the strengthening of the Soviet strategic position in the Baltic would make no practical difference when it came to a Nazi-Soviet show down.⁴⁴⁷

The conclusions drawn by Sargent mirrored those formed within the Northern Department. Maclean argued that both Cripps and Labonne were showing ‘undue optimism’ at the attitude adopted by Molotov. All that could be gleaned from Cripps’ communication was that the Soviet Foreign Minister had listened politely to Labonne’s lamentations of the French desire to maintain resistance in the face of the German attack. Molotov would not commit himself or reveal the Soviet position without first consulting Stalin. Undoubtedly, the Soviet Government would be glad to find a means of prolonging French resistance, yet their fear of Germany was likely to prevent them from taking any positive action in the matter. Thus, Stalin’s appeasement of Germany would continue.⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, Maclean declared that he would be surprised if Stalin decided to engage in conversations with Britain on the delicate subject of preserving the European equilibrium. It was in the Soviet Union’s best interest to consolidate its position in Bessarabia and the Baltic States, an eventuality which would render an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* unlikely, as turning a blind eye to further Soviet aggression would be unpopular with domestic and foreign – particularly American – opinion.⁴⁴⁹ Collier’s contribution to the debate was brief. He agreed with Maclean regarding the Soviet Union and the Baltic States, whilst reiterating his long-standing belief that the key obstacle to a *rapprochement* with the Soviet Government was its continued supply of materials to Germany, as a result of

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, minute by Maclean, 17 June 1940.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. Concerns regarding American opinion were persistent throughout the war. The defeat of France presented a global conundrum for Great Britain, with American support taking precedence over any possible support from the USSR. See Nicholas Cull, *Selling War: the British Propaganda Campaign against American “Neutrality” in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

which the British blockade had been rendered useless. Until Moscow agreed to halt its economic aid to Germany there could be no economic agreement with the Soviets, and certainly no political understanding could be reached. The Head of the Northern Department intended to instruct Cripps to put that point straight to Molotov at the earliest possible opportunity.⁴⁵⁰

It is not surprising that Collier held this position regarding the Soviet Union and the economic blockade of Germany, nor is it surprising that the issue of Soviet action against the Baltic States had sparked his interest. As John Hiden has noted, throughout the 1930s Collier had consistently argued – alongside Frank Ashton-Gwatkin of the Economic Relations Department of the Foreign Office – that the Baltic States were vitally important to British commercial interests, and that economic stability in those countries was paramount. Collier had believed throughout the inter-war years that the main threat to the status quo came from Germany, and had argued that if the Germans succeeded in establishing an effective grip on Scandinavian and Baltic trade it would be to the detriment of British economic interests in those regions. He was equally adamant in 1940 that the Soviets should be prevented from establishing either political or economic control in the Baltic States.⁴⁵¹ However, during the inter-war years, in spite of the warnings of Collier and Ashton-Gwatkin, there was no formal British commitment to defend the border states in the event of aggression.⁴⁵² Although it was in Britain's best interest to maintain the independence of the Baltic States, Collier's superiors did not deem it a cause worth fighting for.

The question of Soviet intentions towards the Baltic States and Britain's economic blockade of Germany were intrinsically linked in the period between the

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, minute by Collier, 19 June 1940.

⁴⁵¹ John Hiden, 'Baltic Security Problems Between the Two World Wars', in *The Baltic and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, ed. by John Hiden and Thomas Lane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-20 (pp. 12-13).

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 13.

fall of France and Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Germany's successes in Western Europe had forced the Kremlin to consolidate its strategic position in the Baltic, as control of the Baltic States would greatly improve the defences of Leningrad in the event of German aggression against the USSR. This had prompted the British Government to consider whether to recognise the Soviet Union as the ruling Government of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in return for a considerable diminution of Soviet economic aid to Germany.⁴⁵³ Britain would only grant such recognition if there was adequate motivation to do so. In Collier's opinion, a promise from Stalin to halt supplying Germany was the only reason for such an inducement on the part of His Majesty's Government.

In an article written in 1943 by Henrikas Rabinavicius, a Lithuanian diplomat, the 'first note of suspicion that Soviet Russia had other than strategic intentions in the Baltic States was aroused in the summer of 1939', during the tripartite negotiations in Moscow.⁴⁵⁴ In a communication to Sir William Seeds in June 1939, the British Foreign Secretary had professed an appreciation of the Soviet desire to consolidate its position in the Baltic States. Initially, it was unclear as to whether consolidation, rather than conquest, dictated Soviet motivations. Indeed, in a conversation with the Estonian Ambassador in June 1939, Halifax had remarked that the USSR may have merely desired protection against the possibility of German action in the Baltic, and would not necessarily resort to aggressive measures to ensure such protection.⁴⁵⁵ In any case, Halifax was adamant that Britain could not allow Moscow to thrust upon the Governments of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania a guarantee which would be 'highly

⁴⁵³ John Hiden, 'British Policy towards the Baltic States: 1939-1945', *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 9 (2004), 75-87 (p. 81).

⁴⁵⁴ Henrikas Rabinavicius, 'The Fate of the Baltic States', *Russian Review*, 3, 1 (Autumn, 1943), 34-44 (p. 41).

⁴⁵⁵ *Documents on British Foreign Policy* [hereafter *DBFP*], 3, VI, pp. 95-96.

distasteful to them', nor one that would threaten their sovereignty.⁴⁵⁶ However, he did not qualify what action – if any – the British Government was likely to take to prevent any such guarantee. As the tripartite discussions progressed, it was evident that Halifax had displayed unfounded optimism and that Stalin had indeed deliberately intended to ask too much of the Governments of the Baltic States. Stalin had demanded that the Baltic States ought to be explicitly guaranteed by the USSR, even without their consent.⁴⁵⁷ Whilst Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, believed that any strengthening of the position of the USSR in the Baltic ought to be welcomed, as the alternative would mean a German domination of the region, the issue of the Baltic States proved to be a stumbling block during the Anglo-Soviet-French negotiations.⁴⁵⁸ As Hiden has noted, the tripartite negotiations of 1939 illustrated the fact that 'the British Government chose not to defy one dictator by appeasing a second'.⁴⁵⁹ When it became clear that an Anglo-Soviet-French agreement would not come to pass, Stalin began to consider the merits of coming to terms with the German Government.⁴⁶⁰ By signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact Stalin ensured that Estonia, Latvia and Finland would fall within the Soviet sphere of influence, whilst Vilnius initially fell in the German zone.⁴⁶¹ Lithuania was later assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence as a consequence of the signature of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty at the end of September 1939.⁴⁶² As one historian has remarked, Molotov had 'swapped ethnic Polish territory for

⁴⁵⁶ *DBFP*, 3, VI, Halifax to Seeds, p. 104.

⁴⁵⁷ Robert Manne, 'The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, 3 (July, 1974), 3-26 (p. 3).

⁴⁵⁸ Patrick Salmon, 'Great Britain, the Soviet Union and Finland at the Beginning of the Second World War', in *The Baltic States and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, ed. by John Hiden and Thomas Lane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 95- 123 (p. 96).

⁴⁵⁹ Hiden, 'British Policy towards the Baltic States', p. 78.

⁴⁶⁰ See pages 16-17 of chapter one for the historiography of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

⁴⁶¹ Sontag and Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, pp. 71-78.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

Lithuania, as easily as American kids swapped baseball cards'.⁴⁶³ Geoffrey Roberts has observed that control of the Baltic States would give the USSR a free hand in the area without fear of German military intervention.⁴⁶⁴

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Baltic States had been forced to sign mutual assistance pacts with the Soviet Government, a process that had been swiftly concluded by 10 October 1939. However, as A.N. Tarulis has noted, one ought to be careful not to conclude that the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States meant that they were now Soviet-occupied countries. Rather, outwardly they remained independent.⁴⁶⁵ As Molotov stated in a report to the Supreme Soviet at the end of March 1940, it had suited the Soviet Government to maintain peaceful relations with the Baltic countries whilst the Red Army was preoccupied in Finland.⁴⁶⁶ However, it was evident that once the Winter War had been concluded with the Soviet Union emerging victorious, and in light of Hitler's triumph in the west, it was necessary for the Soviet Government to adapt their attitudes and policies towards the Baltic States. Thus, the evolution of Soviet policy in the Baltic, from one of peace to one of aggression, was viewed as necessary in the face of a growing German hegemony on the continent. The justification put forward by Soviet historians in the 1970s and 1980s that Soviet policy had developed as a consequence of the growing anti-Soviet actions by the Baltic Governments themselves holds very little sway. Whilst one can most certainly appreciate that the Baltic countries were collaborating in an attempt to maintain their independence, as evinced in the Eleventh Baltic Entente Foreign

⁴⁶³ Michael Jabara Carley, 'A Situation of Delicacy and Danger': Anglo-Soviet Relations, August 1939-March 1940', *Contemporary European History*, 8, 2 (Jul., 1999), pp. 175-208 (p. 177).

⁴⁶⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (London: Tauris, 1989), p. 162.

⁴⁶⁵ A.N. Tarulis, *Soviet Policy Toward the Baltic States 1918-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), p. 166.

⁴⁶⁶ V.M. Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941), p. 64.

Ministers' Conference in Riga in March 1940, arguments of a Baltic-German alignment against the USSR lack credibility.⁴⁶⁷

The Soviet conquest and absorption of the Baltic States began in May 1940 and was completed by August. Lithuania was the first country to fall prey to Soviet designs, with the Soviet Government justifying its action by arguing that the kidnapping of Soviet officers coupled with acts of violence against Soviet soldiers had prompted a re-evaluation of Soviet policy. On 14 June Molotov had read the Soviet demands to the Lithuanian Government and stated that they had until the following day to respond. Similar methods were adopted in Latvia and Estonia, with the Soviet ultimatums being handed to the Latvian and Estonian Governments on 16 June, the result, according to Stalin, of the violation of their mutual assistance agreements. All three governments accepted the Soviet terms, as none was militarily strong enough to mount a successful campaign against the Red Army.⁴⁶⁸

These developments were discussed in Cripps' first interview with Molotov on 13 June 1940, days before the French collapse. According to the newly appointed ambassador, Molotov had been receptive to the idea of some closer collaboration with Great Britain and had urged the necessity for rapid action in the matter of a trade agreement with the British Government. Once France had capitulated, however, the views of the Soviet Government underwent a transformation. Instead of working towards a *rapprochement*, Cripps found himself denied access to Molotov – a common occurrence during his time in Moscow – whilst the French Ambassador was withdrawn from all active diplomatic contacts by the French Government.⁴⁶⁹ Cripps believed that the Soviet response to the fall of France in terms of proceeding to

⁴⁶⁷ For example, see I.K. Koblyakov, *USSR For Peace Against Aggression, 1933-1939* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976).

⁴⁶⁸ Crowe, *The Baltic States and the Great Powers*, pp. 159-161.

⁴⁶⁹ NA, FO371/24845/N6243/30/38, Cripps to Halifax, 2 August 1940.

liquidate the Baltic States as a means of reinforcing the USSR against possible attack was justified; the ensuing debate about the attitude now to be adopted towards Germany and Great Britain was also understandable. Following the absorption of the Baltic States, Cripps communicated to the Foreign Office that the only way in which the Soviet Government would abandon their present attitude of 'reluctant acquiescence' in the German domination of Europe would be through a clear and authoritative assurance of American collaboration and support. The ambassador maintained that the recent change in Soviet policy was not incompatible with the improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations, and that the desirability of inducing Stalin to adopt a policy of cooperation with Great Britain was 'clearly greater than ever'.⁴⁷⁰

Cripps' evaluation of the situation following the conclusion of the Phoney War was somewhat awry and wholly different from those entertained by his colleagues and superiors within the Foreign Office. Cripps' desperation, indeed his folly, is evident in his telegram to the Foreign Office. Not only did he encourage London to court the Soviet Government in order to improve relations, but he also stated his desire for the Foreign Secretary to instruct the British Ambassador in Washington to persuade President Roosevelt to convey such an assurance of collaboration and support to the Soviet Ambassador, Konstantin Umansky. Cripps believed that London could successfully draw the Soviet Union into a common front against Germany, a belief that was very much contrary to the consensus within the Foreign Office.⁴⁷¹

Sargent was careful not to dismiss outright the conclusions drawn by Cripps. Instead of involving the Americans, who were in any case reluctant to involve themselves, Sargent suggested that the best way to approach the Soviet Government

⁴⁷⁰ NA, FO371/24844/N5863/30/38, Cripps to FO 18 June 1940.

⁴⁷¹ NA, FO371/24844/N5863/30/38, Cripps to FO, 18 June 1940.

was for Cripps to deliver a message from the British Prime Minister to Stalin. As Stalin alone dictated policy, the only way in which the British could secure a change in Soviet policy would be through a personal approach to him.⁴⁷² Churchill agreed and a message was sent out via Cripps. It was hoped that it would give the Soviet Premier the occasion, should he desire it, to ‘enlarge on the views and intentions of the Soviet Government in the face of the sudden overthrow of all military and political equilibrium in Europe’.⁴⁷³ In his message to Stalin, Churchill acknowledged that although the systems of government in Great Britain and the Soviet Union represented widely differing systems of political thought, such differences ought not to prevent Anglo-Soviet relations from blossoming. The threat of German domination of the continent must unite Britain and the Soviet Union.⁴⁷⁴ Upon handing Stalin Churchill’s message, it was proposed that Cripps should take the opportunity to raise the issue of Anglo-Soviet trade relations and to convey to Stalin that the British realised that the USSR’s ability to grant or refuse vital supplies to Germany had placed in their hands a powerful weapon. Whilst the British Government was not in a position to say how Moscow should use that weapon, ‘the manner of its use must naturally have an influence in the present crisis upon the negotiation of a mutually profitable trade agreement’, an agreement that the British Government was anxious to bring about.⁴⁷⁵ Evidently, Sargent was hoping to use the opportunity to discover whether the Soviet Government did in fact wish to improve Anglo-Soviet economic relations. The issue of the Baltic States was to be raised simultaneously, illustrating that the two questions were inexorably linked. What is interesting, and indeed surprising, was the line that Sargent had proposed Cripps

⁴⁷² Ibid., Sargent to Cripps, 24 June 1940.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., Sargent to Cripps, 25 June 1940.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

might take in the matter should the issue arise during the conversation. Should the issue of the Baltic States be raised, Cripps was to acknowledge that Soviet action was dictated by the German danger and that they had been justified in their actions.⁴⁷⁶ Before Sargent's reply reached Cripps the ambassador frantically transmitted another dispatch, the tone of which was wholly different to that of his previous communication. Previously, Cripps had illustrated a sense of almost blind optimism, yet his tone was now positively pessimistic. This was the result of Molotov's refusal to receive him following his request to discuss the recent changes with regard to the war situation and the apparent shift in Soviet policy, as evident from the increased economic support to Germany. Cripps had sent his request to Molotov on 22 June, yet had only received an acknowledgement. Clearly the Soviet Government had resorted to the tactic of time-wasting and game-playing. Whilst one cannot blame the Soviets on this occasion, given the fluidity of the situation, those in the Foreign Office were frustrated by the latest display of Soviet manipulation. Previous ambassadors had experienced such treatment at the hands of Molotov and his predecessor, Maxim Litvinov. Indeed, Collier remarked in 1941 that it did not make a great difference as to what sort of ambassador was stationed in Moscow, for, as Chilston had once noted, 'the question for a British Ambassador here is not how much he can do, but merely how much he can stand'.⁴⁷⁷

Following a renewed request two days later, Molotov had informed Cripps that he would not be able to see him for another two or three days 'owing to unusual pressure from work'. Cripps consequently believed that the Soviet Government had already decided to maintain benevolent neutrality towards Germany.⁴⁷⁸ Thus, Cripps

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ NA, FO371/29475/N941/29/38, minute by Collier, 10 March 1941.

⁴⁷⁸ NA, FO371/24844/N5863/30/38, Cripps to FO, 25 June 1940.

had believed that his presence in Moscow was neither necessary nor beneficial, and requested to be withdrawn from his post. Whilst Cripps' reaction in no way surprised his colleagues in London, it was somewhat worrying that the ambassador had been so easily discouraged, in spite of the fact that there had been no material change in Soviet foreign policy.⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, the Soviets had made it clear that they would not allow relations with Germany to deteriorate, a fact about which Cripps' colleagues in the Foreign Office had never entertained any illusions. Whilst Molotov's actions brought no surprise to those in London, Collier conceded that 'to Sir S. Cripps it comes as more [of] a surprise, no doubt'.⁴⁸⁰

Unlike Collier, whose minute had an air of resignation and annoyance, Sargent was more sympathetic to the frustrating situation into which Cripps had been placed. Clearly, Molotov had deemed it prudent to avoid any contact with the British Ambassador at that time, probably due to a fear of raising German suspicions of Anglo-Soviet collusion. Yet the Soviet Foreign Minister kept Cripps 'in play' – a phrase used by Michael Jabara Carley – by hinting that a meeting was likely to take place in the near future.⁴⁸¹ Such delaying tactics had been adopted by the Soviets during the failed negotiations in the summer of 1939, much to the frustration of the British and French. Sargent was resigned to the fact that Cripps was 'entering the humiliating phase which all British negotiators in Moscow have to go through', whereby Molotov intended on keeping the ambassador 'on the doormat until such time as the Soviet Government consider it desirable'.⁴⁸² The delaying tactic played a dual role for the Soviets. Keeping the British on the 'doormat' illustrated the

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 26 June 1940.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., minute by Collier, 26 June 1940.

⁴⁸¹ Carley, "A Situation of Delicacy and Danger", p. 208.

⁴⁸² NA, FO371/24844/N5863/30/38, minute by Sargent, 28 June 1940.

dominant position held by Moscow in the Anglo-Soviet relationship, whilst allowing the Kremlin to play the British and German Governments off against one another.

Both Collier and Sargent believed His Majesty's Government had to set a definite time limit in which trade negotiations would have to be concluded by. Otherwise the issue could be dragged out indefinitely. Not only would it frustrate His Majesty's Government, it would illustrate to the world the weak position in which London was placed at the hands of the Soviets. Indeed, following the outbreak of war, the British Government had become the 'suitor' whilst Stalin had stepped back, and was 'relieved to have avoided being drawn into the war', whilst being 'anxious to take advantage of the destabilization of Europe'.⁴⁸³ Unfortunately, Cripps' capacity as a regular ambassador rather than a Special Envoy could not protect him against the Soviet methods of procrastination and boycott. Thus, Stalin had Cripps exactly where he wanted him, 'as a suppliant on his doormat holding his pathetic little peace offerings in a tin in one hand and a rubber in the other.'⁴⁸⁴ Sargent was certainly sympathetic to Cripps' plight, but had made it clear to the ambassador that admitting defeat and withdrawing him was not an option; to withdraw Cripps would only tarnish London's reputation further. Cripps had been sent to Moscow 'with such a flourish of trumpets' as the man capable of bridging the divide between Great Britain and the USSR; to remove him as a result of the predictable tactics of the Soviets would evoke the general conclusion that London had given up all hope of any cooperation with the Soviet Government. It was thus crucial for Cripps to 'cultivate the virtues of patience and long-suffering, as indeed all British Ambassadors in Moscow are bound to do, and to stay at his post'.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ Carley, "A Situation of Delicacy and Danger", p. 178.

⁴⁸⁴ NA, FO371/24844/N5863/30/38, minute by Sargent, 28 June 1940.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

Following his complaints of a lack of interaction with either Molotov or Stalin, Cripps met with Stalin on 1 July. During the interview, Cripps was able to obtain an authoritative statement of Soviet policy whilst transmitting Churchill's message in the hope that his personal communication would serve as a catalyst to the improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations.⁴⁸⁶ Through a series of telegrams, Cripps relayed the details of his three-hour interview with Stalin. Whilst Cripps' principal motivation for the meeting was to discuss Anglo-Soviet relations and, if possible, to persuade Stalin of the merits of halting Soviet economic aid to Germany, Stalin was fixated on the apparent threat from Turkey to the Soviet Union. Stalin had stated his desire to improve relations with Turkey, and claimed that he was nervous of some sudden action by Turkey against the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Stalin declared that he was anxious not to provoke Turkey into taking any aggressive action, and hoped that His Majesty's Government would help bring about an improvement in relations. More specifically, Stalin hoped to 'deal' with the question of who controlled the Straits, and informed the ambassador that 'until this question is settled relations with Turkey will not be wholly satisfactory'.⁴⁸⁷ Cripps was eager to oblige and believed that the advantages for Britain deriving from any potential Soviet-Turkish collaboration were twofold. Firstly, should Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union come to a reasonable understanding over the Straits it would create the best possible guarantee against German aggression in the Balkans. Secondly, this would greatly increase British prestige in the Balkans and the Near East. Predictably, Cripps readily declared the desire of the British Government to do anything to help improve relations between Turkey and the USSR. He agreed with Stalin that the Straits ought not to be

⁴⁸⁶ Attached to a minute by Sargent in NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5863/ 30/ 38, Sargent to Cripps, 25 June 1940.

⁴⁸⁷ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5937/ 30/ 38, Cripps to FO, telegram 399, 1 July 1940.

under the exclusive control of a single Power who could abuse its position in the region.⁴⁸⁸ It would have been prudent for Cripps to be less forthcoming in his opinions and promises of British support. Unfortunately, Cripps eagerly agreed with the points raised by Stalin, giving the impression that the British were running after the Soviets.

Though the issue of the Straits was the dominating topic under discussion, Cripps was able to introduce the unsatisfactory state of Anglo-Soviet relations as a consequence of the USSR's economic support for Germany. Stalin was noticeably less forthcoming in disclosing the position of his Government on that point. Stalin stated that the general attitude of the Soviet Government towards Great Britain and Germany was simple. The USSR had 'nothing but a non-aggression pact with Germany' and insisted that the pact was 'in no way directed against Great Britain'.⁴⁸⁹ He informed the ambassador of his belief that Germany could not dominate Europe as it lacked the naval strength, and doubted that Hitler had intended upon any such domination. Stalin was not prepared to admit that the danger of Germany domination in Europe was real, nor that it would be physically possible for them to do so.⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, Stalin had refused outright to accept that Hitler was contemplating any action against the Soviet Union. Cripps perceived Stalin's acceptance of German protestations at their face value as an attempt to 'excuse himself [from] acting in concert with us against Germany'.⁴⁹¹ Soviet-German cooperation would continue, and, as Fitzroy Maclean noted, any non-ferrous metals supplied by Great Britain to the Soviet Union would 'bring grist to the Soviet-German mill'.⁴⁹² That was wholly unsatisfactory for the British Government. The economic blockade of Germany was

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., Cripps to FO, telegram 401, 3 July 1940.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., Cripps to FO, telegram 404, 2 July 1940.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., Cripps to FO, telegram 403, 2 July 1940.

⁴⁹² NA, FO371/ 28244/ N5937/ 30/ 38, minute by Maclean, 3 July 1940.

the lynchpin of Great Britain's war strategy. Hence, Stalin's continued economic support of Germany was disastrous for Britain and consequently prevented any improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations, a point seemingly lost on Cripps.

Unlike his previous communication to the Foreign Office, which was unduly pessimistic, Cripps was optimistic following his interview with Stalin, noting that the general tenor of the talk had been frank but friendly. Cripps took solace in Stalin's assurance that he had no intention of using the trade agreement with Germany against Great Britain. It was clear, however, that Stalin was absolutely resolved to the continuation of supplying the Germans throughout the duration of the war. In spite of Stalin's refusal to change his policy towards Germany, Cripps believed that trade negotiations could commence in the near future. Cripps' vacillation between undue optimism and pessimism frustrated Maclean who maintained that the British had nothing to hope for from the Soviet Union. Thus, they had nothing to gain by attempting to bribe the Soviet Government with the rubber and non-ferrous metals. With regard to Turkey, Maclean conceded that Stalin would no doubt prefer to achieve control of the Straits by peaceful means, but steadfastly believed that the Kremlin would attempt to manipulate London into putting pressure on Turkey in order to induce her to capitulate to Soviet demands. The British would not be offered anything in return for services rendered. Furthermore, the apparent two-fold advantages for British intervention, as laid out by Cripps, were refuted by Maclean. He doubted that British mediation would enhance prestige, nor would it lead to the formation of an Anglo-Soviet-Turkish barrier to German aggression in the Balkans. There was the additional possibility that any British mediation would drive Turkey into the arms of Germany, thus losing another ally.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 3 July 1940.

On 3 July Sargent, Collier, Maclean, Nichols and Bowker met to discuss whether it would be to Britain's advantage to secure the friendship of the Soviet Union at the expense of its friendship with Turkey. Turkey was an important ally for His Majesty's Government as Turkey lay on the direct route between Europe and vital spheres of interest in the Middle East, including Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan. From a political point of view, Turkey was the leading member of the Balkan Entente on the one hand and the Saadabad Pact on the other.⁴⁹⁴ Hence, Turkish influence on the policy of the countries in the Near and Middle East was clearly significant. As a result, it was essential to keep Turkey out of the orbit of the Axis Powers, and it was agreed that Britain ought to accept the Soviet invitation to serve as an intermediary, but to remain cautious and suspicious of Stalin's motivations. As Bowker observed, 'we have no reason to trust M. Stalin' and Stalin's remark that the Soviet Government were nervous as to some sudden action by Turkey held an 'insincere ring' that did not give grounds for confidence.⁴⁹⁵ There was a collective suspicion of Soviet motivations and intentions in this matter. It was believed that Stalin desired to monopolise control of the Straits, and that the chances of any satisfactory agreement being reached were very small. Nevertheless, the discussions would either reveal the measure of Stalin's insincerity or would illustrate whether it would be possible for the Soviet Union and Turkey to cooperate together against the danger of German penetration in the Balkans and the Black Sea. Such cooperation would be of inestimable value to Great Britain.⁴⁹⁶

The War Cabinet agreed and decided that the British Government ought to test the Soviet's intentions by offering to act as an intermediary between the Soviet and

⁴⁹⁴ The Treaty of Saadabad was a non-aggression pact signed by Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan on 8 July 1937. The Treaty lasted for five years and was ratified in Tehran on 25 June 1938.

⁴⁹⁵ NA, FO371/24844/N5937/30/38, minute by Bowker, 3 July 1940.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

Turkish Governments. Halifax was ‘not very sanguine that anything would come of this move’ but had ‘thought it worth trying’.⁴⁹⁷ His Majesty’s Government’s policy towards the USSR at this juncture was one not of ambivalence, as Paul Doerr has argued, but simply one of reserve. His Majesty’s Government wanted to prevent further German military successes, and hoped for Soviet assistance in this endeavour. British suspicion of Soviet sincerity was evident, but the recent turn of events in the war had forced London to attempt a genuine improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations in the face of an increasingly powerful Germany. The attempts to intervene in Soviet-Turkish relations and the desire to conclude a war trade agreement with Moscow were a direct result of the changing course of the war. A consensus was steadily growing within the Foreign Office that Britain could no longer ignore the strategic importance of the USSR.

There were still two points under discussion: how far would Britain go in order to secure Soviet friendship and how should His Majesty’s Government go about attaining it? Whilst the issue fell under the jurisdiction of the Northern Department, there was a plethora of contributions from officials from the various departments in the Foreign Office. For example, Owen St. Clare O’Malley of the Southern Department, a vocal critic of Soviet Russia throughout the inter-war years, who had castigated the Soviet Union as a ‘spiritual gas chamber, a sinister, unnatural and unholy place’,⁴⁹⁸ was one contributor to the debate. O’Malley had recognised the need to put personal prejudices to one side in order to form an Anglo-Soviet bloc against Germany, and proposed the rather drastic measure of indicating to the Soviet Government that Britain was tempted to listen to Hitler’s recent peace overtures.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N5969/ 30/ 38, Extract from War Cabinet Conclusions, 11 July 1940.

⁴⁹⁸ O’Malley, *The Phantom Caravan*, p. 70.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 22 July 1940.

Collier was critical of such an approach. He maintained that as a consequence of Stalin's intense fear of Germany, it was highly unlikely that he would take any measures that would involve the Soviet Union in hostilities with Germany. Stalin was far more likely to seek a fresh understanding with Hitler as quickly as possible. Rather than driving a wedge between Stalin and Hitler, they would be forced to be uncomfortable bedfellows, united in a desire to defeat the Allied Powers. Furthermore, there would be disastrous consequences both in Europe and America should it be believed that Britain was to acquiesce to Hitler's terms.⁵⁰⁰ Collier acknowledged that although the idea appeared attractive at first sight, it was too dangerous to be pursued. What he failed to include, however, was a counter-proposal to O'Malley's suggestion. He was yet to formulate a plan as to how the British Government could draw Stalin away from Hitler. Sargent was equally critical of the idea of using such obvious scare tactics in order to bring about an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*. Stalin would certainly be alarmed at the prospect of an early peace between Britain and Germany, but it was doubtful whether his reaction would take the form of military action in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, thus precipitating hostilities with Germany.⁵⁰¹ Sargent feared that all that would be achieved would be the precipitation of a fresh Soviet-German entente, a fear shared by Collier. Unlike Collier, Sargent did in fact suggest a possible course of action. Sargent thought that it would be safe to let Stalin know privately that Hitler had been putting forward peace feelers to London through unofficial channels and that such feelers had been ignored. Sargent proposed that Hitler wished to free his hands in the West. He would then be able to take military action against Soviet Russia in the not so distant future. Consequently, Stalin may have been tempted to make an advance to His Majesty's

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 22 July 1940.

Government in order to prevent London from concluding a separate peace with Nazi Germany. Sargent hoped it would have the twofold benefit of increasing tensions between Moscow and Berlin whilst prompting Anglo-Soviet consultation. Sargent feared that Stalin may suspect that Britain was in fact on the verge of capitulation. However, he believed that so long as they made it clear ‘by speech and act’ that they were not prepared to give Hitler the early peace that he wanted, then such a course, though risky, would be favourable.⁵⁰² The ideas expressed in Collier’s minute combined with the action proposed by Sargent were met with the approval of the Permanent Under-Secretary. Cadogan believed that Sargent’s suggestions ought to be adopted and contended that it was surely possible to convince Stalin that they were not contemplating accepting Hitler’s peace feelers.⁵⁰³

At the end of July, although he had already met with Stalin at the beginning of the month, Cripps was once again voicing his desire to be withdrawn from his post in the face of further refusals by Molotov to receive him. Evidently, Sargent’s request for patience had fallen on deaf ears. As a consequence, Cripps suggested to Halifax that he ought to inform Maisky that he was questioning the utility of keeping an ambassador in Moscow. Despite the cordial tone of Churchill’s message to Stalin – as conveyed during Cripps’ recent interview– and Cripps’ own efforts to establish friendly contacts, the ambassador had believed that it was ‘clearly useless to maintain an ambassador to a government whose Minister for Foreign Affairs declines to receive him’.⁵⁰⁴ So long as the Soviet Government maintained their present attitude it would be impossible to achieve any improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations. Maclean once again urged patience. Should Halifax grant Cripps’ request, the results would be

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 23 July 1940.

⁵⁰⁴ NA, FO371/ 24844/ N6073/ 30/ 38, Cripps to FO, 30 July 1940.

entirely negative. The Soviet Government would lose no time in advertising the fact that Cripps had been forced upon them, and that he had been sent to Moscow merely to keep the Soviets in play whilst the British proceeded to ruin Moscow's relations with third powers, notably Germany. Again, it was feared that British prestige would be tarnished and any fears that Hitler may have held of the likelihood of an impending Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* would disperse. Maclean was not unsympathetic to Cripps' plight, but felt that Cripps had been too easily discouraged.⁵⁰⁵ The treatment of Cripps was nothing new or unusual. His predecessors would go for months at a time without seeing the Soviet Foreign Minister, Maxim Litvinov. Cripps, however, had seen Molotov several times as well as Stalin in the eight weeks he had spent in Moscow. Collier was inclined to agree, and informed Cripps that he would speak to Maisky of British displeasure, but categorically refused to withdraw Cripps from his post. Collier agreed that to do so would be regarded as a public admission that His Majesty's Government had failed in their attempt to disrupt Nazi-Soviet relations.⁵⁰⁶

One can most certainly sympathise with Cripps at this juncture. His attempts at arranging further meetings with Molotov were frustrated at every turn. In any case, it was a widely held belief within the Foreign Office that Molotov was 'a person of very little importance'.⁵⁰⁷ One would have to convince Stalin of the merits of reversing his policy, yet that was highly unlikely. In a Foreign Office appraisal of the consequences of the French collapse, the general consensus was that Stalin had believed that cooperation with Germany would give the Soviet Union greater advantages than would any other course. Stalin's wish to conclude a barter agreement rather than a comprehensive war trade agreement with Great Britain illustrated his

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 1 August 1940.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., minute by Collier, 2 August 1940.

⁵⁰⁷ NA, FO371/24844/N5888/30/38, minute by Maclean, 19 June 1940.

desire to avoid antagonizing the Germans. Any commercial agreement between Great Britain and the Soviet Union would be viewed by Hitler as decidedly anti-German. Maclean believed it likely that the Germans would approve of an Anglo-Soviet barter agreement as the Soviets would receive rubber, tin, nickel and copper, all of which Germany was greatly in need of. The German Government would further hope that as a consequence of the barter arrangement the British blockade would be relaxed further. Maclean concluded that it would be both economically and politically disadvantageous for Britain to pursue such a course. The only way in which Stalin could afford any effective relief for Britain was by taking immediate action against Germany, or at any rate by adopting so threatening an attitude as to cause Germany to transfer a proportion of her resources to the east, thus relieving the pressure on the Western front.⁵⁰⁸ In order to induce Stalin to make such a radical break from his existing approach, Cripps would have to persuade him that his own interests demanded it. Maclean postulated that there was a chance – as slim as it was – that Stalin could be convinced of the detrimental effects of a swift German victory over Great Britain as Hitler would then turn his attention to the Soviet Union. If, according to Maclean, Britain was able to defeat Germany with the help of the USSR, any such German attack could be avoided. The British Government would in turn take legitimate Soviet claims into consideration, a discreet reference to the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States. If, however, the Soviet Government were to persist in their present policy of cooperation with Germany, Maclean argued that the British would be obliged to take retaliatory action against the Soviet Union. Thus, it was decided that Cripps' attempts to review Anglo-Soviet policy with Molotov should be abandoned. The best course would be to arrange a meeting between Churchill and

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

Stalin. As Stalin was an extremely ‘shrewd and ... open-minded man’, Maclean believed that a meeting between the Prime Minister and Stalin would force the latter seriously to consider the British proposal.⁵⁰⁹ Collier and Sargent agreed that a meeting between Churchill and Stalin was the best course of action, though it would undoubtedly displease Cripps. Collier, however, believed that rather than expecting the Soviets to take immediate military action against Germany, one ought to be satisfied with an assurance by Stalin that he would cease supplying Germany.⁵¹⁰

Although Cripps had been received by Mikoyan, Molotov and Stalin in the first eight weeks of his tenure as ambassador, he had been unable to discuss the pertinent issues of Anglo-Soviet trade and the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States. All that had been clear from these meetings was Stalin’s desire to fulfil the terms of the various Soviet-German economic agreements. Cripps had not been able fully to comprehend Stalin’s position on Anglo-Soviet trade relations and what measures would be required to improve those relations. As for the Baltic States, the motivations behind Soviet aggression were unclear. Was Stalin motivated by fear of a German attack or was he simply dissatisfied with the mutual assistance pacts imposed on Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in October 1939? Cripps’ interview with Mikoyan, the recently appointed Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, on 22 August helped to clarify the Soviet position.

In his account of the meeting, Cripps drew attention to the difficulties he faced when he was able to meet with any Soviet statesman. He was not permitted a shorthand writer with him, thus the record of his interview was not wholly accurate.⁵¹¹ In one account of a conversation with Molotov, Cripps had complained of the

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., minute by Collier, 20 June 1940.

⁵¹¹ NA, FO371/24841/N6468/5/38, telegram: Cripps, 26 June 1940.

linguistic barrier that he faced in any exchange of views with the Soviet Foreign Minister. Unfortunately for Cripps, Molotov had a tendency to speak both rapidly and with little clarity. His translator spoke very little English, resulting in an incomplete translation of their meetings that often did not reflect the length and breadth of what was discussed. Consequently, Cripps was ‘generally only able to get the main line of M. Molotov’s argument without any of the finesse of the details or of particular phrases he uses’.⁵¹²

In the case of Cripps’ interview with Mikoyan on 22 August, he was without a shorthand writer, although he was provided with a translator. During the course of the meeting Cripps was able to gain further insight into the position of the Soviet Government vis-à-vis the possibility of concluding an Anglo-Soviet trade agreement. The news was not promising. Unfortunately for Cripps, Mikoyan bluntly informed him that the Soviet Government did not feel that the present moment was suitable for a comprehensive agreement. The British Government’s retention of the assets of the former Baltic States was cited as the main obstacle. As a consequence the atmosphere would not be suitable for general trade discussions until the ‘difficulties arising out of the incorporation of the former Baltic States in the Soviet Union have been satisfactorily disposed of’.⁵¹³

Although Mikoyan had limited his protestations to the economic sphere, Maclean believed that the Soviet Government simply did not desire a *rapprochement* with Great Britain, but would not openly declare as much. The Soviets were thus using ‘delaying tactics’ whilst simultaneously blaming the British for the lack of progress made. By making themselves the victims of British cynicism they were attempting to render public opinion in Britain critical of the government’s policy

⁵¹² NA, FO371/29464/N829/3/38, Cripps to Eden, 3 February 1941.

⁵¹³ NA, FO371/24841/N6468/5/38, telegram: Cripps, 26 August 1940.

towards the USSR, whilst at the same time succeeding in extracting concessions from Britain in the matter of the Baltic States. Public perception of British policy towards the Soviets had always been important for British policy-makers. As Robert Manne has perhaps controversially argued, London entered into negotiations with the Soviets in 1939 ‘not to secure an alliance but to appease and dupe public opinion’.⁵¹⁴ Whilst Cripps was guardedly optimistic, Maclean argued that London would not be justified in making any concessions over the Baltic question ‘in return for illusory political advantages’.⁵¹⁵ Collier believed that the Soviets were using the British response to the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States as an excuse to avoid improving their relations with London. The real obstacle in reaching an understanding was Stalin’s intense fear of Germany. According to Collier, if the Baltic excuse was not available, then ‘another [one] will be found’.⁵¹⁶

Professor Postan, the Soviet expert in the Ministry of Economic Warfare, contributed to the debate in July 1940. In a letter to Collier, Postan was openly critical of the conclusions drawn by members of the Northern Department, sparking a number of minutes by Maclean, Collier and Sargent. According to Postan, the chief concern of the Ministry of Economic Warfare was to prevent the further development of economic assistance to Germany. Although he agreed with Collier and Maclean that Soviet policy since 1938 – following the Munich Conference – was guided by an innate fear of Germany and German designs on the Soviet Union, he felt that Britain ought to grant small concessions to them – notably in the Baltic States – in order to buy its friendship and lure the Kremlin away from the Germans. By granting such concessions, the British would help to strengthen the Soviet position. This would

⁵¹⁴ Manne, ‘The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939’, p. 3.

⁵¹⁵ NA, FO371/24841/N6468/5/38, minute by Maclean, 5 September 1940.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 6 September 1940.

prove to be essential when Germany finally invaded the Soviet Union. A reversal of the current Soviet attitude towards Great Britain would only come about through the ‘development of our [British] armed power and the German weakness, or a striking accretion of Russian armed strength’. However, although these changes would not immediately attain Soviet friendship, Postan believed that the British Government ought to ‘keep the road clear’ through offering ‘a series of small concessions to Soviet interests and points of view’. Postan believed that the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States had affected the position of the Baltic States very little and the ‘British military position not at all’.⁵¹⁷ He maintained this position throughout the wartime period, and would not be dissuaded of his views.

In a meeting with Maisky in February 1941, Postan emphasized the importance of a war trade agreement and informed the Soviet Ambassador that he wished to ‘settle any outstanding problems between His Majesty’s Government and the Soviet Government’. Maisky had repeated the Soviet party-line that they had never recognised the British blockade and would stick to their right as a neutral to trade freely with all. Postan, however, was unwavering in his conclusions.⁵¹⁸ There was a great deal of common ground in the attitudes of Postan and Cripps, but Postan’s arguments were at odds with those held by both Maclean and Collier. Maclean stated that Postan’s analysis of Britain’s policy towards Soviet Russia was ‘unnecessarily complicated and insufficiently unrealistic’ and, in places, was ‘inclined to be wrong-headed’.⁵¹⁹

Collier’s response was, unsurprisingly, lengthy and emphatic. He fully agreed with Postan that the ‘dominant motive of Soviet foreign policy is fear of Germany’. However, until the Soviets had a reason to fear Britain, their attitude would remain

⁵¹⁷ NA, FO371/ 24852/ N6359/ 263/ 38, Postan to Collier, 17 July 1940.

⁵¹⁸ NA, FO371/ 29473/ N456/ 22/ 38, FO to Cripps, 5 February 1941.

⁵¹⁹ NA, FO371/ 24852/ N6359/ 263/ 38, minute by Maclean, 26 August 1940.

unaltered. Previous plans to bomb Soviet installations at Baku had evoked such fears, but had never been adopted by the British Government. Both Sargent and Collier were in favour of taking such action, and believed that a firmer line with the Soviets would force Stalin to re-think his policy towards Britain.⁵²⁰ Whilst Cripps believed that Stalin would look favourably on British resistance to German military advances, Maclean argued that the Soviets would continue to support the Germans in order to ‘prolong the struggle and weaken both sides as much as possible’.⁵²¹ Collier agreed with Maclean. Stalin had no more desire to see Britain win the war than he wished to see Germany winning it, and ‘the chance of anything really useful to us arising from a change in Soviet policy is too small to warrant making concessions to the Soviet Government in the hope of paving the way for it’. Moreover, even if the Soviet Government changed its attitudes towards the belligerents, Collier believed it would be erroneous to grant concessions, even if they paved the way for a war trade agreement. Indeed, Collier had never recommended concessions to Hitler or Mussolini in the 1930s, and he would not recommend them to Stalin in 1940.⁵²² Instead, the British Government ought to adopt a hard-line attitude towards the Soviets and should drop the policy of concessions altogether.⁵²³ Sargent agreed with Collier regarding any proposed concessions to the Soviet Government, indicating a reversal of his position from June 1940 when he had stated that Soviet action in the Baltic States could be justified as an act of self-defence in the face of the growing German menace. In any case, the only trade agreement that would constitute a ‘slap in the face’ for Germany, as Postan had remarked, would be one which would

⁵²⁰ NA, FO371/ 24852/ N6438/ 283/ 38, minute by Sargent, 2 September 1940.

⁵²¹ NA, FO371/ 24841/ N6581/ 5/ 38, minute by Maclean, 25 September 1940.

⁵²² NA, FO371/ 24852/ N6359/ 263/ 38, Collier to Postan, 28 August 1940.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 6 September 1940.

definitely limit the amount of vital commodities reaching Germany either through or from the Soviet Union.⁵²⁴

As was very often the case, definite evidence illustrating the nature and extent of Nazi-Soviet collaboration was exceedingly hard to obtain. At the end of October, Maclean composed a memorandum exploring this issue. He believed that since the start of the conflict the Soviet Union had wanted to prolong the war to the detriment of both sides, and that Stalin was willing to bring this about through supplying Germany with essential war materials. As Collier remarked, in the first year of the war the German Government had been the dominant partner in the Soviet-German relationship, and only had to 'bang on the table' in order to induce Stalin to acquiesce in Hitler's demands.⁵²⁵ By October 1940, however, this relationship had altered. It was Hitler who needed the Soviet Government in order successfully to carry out his war strategy. What was unclear, however, was how far Hitler was prepared to go to secure the continuation of Soviet aid. There was a surplus of information flowing into the Foreign Office relating to that issue, yet the reliability of such information was under constant scrutiny, and much was supposition at best. Maclean asserted that it had seemed 'probable that the Germans have told the Russians that they are at liberty to expand in the direction of the Persian Gulf', yet it was less clear what division of spoils Hitler had offered Stalin in the Near East.⁵²⁶

There were varying accounts of questionable reliability. Such reports indicated that Hitler had only offered the Soviets a rectification of the Caucasus frontier, whilst others stated that the German offer included Soviet control of the

⁵²⁴ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 13 September 1940.

⁵²⁵ NA, FO371/29497/N1099/88/38, minute by Collier, 19 March 1941.

⁵²⁶ NA, FO371/24845/N7046/30/38, minute by Maclean, 31 October 1940. See John C. Campbell, 'The Soviet Union and the Middle East: "In the General Direction of the Persian Gulf"'. Part I, *Russian Review*, 29, 3 (Apr., 1970), pp. 143-153; John C. Campbell, 'The Soviet Union and the Middle East: "In the General Direction of the Persian Gulf"'. Part II, *Russian Review*, 29, 3 (Jul., 1970), pp. 247-261.

whole of Turkey in Asia. The secret nature of Nazi-Soviet relations made it impossible to determine with any certainty which information – if any – was accurate. British officials were continually wary of the reports received as it was believed that a great deal of the information had been planted by the Germans and Soviets, with both Powers using the press to convey the information that they wished to be made public knowledge. The information received by Collier had hinted that the Germans were prepared to make the Soviets an offer regarding the Dardanelles, which were of strategic importance to the Soviet Union. Collier noted that Stalin may well have realised that any joint Soviet-German control of the Straits would mean German control in practice. Therefore, the first object of British and Turkish policy should be to attempt to convince the Soviet Government that it would be advantageous for them to collaborate with Great Britain over the matter.⁵²⁷

Upon receiving a telegram from the British Ambassador in Belgrade, Maclean noted that any hope of collaborating with the Soviets was unlikely. In a recent conversation with Vyshinsky, Campbell had gained the impression that the Soviet Government was prepared to join Germany in an attack on Turkey with the object of safeguarding Soviet interests in the Straits, thus implying that Stalin was prepared to share control of the Straits with Germany. In this way Stalin would be able to avoid war with Germany whilst satisfying his ambitions in Turkey.⁵²⁸ No doubt Hitler had induced Stalin to agree to put pressure on Turkey through a mixture of threats and bribes, and in the very near future the Soviets would try to keep the Turks quiet by amassing troops on the Caucasus frontier and stationing warships in the Black Sea.⁵²⁹ Collier hoped that London would not be deterred from promising Turkey the fullest

⁵²⁷ Ibid., minute by Collier, 31 October 1940.

⁵²⁸ NA, FO371/24845/N7148/30/38, minute by Maclean, 10 November 1940.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., minute by Collier, 10 November 1940.

support against the USSR. He further stated that the British Government ought to treat the Soviet Union as an enemy and warn Stalin that any threat to Turkey would lead to an immediate breach with Great Britain. Such a threat was likely to be effective, as there was ‘little doubt that they dread the prospect of being involved in the war and, rather than face it, would be likely to back out of any engagements to Germany’. This would only happen should the Stalin be convinced of a British resolve to support its Turkish ally.⁵³⁰

Upon Joachim von Ribbentrop’s invitation, Molotov arrived in Berlin on 10 November.⁵³¹ Molotov’s trip ignited the belief of further Soviet-German collaboration. As Collier stated, ‘I find it hard to believe that Molotov would have agreed to go to Berlin unless the main outlines of the new Russo-German deal had already been worked out’.⁵³² The Berlin Conference, although now widely accepted as a failure as it produced no new agreement between the two Powers, illustrated *inter alia* the importance that both Germany and the Soviet Union attached to Turkey.⁵³³ Indeed, one historian has remarked that Molotov ‘over-played his hand’ with regard to Soviet demands over Turkey.⁵³⁴ During the talks between Hitler and Molotov both statesmen complained of their dissatisfaction with the Straits and the Montreux Convention, and ways of revising the situation were discussed in some detail. It was decided that the Montreux Convention was to be ‘scrapped’ and the three Powers

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ The German Foreign Minister.

⁵³² NA, FO371/ 24845/ N7148/ 30/ 38, minute by Collier, 10 November 1940.

⁵³³ In the immediate aftermath of the Berlin Conference it was believed within the Foreign Office that it was a further example of Nazi-Soviet collaboration. It was not until the details from the visit emerged that those in the Foreign Office appreciated that Molotov’s trip did not result in any new agreement.

⁵³⁴ Graham Ross, *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations 1941-45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

would create a new Straits convention that would satisfy the demands of all and give the USSR 'certain privileges'.⁵³⁵

In his final meeting with Hitler, the Soviet Foreign Minister wanted the Germans to grant 'effective guarantees of her security' through establishing Soviet bases in Turkey.⁵³⁶ This would have come as no surprise to Collier. Stalin had expressed his desire for an improvement in relations with Turkey in his first meeting with Cripps in July. This had led to a debate within the Foreign Office as to whether Soviets intentions were sincere or whether Stalin hoped that Great Britain would exert pressure on Turkey to acquiesce in whatever demands Moscow put to the Turkish authorities. It was decided in July that the British would act as intermediary but that they would make it clear to the Turkish Government that they had no intention whatsoever of suggesting that they should renounce any of their rights under the Montreux Convention, nor would any special rights be given to the Soviet Union.⁵³⁷ Furthermore, London would have to specify that the only acceptable Turko-Soviet arrangement regarding the Straits would be one that would deny access to Germany and Italy.⁵³⁸ However, once details of Molotov's talks with Hitler reached the Foreign Office via Cripps, the idea of London serving as an intermediary between the USSR and Turkey was redundant, as the Soviets had clearly illustrated that their relationship with Germany would better serve their interests.

As Collier argued, Stalin's increasing cooperation with Germany over Turkey had severely damaged Anglo-Soviet political and economic relations, and provided yet another stumbling block in the conclusion of a war trade agreement with the

⁵³⁵ Sontag & Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, pp. 222-223.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁵³⁷ The Montreux Convention of 20 July 1936 permitted Turkey to fortify and assume control of the Bosphorous Straits and the Dardanelles. This was a source of controversy with the Soviet Union as its military access to the Mediterranean Sea was restricted.

⁵³⁸ NA, FO371/24844/N5937/30/38, minute by Bowker, November 1940 [exact date unknown].

Soviet Union. When Cripps transmitted the details of Molotov's visit to Berlin to London, the British Government was still awaiting a reply to the proposals made to Moscow on 21 October. In the proposals delivered to Vyshinsky via Cripps, the British had promised that the Soviet Union would play a part in any ultimate peace settlement as well as pledging that the government would not join any combination of powers hostile to the Soviet Union and, crucially, would grant *de facto* recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union.⁵³⁹ It was hoped that this would satisfy the Soviets and thus pave the way for a war trade agreement. Unfortunately, as had been the case in 1939, when Britain first approached the USSR with proposals for an economic agreement, they were kept waiting until Stalin deemed it to be the favourable time to discuss the proposals. As Maclean observed, Stalin was playing his cards close to his chest in order to keep both the British and the Germans guessing. He made the interesting remark that Stalin was in fact pursuing a policy of appeasement both towards Germany and, to a lesser extent, towards Great Britain and her allies. Maclean noted that 'when he [Stalin] feels that he has gone too far in one direction, he restores the balance by making some gesture to the offended party'.⁵⁴⁰ This was highly advantageous for Stalin, as it served the double purpose of keeping both parties in play whilst avoiding a breach with either. Furthermore, it induced both London and Berlin to offer a higher price for Soviet friendship than they would otherwise feel disposed to pay. Unfortunately for His Majesty's Government, 'the Soviet Government are less frightened of us than of Germany and therefore have less regard for our feelings'. This was evident in the Soviet response to the British

⁵³⁹ NA, FO371/ 24848/ N7200/ 40/ 38, minute by Maclean, 10 November 1940. Through granting *de facto* recognition, the British Government would acknowledge that the Soviet Government exercised control over a territory. Stalin wanted *du jure* recognition as it meant that the Soviet Government would be regarded as the legal and legitimate government of the Baltic States.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

proposals for an economic agreement. Indeed, Sargent firmly believed that Molotov's visit to Berlin had amounted to a rejection of Britain's advances.⁵⁴¹

Collier's frustration at the fact that Stalin never gave an 'early or definite reply' to British communiques intensified following Molotov's visit to Berlin. He was aware that His Majesty's Government had to carefully consider the British attitude towards the various practical questions affected by the most recent Soviet-German understanding. With regard to British policy in the Middle East, Collier once again suggested that a warning ought to be immediately conveyed to the Soviet Government that any threat to Turkey would lead to a breach with Great Britain, and that the Ministry of Economic Warfare ought to formally inform the Kremlin that the proposed economic agreement would lapse.⁵⁴² As a consequence of recent developments, Cripps was convinced that Molotov's treatment of Great Britain was unprecedented and 'showed unmistakably his [Molotov's] un-neutral attitude'. Consequently, he believed that it would be 'quite useless to make any further attempt to improve relations' with the Soviet Union.⁵⁴³

On 19 November Cripps asked the Foreign Secretary for permission officially to withdraw the proposals, believing that it would increase the pressure upon the Soviet Government.⁵⁴⁴ Cripps' justification is somewhat difficult to understand. The Soviets had illustrated no desire to come to terms with Great Britain as to do so would be to the detriment of their understanding with the German Government. Stalin's failure to respond to the British proposals of October was evidence of this. Therefore, to withdraw the proposals would merely reinforce in Stalin's mind the precarious position in which His Majesty's Government was placed. The British Government

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 10 November 1940.

⁵⁴² NA, FO371/24848/N7165/40/38, minute by Collier, 18 November 1940.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., telegram: Cripps, 11 November 1940.

⁵⁴⁴ NA, FO371/24848/N7233/40/38, Cripps to FO, 19 November 1940.

clearly wanted to obtain an economic agreement with Moscow, yet was anxious to avoid any appearance of chasing after the Soviets. So far they had failed on both accounts.

Inevitably, Cripps' suggestion of withdrawing the British proposals for an economic agreement was criticised by both Maclean and Sargent. Neither could deny that the Soviet's had been reprehensible in their treatment of both Cripps and the proposals that he had presented to Molotov. However, they felt that Cripps was allowing his irritation to get the better of his judgement. Maclean very much doubted that the Soviet Government wanted to conclude a war trade agreement, and noted that it was likely that the Soviets had allowed trade negotiations to continue simply to keep the British in play. However, if His Majesty's Government withdrew the proposals, the Soviet Government could have justifiably argued that the British had never really wanted to reach an agreement and that Stalin had been on the verge of accepting the British proposals at the point of withdrawal.⁵⁴⁵ However, Maclean believed that one ought not to be consumed by the political repercussions of any trade agreement with Moscow. As the Ministry of Economic Warfare had consistently argued, the agreement could have stood on its own merits; no political advantages were required to 'make up weight'.⁵⁴⁶ Once again, Sargent urged patience. Although Cripps' frustration was understandable, Sargent would not authorize the ambassador to withdraw the proposals for an economic agreement as it would not exercise pressure on the Soviet Government. Stalin did not appear to want an agreement with Great Britain, as evidenced from his refusal to respond to the British overtures. Hence, such tactics had very little chance of success. As Maclean stated, it would be

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 21 November 1940.

viewed by the world as evidence of Foreign Office insincerity in all their approaches to the Soviet Government.⁵⁴⁷

Rather than withdrawing the economic proposals, Maclean believed that the British should find ways in which to inspire the Soviets with a fear of Great Britain which was at least as great as their fear of Germany – a point often raised by Collier.⁵⁴⁸ The most obvious way to invoke such fear was to renew plans to bomb the oilfields at Baku as the Soviet Government had never shown themselves to be more forthcoming than when an attack on Baku was being canvassed in Great Britain. Maclean firmly believed that it would have ‘a most salutary effect if this fear were to be revived’ should the Soviets take any action hostile to British interests.⁵⁴⁹ Evidently, both Maclean and Collier were in agreement when it came to the treatment of the Soviets. A hard-line policy was the most advantageous one to adopt. Both had advised that the Soviet Government should be warned that any hostile action – whether in the guise of economic aid to the Germans or acts of aggression against Turkey – would inevitably lead to a breach with London. Whilst Sargent was inclined to disagree, as he could see no way to make the Soviet Government fear the British more than they feared the Germans, the two Northern Department officials had enlisted the support of a most surprising figure – Sir Stafford Cripps. As his tenure as ambassador in Moscow was nearing the six month mark, his initial optimism and belief in Soviet sincerity had dissolved and had been replaced with an inherent suspicion of the Kremlin. Indeed, Cripps was now advocating the adoption of a hard-line policy towards the Soviets, which was a marked break from his previously held views.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 21 November 1940.

⁵⁴⁸ NA, FO371/ 24848/ N7232/ 40/ 38, minute by Maclean, 22 November 1940.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ NA, FO371/ 24848/ N7366/ 40/ 38, minute by Maclean, 5 December 1940.

Cripps reiterated that point in a communication to the Foreign Secretary on 9 December. He again suggested formally withdrawing the detailed and as yet unanswered proposals that he had communicated to Stalin in October. The issue of the Baltic States had escalated to something of an obsession for Cripps, and the reversal of his opinions on the issue was perplexing to his colleagues in the Northern Department. In previous months Cripps had been adamant that Britain ought to grant concessions regarding the recognition of Soviet control of the region, yet by December he was arguing the opposite. Maclean did not comment on the ever-changing opinions of the ambassador. Instead, he noted that if it was the intention of His Majesty's Government to adopt the firm line approach to the Soviets, Cripps' proposal would serve the purpose very well. If, on the other hand, the British wished to continue the policy of 'uniform amiability', Cripps' suggestion should not be adopted.⁵⁵¹

Unlike in previous months, when Maclean was critical of Cripps, by December 1940 he was informing Halifax that Cripps' opinions ought to be seriously considered. Maclean noted that the fact that Cripps was stationed in Moscow had meant that he was in the position to judge what the situation required. Additionally, his well-known sympathy and personal contacts with the Soviet regime 'should enable him to judge how best to approach the Soviet Government in matters of this kind'.⁵⁵² Although Maclean was in favour of formally withdrawing the economic proposals, he was fully alive to the possible repercussions. The Soviet Government might put forward counter proposals, or, more importantly, they could take the opportunity of making trouble in certain sections of public opinion in Britain, most notably with the British Left. As a consequence of the Soviet production of a

⁵⁵¹ NA, FO371/ 24849/ N7387/ 40/ 38, minute by Maclean, 9 December 1940.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

‘garbled version of what has happened’, the Foreign Office would predictably be criticised for ‘deliberately sabotaging Anglo-Soviet relations’.⁵⁵³

Dr Dalton and Frederick Leith-Ross at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, although wary of definitively stating their opinion as the matter was primarily political in nature and therefore outside the scope of their expertise, they were inclined to agree with Maclean and Cripps. Both Dalton and Leith-Ross feared that any reluctance to give Cripps a free hand in this matter would lead to his resignation. Furthermore, the proposals relayed to the Kremlin in October would be extremely inconvenient if not impossible to implement at that time. Central to their reasoning was the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States and Stalin’s insistence to continue supplying war materials to Germany. Thus, Soviet policy had rendered cooperation difficult.⁵⁵⁴ Halifax disagreed. On 2 December he informed Cripps of the inadvisability of taking such an action, adding that the British attitude towards Moscow ought to be as forthcoming and helpful as possible. Displays of irritation would be counter-productive.⁵⁵⁵ Central to Halifax’s reasoning was a belief that Nazi-Soviet relations were not as close as previously believed. The Berlin Conference of November 1940 initially appeared to indicate a strengthening of relations between Moscow and Berlin, yet Halifax began to doubt that any such strengthening had in fact occurred. According to Halifax, German designs in the Balkans would inexorably cause friction between the two Powers, and it was for His Majesty’s Government to wait patiently for the relationship to implode.⁵⁵⁶

Evidently, as 1940 drew to a close, the British were still unsure as to the best ways and means of dealing with the Soviets. The ‘policy of reserve’ was widely

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 17 December 1940.

⁵⁵⁵ NA, FO371/24849/N7354/40/38, FO to Cripps, 2 December 1940.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

accepted, yet London had faced many obstacles in its attempt to improve Anglo-Soviet relations. The key consideration for those in the Foreign Office remained the extent and nature of Nazi-Soviet cooperation and whether His Majesty's Government would be capable of rupturing Soviet-German relations. In a review of his first six months as ambassador, Cripps noted that although Anglo-Soviet relations were neither better nor worse than they had been before his appointment, the chances of improving them remained slim. The Soviet Government was un-sentimental, realistic and nationalistic, and would only alter its policy should it suit its interests to do so. With regard to the way in which Soviet diplomacy was conducted, Cripps stated that the Soviet Government had utilized Maisky to create an atmosphere of optimism in London as a means of counter-balancing the effect of their current close relations with Germany. More specifically, the Kremlin had used such methods to 'soften [the] reaction of His Majesty's Government to an impending fresh economic agreement' with the Germans.⁵⁵⁷ Stalin had consistently used British approaches to the Soviet Government in order to extract more favourable conditions from the Germans, and, according to Maclean, it was for the British to bring an end to Soviet duplicity. Although the war situation was markedly differently by the end of December in that an overwhelming German victory appeared unlikely, Maclean maintained that the Soviets would continue to deal with Germany in order to prolong the struggle to the detriment of both belligerents.⁵⁵⁸ Soviet policy at the time of the fall of France had been motivated by self-interest, and although a German domination of the continent no longer seemed inevitable, it was still in Stalin's best interest to maintain close relations with Germany whilst keeping the British in play. Maclean remarked that even when Germany began to get the worst of it, Soviet support would continue.

⁵⁵⁷ NA, FO371/ 24849/ N7526/ 40/ 38, telegram: Cripps, 23 December 1940.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, minute by Maclean, 26 December 1940.

Such support would serve two purposes. Firstly, it would enable Germany to continue the struggle and thus weaken her opponents to a greater extent than would otherwise have been the case. Secondly, it would also make Germany less likely to seek a diversion by turning on the Soviet Union.⁵⁵⁹ It was for those reasons that Maclean and Collier in London, and Cripps in Moscow, had favoured taking the rather dramatic step of withdrawing Britain's proposals for an economic agreement with the USSR.

The idea of standing up to the Soviets was not limited to those in the Northern Department. In a paper written at the beginning of 1941 Mr Randall of the News Department reviewed the varying strands of opinion within the British press. It was evident that he was in full agreement with the arguments put forward by those within the Northern Department. Randall noted that it was 'obviously impossible to maintain that any sympathy with democracy or antipathy to totalitarianism alone predisposes Russian official opinion to wish for our success'. Indeed, 'Moscow would certainly not welcome Germany's victory at our expense, but scarcely less would it suit her to see our complete victory over Germany'.⁵⁶⁰ The need for a new approach became more crucial once news reached the Foreign Office of a further Nazi-Soviet economic agreement in the form of a renewed credit agreement, signed on 10 January 1941.⁵⁶¹ Cripps reported on 12 January that the new agreement had made the Germans in Moscow 'jubilant' and that they were stressing the political and economic importance of the agreements.⁵⁶² Collier's frustration at his Government's persistent policy of uniform amiability was clear, and once the news of extended

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ NA, FO371/24963/N54/3/38, 'Guidance for News Department and BBC on Soviet Russia', written by Mr. Randall, 1 January 1941.

⁵⁶¹ Heinrich Schwendemann, 'German-Soviet Economic Relations at the Time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact 1939-1941', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 36, 1 (Jan.-Jun., 1995), pp. 161-178 (p. 161). The initial credit agreement was signed on 19 August 1939, four days before the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

⁵⁶² NA, FO371/29497/N159/88/38, Cripps to Foreign Office, 12 January 1941.

cooperation between Moscow and Berlin had reached Collier, he openly criticised his political masters. Stalin continued to insist upon the neutral stance of the Soviet Union, yet the ever-expanding economic cooperation with Hitler made it clear that the Soviets were not neutral but merely a non-belligerent ally of one of the parties to the conflict. Consequently, they must 'take all the consequences and expect the other party to treat them as such'. Unfortunately, due to the British Government's lack of resolve to chastise the Soviets, Stalin would be 'inclined to think that we shall never react against their economic help to Germany, however large it becomes'.⁵⁶³ Collier's advice to Anthony Eden, the new Foreign Secretary, was to refuse any future advances from the Soviets for a barter agreement and to authorize Cripps to send a letter formally withdrawing Britain's previous barter offer.⁵⁶⁴ Sargent disagreed. With the support of Cadogan, Sargent argued that, rather than taking any specific action in reply to the most recent German-Soviet agreement, a 'general attitude of reserve' alongside the tightening of the British blockade were the only necessary actions to take.⁵⁶⁵ Sargent believed that Stalin had 'been at pains to buy off and appease the German ogre' and that no amount of British protestation would persuade him to alter his appeasement policy.⁵⁶⁶ Once again, the notion of Stalin's appeasement of Germany was raised. It was believed by Sargent, Collier and Maclean that Stalin was pursuing a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany, as it suited Soviet interests at that time.

Eden, for his part, appreciated the frustration felt within the Northern Department, but agreed with Sargent and refused to allow Cripps to make any form of

⁵⁶³ Ibid., minute by Collier, 13 January 1941.

⁵⁶⁴ Eden's appointment as Foreign Secretary occurred following the death of Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador to the United States. As a consequence, Lord Halifax succeeded Lord Lothian, leaving the position as Foreign Secretary vacant.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 15 January 1941.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

protest in Moscow.⁵⁶⁷ To soften the blow of his rejection of Cripps' proposal, Eden communicated a telegram to the ambassador in which he praised the 'realistic and forceful way' in which he was carrying out his difficult task in Moscow.⁵⁶⁸ Eden's communication served to pacify the frustrated ambassador whilst simultaneously clarifying his own position on the matter of Anglo-Soviet relations. Eden could sympathise with Cripps as he had himself experienced the difficulties that arose from any attempt to improve Anglo-Soviet relations, and explained to the ambassador that he had his share of disappointment in those endeavours.⁵⁶⁹ In spite of his praise, Eden had made it clear that the policy of 'reserve' was one which he approved, and he believed that the recent Soviet-German agreement was an additional reason for continuing it. However, should the Soviet Government fail to respond to future British approaches, there could be no question of making any further political or economic approaches to the Soviet Government. With regard to the question of concessions over the Baltic States, the Foreign Secretary was in agreement with the attitudes of the Northern Department. Nothing would be gained from making fresh attempts to reach a settlement of the outstanding Baltic questions.⁵⁷⁰

The 'outstanding Baltic questions' became increasingly important as the war progressed. During Cripps' interview with Molotov on 1 February 1941, the ambassador had attempted to discuss with the Soviet Foreign Minister the unsatisfactory state of Anglo-Soviet relations, in particular their economic relations. Molotov used the Baltic question as a means of justifying not only his refusal formally to acknowledge the British proposals, but to justify the recent consolidation

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., minute by Eden, 15 January 1941.

⁵⁶⁸ NA, FO371/ 29514/ N290/ 290/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 17 January 1941.

⁵⁶⁹ Eden had visited Moscow in March 1935 and experienced first-hand how difficult it was to conduct relations with the Soviet Premier. Lord Avon, *Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell, 1962), pp. 144-63.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

in Soviet-German relations. When Cripps had communicated the British proposals in October 1940, the British Government had clarified its position on the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States, and had acknowledged that the Soviet Union was the *de facto* Government in the region. Unfortunately, Molotov was clearly unimpressed by the British position and declared that the proposals could not serve as the basis for a settlement of the relations between the two countries.⁵⁷¹ This would have come as no surprise to Cripps, as the Soviet Government's silence following the presentation of the British proposals was evidence of this.

Indeed, during a conversation between A.V. Alexander of the Admiralty and Maisky in September 1940, Maisky had proclaimed to be perplexed as to why the Foreign Office were so hostile towards the USSR, adding that he could not understand the British stance on the Baltic States. Towing the party-line, Maisky had told Alexander that the territory had been Russian for over two hundred years, and had only been constituted as three independent nations in the aftermath of World War One. As a consequence of British hostility, Maisky asserted that his Government and people did not believe that the British truly wanted to improve relations.⁵⁷² Though the communication was intended to reach Cadogan, the Foreign Secretary was the first to read and respond to Alexander's report of the conversation. The then Foreign Secretary, Halifax, correctly pointed out that the argument that the Baltic States had been 'Russian' territory for two hundred years was 'imperialist ... if ever there was one', and was in contradiction to the Soviet Government's earlier policy which had led to their recognition of the independence of those states in 1920. Halifax proceeded to question Soviet sincerity. Maisky had hinted that in order for the British to defeat Nazi Germany they must gain the help of the Soviet Union. The Soviet

⁵⁷¹ NA, FO371/ 29464/ N829/ 3/ 38, telegram: Cripps, 3 February 1941.

⁵⁷² NA, FO371/ 24845/ N6630/ 30/ 38, A.V. Alexander to Cadogan, 17 September 1940.

Ambassador declared that in order to assure assistance the British ‘must do what his government wants in questions such as that of the Baltic States because we shall need their help against Germany’. Halifax did not dispute the importance of Soviet aid, but noted that in spite of Maisky’s utterances he had avoided producing any evidence to suggest that Moscow were prepared to aid Britain in their struggle with Germany.⁵⁷³ Indeed, Maclean had noted that the Soviet Government consistently made a point of keeping its representatives abroad in the dark with regard to its real intentions and would simply hand out to them whatever they considered a suitable ‘party line’ for export purposes.⁵⁷⁴ Collier concurred with the Foreign Secretary and adopted a somewhat mocking tone in his response to Maisky’s justifications of the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States. The imperialist argument used by the Soviet Ambassador was unconvincing, due mainly to the fact that his Government had ‘rejected with contumely’ any imperialist arguments when the Kremlin had recognised Baltic and Finnish independence in 1920. The illusory idea of the continuation of Soviet neutrality was unconvincing. Collier was as equally doubtful that the Soviets could adopt any policy that would be advantageous for Britain. Reiterating an oft-used justification, Collier exclaimed that the only way in which the Soviets could be of any use for Britain would be through the diminution of economic aid to the Germans. Soviet economic assistance to Germany was increasing, ensuring that any Anglo-Soviet collusion in the political sphere was highly unlikely. It was merely another example of Maisky’s attempted manipulation of the British, and Collier firmly believed that one ought to disregard Alexander’s conversation with Maisky.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Ibid., minute by Halifax, undated.

⁵⁷⁴ NA, FO371/ 24852/ N7167/ 283/ 38, minute by Maclean, 12 November 1940.

⁵⁷⁵ NA, FO371/ 24845/ N6630/ 30/ 38, minute by Collier, 24 September 1940.

In previous months the Foreign Office had advised Cripps that it would 'clearly be a mistake to miss any opportunity of fishing in these troubled waters'. The idea that Soviet-German interests in the Baltic were not easily reconcilable had been dismissed, as it was apparent that their relations were steadily improving, both economically and politically.⁵⁷⁶ His Majesty's Government consistently maintained that position. Following Alexander's meeting with Maisky it was decided that any future approach towards the Soviet Government ought to be cautious and based on three pertinent points. The possibility of British mediation in Soviet-Turkish relations would be dependent on some practical proof of benevolent neutrality towards Turkey. The Soviet Government could not merely be passive spectators but should 'facilitate Turkish defence by all steps consistent with technical neutrality'. The British Government would concede that the Soviet Government was in *de facto* control of the Baltic States, and upon these two points the third was dictated. Any economic agreement between Great Britain and the USSR would hinge upon Soviet assurances of assistance to Turkey and satisfaction of the British position vis-à-vis the Baltic States. That position was to be maintained throughout 1940.

Thus, as 1941 approached, there was a consensus within the Northern Department that no further approaches should be made to Moscow. In December the Foreign Secretary had raised the idea of addressing a personal message to Stalin in the hope of kick starting an improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations, yet Cripps believed such an approach would be fruitless. The ambassador believed that the Soviet Government was perfectly aware of the willingness of Britain to improve relations and have had ample evidence of that, through the various proposals put forward by Cripps, all of which had been rebuffed. As a consequence, Cripps was certain that

⁵⁷⁶ NA, FO371/ 24847/ N5648/ 40/ 38, FO to Cripps, 23 May 1940.

any friendly messages would not make the slightest difference to the Soviet mind-set, as their policy was 'based on the realities of their own situation and not on sentiment'.⁵⁷⁷ Cripps used Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940 as an example of an improvement of Nazi-Soviet relations. As such, any further British expressions of friendly intentions would only be interpreted as an indication of some special or increased need for Soviet assistance. Stalin would only seek a *rapprochement* with Great Britain if it suited Soviet interests. Should a change in the war or a deterioration in Soviet-German relations occur, it was conceivable that Stalin would adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards His Majesty's Government. Consequently, Cripps believed that he ought not attempt to change Stalin's mind. Maclean agreed, noting that Cripps' comments were both valuable and interesting. Maclean fully endorsed Cripps' suggestion that rather than chasing after the Soviets, it would be wise for the British to adopt a policy of 'non-helpfulness' towards the Soviet Union. It would serve no purpose for Eden to ask about the outstanding issue of the Baltic States and the state of Soviet-Turkish relations, and their impact upon the possibility of concluding an economic agreement with Moscow, for they had not undergone any significant change. Indeed, the Berlin Conference had illustrated the Soviet position well. The Soviet Government had favoured a strengthening of its relations with Germany rather than with Great Britain; thus, to communicate a further message of British goodwill would serve no real purpose.⁵⁷⁸ Cripps rightly concluded that Moscow's trump card was the knowledge that Hitler was obsessed by the danger of a war on two fronts, whilst Hitler's trump card was the presence of German forces on the borders of the Soviet Union and the knowledge that Stalin was determined not to be drawn into hostilities with an undefeated Germany. This ensured a 'delicate

⁵⁷⁷ NA, FO371/29463/N29/3/38, Cripps to FO, 31 December 1940.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, minute by Maclean, 3 January 1941.

balance and completely opportunistic policy on both sides', and illustrated the fact that Great Britain and the persistent assurances of British goodwill were not a consideration for Stalin.⁵⁷⁹

Following an interview with Molotov on 1 February – a meeting that had only taken place following Eden's complaint to Maisky that Cripps had not had any contact with Molotov for four months – it was clear that the Soviets were unwavering in their attitudes. Eden had warned Maisky on 29 January that, should Cripps continue to receive the cold shoulder, His Majesty's Government would treat Maisky with similar discourtesy. During the course of the interview the Soviet Foreign Minister had used an abundance of flattery in an attempt to persuade Cripps that should the outstanding question of the Baltic States be resolved, it would be possible for Great Britain to achieve a *rapprochement* with the Soviets. Molotov told Cripps that the Soviets had adopted a positive attitude towards him personally and that the Kremlin had welcomed his appointment. Furthermore, the Soviet Government had committed no unfriendly acts towards Great Britain, whilst the dispute in the Baltic had illustrated the negative attitude adopted by the British towards the Kremlin. Furthermore, the British retention of Baltic assets had clearly illustrated a lack of goodwill.⁵⁸⁰ Although they had outwardly created an illusion of a British desire for *rapprochement*, the political and economic proposals of October 1940 did not and could not serve as a basis for a settlement of the relations between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Molotov had placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the British. His Majesty's Government's methods of coming first to an arrangement on general questions and then proceeding to individual outstanding questions would only

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., Cripps to FO, 31 December 1940.

⁵⁸⁰ On 12 November the War Cabinet decided that the Baltic States' ships should be seized.

lead to a delay and a 'tangling of the solution'.⁵⁸¹ Cripps stated his belief that the proposals had provided a good basis for improving relations between the two countries, and that British recognition of the *de facto* control of the Baltic States would naturally become the basis for regulating the questions at issue between London and Moscow. A general advance in Anglo-Soviet relations would be followed by the solution of the outstanding secondary problems, and Cripps had hoped in October 1940 that the political proposals would prove acceptable to the Kremlin. Indeed, the proposals should have been acceptable at that time also.

Unsurprisingly, Molotov was unwavering in his criticism of the British, and expressed his disappointment that the details of Anglo-Soviet conversations had been leaked in the British press. The political proposals were to be kept secret, predominantly due to a Soviet desire to keep the Germans in the dark. For the Commissar, 'this reminded him of the position in the summer of 1939'. At that time Molotov had been conducting secret negotiations with the British and French Ambassadors, in an attempt to reach an Anglo-Soviet-French understanding. However, reports had appeared in the press and had therefore violated the agreement about the necessity of keeping the negotiations secret. Consequently, Molotov had believed that there had been an accumulation of unfriendly measures on the part of the British Government and that the experience of 1939 had not shown a desire on their part to improve relations; the wartime experience had indicated a similar attitude. Cripps was equally critical of his Foreign Office colleagues for not preventing the leak, and believed that instances of leaks in the British press would only enhance his difficulties in Moscow. In spite of complaints in his telegram to the Foreign Office, Cripps was insistent when he informed Molotov that he was wrong in

⁵⁸¹ NA, FO371/29464/N829/3/38, Cripps to FO, 3 February 1941.

his analysis of the situation. He told Molotov that the offers made in October 1940 had shown quite clearly that London was genuinely anxious for better relations with the Soviet Union.⁵⁸²

Maclean and Collier wasted no time in condemning Molotov's criticisms of leakages of information in the British press. Maclean remarked that one of Maisky's principal functions during the previous eighteen months had been to cast the blame for the unsatisfactory state of Anglo-Soviet relations upon the British Government and the incompetent officials within the Foreign Office had served as useful scapegoats.⁵⁸³ Collier addressed Cripps' complaints of British publicity and its effects on Anglo-Soviet relations. He had doubted that 'we should ever be able to compete with Maisky's methods of feeding the press' and that his 'intrigues in journalistic and parliamentary circles' had become 'notorious throughout the diplomatic corps'.⁵⁸⁴ Sargent was in full agreement. Following Molotov's complaints of press leakages, Collier suggested that the Foreign Office should adopt a policy of refusing rather than granting Maisky social favours as he had made so improper a use of his contacts in London.⁵⁸⁵ Cripps' meeting with Molotov had consolidated in Maclean's mind that the predominant motivation for the Soviets was to secure the recognition of their sovereignty over the Baltic States before the end of the war. That would prove to be impossible, as to do so would mark a departure from the principles that had been laid down by Churchill in a speech on 5 September 1940.

In his speech, Churchill was adamant that he would not recognize any territorial changes made during the war, except those brought about by the free consent of all concerned. To do so would lead to the abandonment of the common

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ NA, FO371/29463/N502/3/38, minute by Maclean, 4 February 1941.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., minute by Collier, 4 February 1941.

⁵⁸⁵ NA, FO371/29527/N605/38, minute by Collier, 4 February 1941.

attitude shared with the Government of the United States who had very clearly taken a firm line on the subject of the Baltic States. Maclean took solace in the belief that for the present time Soviet interests would not allow the Soviet Government to either to break or strengthen its relations with the British. In the circumstances, Maclean believed that the best chance of improving the position of Britain vis-à-vis the Soviet Union would be brought about as a result of increasing Soviet respect for Great Britain. That would only be achieved should Britain take a firm line with the Soviets, not through granting concessions to appease Stalin. Since the outbreak of the war it was Britain who had made the advances, to very little avail.⁵⁸⁶ Cripps' interview with Molotov had consolidated Maclean's belief that in present circumstances there was little hope of achieving profitable cooperation between Great Britain and the Soviet Union, a conclusion that mirrored those drawn by Cripps at that time. The continued hostility against Great Britain was unlikely to dissolve unless some 'very visible signs of accomplished facts convince the Soviet Government of a change of attitude'.⁵⁸⁷

In a letter to Eden, Cripps wrote of his belief that the USSR was in a dominant position at that juncture of the war. Not only had London been actively courting the Kremlin but the Soviet Government's relationship with Germany had altered somewhat. Upon the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, the Soviet Government was very much the weaker Power in the relationship. As a consequence of the Soviet conquest and absorption of the Baltic States, alongside its victory in Finland, the Soviet Union's frontiers had been strengthened to the point that Stalin no longer had to fear Germany to the extent he had done in previous months. Indeed, the British Ambassador believed that the settlement of the problem of the Baltic States had been a 'major success for Russian diplomacy'. The Soviet absorption of

⁵⁸⁶ NA, FO371/29463/N411/3/38, minute by Maclean, 4 February 1941.

⁵⁸⁷ NA, FO371/29500/N947/122/38, Cripps to Eden, 26 January 1941.

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, alongside the most recent Nazi-Soviet economic understanding, would make it almost impossible for Hitler to make any trouble for Stalin in the region. Cripps acknowledged that as a by-product of the purely economic agreement there was a very clear political repercussion, one that had suited Stalin immensely. The Soviets were able temporarily to appease the German menace and comply with German economic requirements, and should Moscow fear too early a termination of hostilities before the combatants were sufficiently weakened, Stalin could utilize the prospect of Anglo-Soviet discussions to delay the end of the war until both sides were adequately enfeebled.⁵⁸⁸ Consequently, the short-term improvement in the relations between the USSR and Germany had ensured the ‘practical elimination of the fear of armed conflict’ on both the Soviet and German side. All that remained for Stalin was to resolve the outstanding question of British *de jure* recognition of the Soviet control of the Baltic States.⁵⁸⁹ Maclean was critical of Cripps’ assessment, and did not believe that Stalin had attached such great importance the Baltic question. He did, however, agree with Cripps that the recent economic agreement between Moscow and Berlin was significant, and that there was very little chance of immediate political collaboration between London and Moscow.⁵⁹⁰

Just as a consensus of opinion was developing within the Northern Department about the unsuitability and futility of attempting to settle the Baltic question with the Kremlin, Cripps once again reversed his position on the matter, much to the frustration of Collier and Maclean. Cripps’ reversal of opinion came at a time when the Foreign Secretary had finally authorized Cripps officially to withdraw

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 15 March 1941.

the British proposals of 21 October 1940. As a consequence of Cripps' change of heart, his colleagues in the Foreign Office were becoming increasingly exacerbated by the ambassador. Cripps' viewpoint had reversed in the aftermath of Eden's visit to Turkey at the end of February.⁵⁹¹ Although Cripps had acknowledged the fact that the Soviets were 'masters of delay and sabotage', and was aware that whenever the Soviets adopted a more friendly attitude it often presaged fresh attempts to neutralize the German danger by further appeasement, he wanted to inform the Foreign Secretary of the advisability of coming to a settlement with the Soviets over the Baltic question.⁵⁹² Quite apart from British interests, Cripps had believed that His Majesty's Government were 'bound as realists' to accept the *fait accompli* in the Baltic States and grant *de facto* recognition.⁵⁹³

Once again, Cripps' position was somewhat confused. When the matter of the Baltic States had been discussed in previous months, there was a general concurrence within the Foreign Office – with the exception of Collier – that *de facto* recognition would in fact be acceptable. It was the Soviets who had deemed *de facto* unsuitable, thus stalling the possibility of reaching a resolution of the issue. As Collier rightly illuminated, Cripps had ignored the fact that the Soviet Government had required from London something that would in practice be indistinguishable from *de jure* recognition, and that Cripps had spoken as if he was only asking the British to recognize Soviet *de facto* recognition of the Baltic States.⁵⁹⁴ Collier repeated his reasons for opposing the granting of *de jure* recognition. To do so would negatively affect Britain's relations with the American and Polish Governments, and would run contrary to the position of the Prime Minister. In spite of these justifiable reasons for

⁵⁹¹ Eden and Cripps met in Ankara on 28 February 1941, where the main topic of debate was Soviet designs in Turkey.

⁵⁹² NA, FO371/29500/N1164/122/38, Cripps to Eden, 9 March 1941.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., minute by Collier, 23 March 1941.

opposition, ‘Cripps apparently thinks that these objections would be mitigated, if not wholly overcome, by negotiating for *de facto* recognition only’. In the same breath Cripps had admitted that by adopting that course, Soviet demands on His Majesty’s Government would continue. It is difficult to comprehend the advice tendered by Sir Stafford Cripps. His vacillation was a constant source of frustration for Collier. Whenever Collier expressed satisfaction of the work and opinions of the ambassador, Cripps communicated confused and contradictory advice to his colleagues in the Foreign Office. One of the greatest difficulties of conducting any discussion with Cripps, as Collier wrote the following month, was the ambassador’s habit of ignoring of any objections raised by those in the Foreign Office. Cripps consistently tried the patience of Collier throughout his tenure as ambassador.⁵⁹⁵

Indeed, Collier believed that the ambassador was unsuitable for conducting any negotiations involving the question of the Baltic States due to his obsession over the issue. As a result Cripps could not, or would not, appreciate the point of view of his colleagues within the Northern Department.⁵⁹⁶ Accordingly, Collier informed the Foreign Secretary unequivocally of the prevailing belief within the Northern Department, whilst excluding the opinions of, and advice tendered by, Cripps. Collier told Eden that should London commence any negotiations with the Soviet Government, the British ought not to be deluded into thinking that they would be required to give anything less than *de jure* recognition in practice. Collier informed the Foreign Secretary that the choice was between granting full *de jure* recognition and leaving matters as they stood. Collier had previously informed the ambassador that so serious a concession, with all its far-reaching consequences, would only be contemplated if it could be shown that it would bring some definite and considerable

⁵⁹⁵NA, FO371/ 29464/ N1386/ 3/ 38, minute by Collier, 7 April 1941.

⁵⁹⁶NA, FO371/ 29465/ N1725/ 3/ 38, minute by Collier, 22 April 1941.

advantage, such as the cessation or considerable diminution of Soviet economic help to Germany or Soviet interference with German plans in the Balkans. Collier had never believed that such advantages were obtainable. The Soviets had consistently preached their adherence to the policy of benevolent neutrality, as well as their right to trade with Germany as a neutral. Furthermore, any Soviet interference in German plans in the Balkans – namely in Turkey – would only come about should the Soviet Government consider it in their interest to take such a step, and not merely because the British had offered them concessions in the Baltic States or elsewhere.⁵⁹⁷

Although Collier conceded that such concession would increase the general goodwill of the Soviet Government and so incline them to do more for Turkey, Collier's past experiences had led him to believe that goodwill was a commodity in which the Soviets had very little dealing. Soviet interests dictated action, not goodwill. Thus, he concluded that there was no reason to believe that recognition of their sovereignty over the Baltic States would make any difference one way or another to their decision to give further help to Turkey. Nor would it induce the Soviet Government to diminish its economic aid to the Germans. The authorities in London had conceded the fact that the Soviet Government controlled the Baltic States, yet did not give official recognition of Soviet sovereignty. Collier believed that the position adopted by His Majesty's Government in this matter was quite correct. Furthermore, he believed that in the face of continued hostility from the Soviet Government it was crucial that Cripps, and His Majesty's Government generally, should continue the policy of reserve and aloofness towards the Moscow.⁵⁹⁸ Evidently, the problems arising from the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States continued to prove decisive within British policy-making circles.

⁵⁹⁷ NA, FO371/ 29500/ N1164/ 122/ 38, minute by Collier, 23 March 1941.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

However, as 1941 progressed, a different topic of debate dominated the Northern Department. Since the outbreak of war in September 1939 the nature Nazi-Soviet relations had been an issue of special concern to His Majesty's Government. In October 1940, Fitzroy Maclean had been one of the first officials within the Foreign Office to broach the question of German intentions towards the USSR. In an analysis of the interconnected issue of Anglo-Soviet and Nazi-Soviet relations, Maclean stated his belief that the Germans would not choose to invade both Great Britain and the Soviet Union at the same time, as his contact from the Berlin Embassy, von Herwath, had informed him. To decide upon an invasion of the USSR in the spring of 1941 would, he believed, be a mistake as the German mechanised forces 'would be at a grave disadvantage owing to the condition of the ground'.⁵⁹⁹ Following Molotov's visit to Berlin Maclean's conclusions appeared to be accurate. As previously mentioned, although Molotov's visit had failed to produce a new Nazi-Soviet agreement, in the immediate aftermath of the Conference, members of the British Foreign Office were not yet aware of that fact. Until those in London received a summary of the conversations, they were convinced of Stalin's determination to 'keep out of trouble' and stay in Hitler's good graces in the hope of avoiding falling victim to German aggression. Indeed, it was believed that Molotov's visit to Berlin had resulted in a general strengthening of Soviet-German relations.

Although Maclean and Sargent believed that Stalin would continue to appease Hitler in economic matters in order to stave off a German attack, they could not condone Cripps' behaviour in the aftermath of Molotov's conversations in Berlin. In a communication of 13 November, Cripps put forward two suggestions as to how to deal with the Soviets in the aftermath of the Commissar's visit. His first suggestion

⁵⁹⁹ NA, FO371/ 24852/ 6822/ 283/ 38, minute by Maclean, 12 October 1940.

was that he could lose his temper with the Soviet Commissar in their next meeting in order to illustrate his displeasure over Stalin's refusal to respond to British overtures. Cripps' alternative suggestion was that he could 'pretend' to lose his temper with the Soviets. Sargent was critical of each approach. The Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary feared that it would 'merely give Stalin the impression that His Majesty's Government have been very much frightened'. Rather, the British Government had to accept that although the Soviet Union was formally not allied to Germany, it was 'quite natural that they should consult together whenever the occasion requires'.⁶⁰⁰ As for the Soviet attitude towards the British, that would remain unaltered as a result of Stalin's innate fear of Germany.⁶⁰¹ Indeed, as Maclean pointed out, until Germany 'collapsed completely', there was no possibility of an improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations due to Stalin's innate fear of Hitler. Indeed, Stalin would merely avoid a breach with the British Government, whilst doing all he could to 'prolong the struggle to the detriment of both belligerents'.⁶⁰²

Thus, as 1940 drew to a close, officials in London were under no illusions as to Stalin's ultimate intentions: the Soviet Premier wished to see Britain and Germany exhaust themselves whilst observing from safety of the sidelines. Hitler's intentions towards the USSR, however, remained something of a mystery. On 4 December, Sir Robert Craigie, the British Ambassador in Tokyo, relayed the opinions of a 'Czech informant' whom the ambassador believed to be 'absolutely reliable'. Following a recent conversation with Kaganovitch, the Soviet Commissar for Transport, the informant was convinced that Soviet policy was motivated by a desire to maintain 'peace at any price', unless it involved sacrificing important Soviet interests. Indeed, the informant had argued that the Soviet Government was in a position to stop

⁶⁰⁰ NA, FO371/24848/N7166/40/38, minute by Sargent, 13 November 1940.

⁶⁰¹ NA, FO371/24848/N7232/40/38, minute by Maclean, 22 November 1940.

⁶⁰² NA, FO371/24849/N7526/40/38, minute by Maclean, 26 December 1940.

German expansion through economic and diplomatic action alone.⁶⁰³ Although Maclean was sceptical about the reliability of his Craigie's source, he did not dispute the conclusions drawn. The informant believed that Kaganovitch was very close to Stalin, who had married his sister, yet Maclean doubted that Stalin would confide in him on issues of Soviet foreign policy. Maclean acknowledged that there was bound to be a certain amount of mutual suspicion between the Soviet Union and Germany, but he reiterated that a clash between the two Powers was most unlikely. It was likely that the Soviets would only fight if their territory was invaded. The Germans would no doubt realize that fact and Maclean noted that Kaganovitch's claim that the USSR was in a position to stop German expansion by economic and diplomatic action was credible.⁶⁰⁴ For Maclean, the Soviet attitude was highly advantageous for the German Government. Stalin's desire to maintain peace at any cost – as illustrated in the extensive economic aid for Germany – would prove successful as Hitler had received vast amounts of supplies that were vital to Germany's war economy. Indeed, there was a general consensus within the Foreign and War Offices at that time that there was 'no reason to anticipate an early German attack on the Soviet Union' as any such attack would be contrary to the best interests of Germany.⁶⁰⁵

At the end of January, in a communication to the Foreign Secretary, Cripps registered his agreement with the prevailing consensus within Whitehall. Although the ambassador did not believe that any change had occurred in the long-term outlook of the Soviet Government with regard to its relations with Germany, he believed that there had been a 'lessening of temporary tensions' between Moscow and Berlin. Stalin remained determined to avoid an armed conflict with Germany 'at almost any cost'. Furthermore, the extension of Soviet economic aid to Germany had convinced

⁶⁰³ NA, FO371/ 29479/ N151/ 78/ 38, Craigie to FO, 4 December 1940.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., minute by Maclean, 11 January 1941.

⁶⁰⁵ NA, FO371/ 29479/ N286/ 78/ 38, minute by Maclean, 22 January 1941.

Stalin that German aggression towards the Soviet Union was unlikely. Indeed, the increased economic support had led to the ‘practical elimination of the fear of armed conflict on both sides’.⁶⁰⁶

Scepticism about possible German aggression against the Soviet Union continued well into 1941. For example, on 24 March 1941 the Military Attaché in Switzerland informed the War Office that a confidential source in Berlin believed that preparations were being made for an attack on the USSR.⁶⁰⁷ The combination of continued large-scale recruitment, reports of increased Nazi-Soviet tension and the construction of fortifications on the Soviet-German border had convinced Kelly’s source of Hitler’s intention to invade the Soviet Union. J.K. Roberts of the Central Department mused that ‘there must be some fire behind the increasing clouds of smoke’. However, although the Germans appeared to be making preparations, Roberts was of the opinion that Hitler would instead hope that blackmail would suffice.⁶⁰⁸ Collier agreed. Following a discussion with Major Tamplin of the War Office, it was agreed that Germany would not attack the Soviet Union if it could be avoided. However, it was possible that the Germans could find themselves involved in a war with the Soviet Union against their wishes should Stalin call Hitler’s bluff and refuse to bow to threats and blackmail.⁶⁰⁹

Major Tamplin, who was highly knowledgeable in matters relating to the Soviet Union, informed Collier that the result of a successful German invasion ‘would in practice be complete chaos throughout the whole of the Soviet Union’ and that the Germans would have to reorganize everything from the bottom upwards in whatever territories they occupied. As a consequence, far from gaining new resources, the

⁶⁰⁶ NA, FO371/ 29500/ N947/ 122/ 38, Cripps to Eden, 26 January 1941.

⁶⁰⁷ NA, FO371/ 29479/ N1367/ 78/ 38, Kelly [Military Attache in Switzerland] to WO, 24 March 1941.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., minute by Roberts, 28 March 1941.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., minute by Collier, 28 March 1941.

Germans would lose the USSR as a source of supply. Additionally, they would spend a great deal of time and effort in the reorganization of the USSR. Tamplin noted that German resources were not 'illimitable'. Hitler could hardly afford to undertake a first-class campaign in the Balkans and to simultaneously attempt to deal a knockout blow against Great Britain before American help arrived, as well as invading, occupying and reorganizing a large part of the Soviet Union. As a result of Tamplin's advice, Collier was convinced that whatever German plans may have been drawn up concerning the destruction of the Soviet Union, these would have to be 'put into cold storage' pending the result of Germany's forthcoming campaign in the Balkans.⁶¹⁰ The conclusions drawn by Collier were met with the approval of both Sargent and Cadogan. To precipitate a war with Soviet Russia would cause immeasurable damage to the German war machine. Thus, should Stalin continue to meet Hitler's demands for economic assistance and supply, it was widely believed that the status quo would be maintained in the Nazi-Soviet relationship.⁶¹¹

On 28 March, Kelly composed a paper exploring this issue. Kelly relayed information obtained from the His Majesty's Consul in Geneva who was convinced of the growing feeling among German officers that a move would be made against the Soviet Union that year. Hitler's objective was to furnish Germany with supplies from the Ukraine for an indefinite amount of time. It was believed that Hitler hoped to neutralize Yugoslavia and Turkey through diplomatic means, whilst simultaneously forcing Greece to conclude peace. In that way, Germany's flank would be

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., minute by Collier, 31 March 1941. The issue of the Balkans had been a long-standing problem within Nazi-Soviet relations. The Balkans were of strategic importance for both Russia and Germany; Roumanian oil and grain were essential for the German war effort, whilst the Russians were eager to prevent German hegemony in the region. For in-depth analysis of the impact of the Balkans on Nazi-Soviet relations, see K.W. Koch, 'Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa'', *Historical Journal*, 26, 4 (Dec., 1983), pp. 891-920; Ernst Presseisen, 'Prelude to "Barbarossa": Germany and the Balkans, 1940-1941', *Journal of Modern History*, 32, 4 (Dec., 1960), pp. 359-370.

⁶¹¹ NA, FO371/29479/N1367/78/38, Cadogan and Sargent noted their approval of Collier's conclusion in the margin of his minute.

protected.⁶¹² Whilst Kelly was correct in his belief that Hitler would use diplomacy to subdue any opposition from the Governments of the Balkans, it proved to be a timely memorandum. The next day the Yugoslav Government was overthrown by General Sushan Simovic, the commander of the Yugoslav air force, in protest to Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact.⁶¹³ The coup led the Soviets hurriedly to conclude a non-aggression pact with Yugoslavia on the day of the coup. Upon hearing the news, Hitler, who had always suspected an intimate tie between Moscow and Belgrade, decided to invade Yugoslavia, a decision that contributed to the delay of his assault on the USSR by five weeks.⁶¹⁴

Collier criticised the conclusions drawn by Kelly on account of the sources of information. Kelly's intelligence network was unreliable. His information had derived from a Zurich grain importer who was also a member of the Swiss Trade Delegation to the Soviet Union. Kelly's informant stated that he had been 'told by high officials in Germany close to General Halder' that there had been 'a growing feeling among German Army officers that movement must be made against the Soviet Union that year in order to obtain grain and other products from the Ukraine'.⁶¹⁵ Collier was critical of both the accuracy and reliability of Kelly's report as the author 'could not vouch for the accuracy' of the information. The most serious argument against the possibility of a German attack, according to Collier, was the Soviet-German oil agreement.⁶¹⁶ A German invasion of the USSR would inevitably put an end to Soviet-German economic cooperation. That would be detrimental to Germany. However, Collier was aware that 'everything ... depends on Hitler's decisions'. In

⁶¹² NA, FO371/ 29479/ N1364/ 78/ 38, telegram: Kelly, 26 March 1941.

⁶¹³ Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps in Moscow*, p. 99. The Tripartite Pact was concluded on 20 November 1940 and had bound Hungary, Roumania and Slovakia to Germany.

⁶¹⁴ Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union*, p. 155.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, telegram: Kelly, 26 March 1941.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 19 April 1941.

Collier's opinion, those decisions were incredibly difficult to predict. Furthermore, he noted that since the Yugoslavian revolution there had been a significant dearth of evidence to suggest a German move against the Soviet Union. To be sure, there had been rumours of some three million German troops being stationed in Poland, yet Collier argued somewhat curiously in the circumstances, that this was not necessarily indicative of Hitler's intention to invade the Soviet Union.⁶¹⁷

Throughout this period Collier continued to be critical of the intelligence he received which pointed to a German invasion the Soviet Union in the coming months. On 30 March the British Ambassador in Belgrade reported on a conversation between his American counterpart and Prince Paul in the course of which the latter had been told by Hitler that he intended to attack the USSR on 30 June.⁶¹⁸ While acknowledging that it was 'quite probable' that Hitler had expressed anti-Soviet sentiments due to Prince Paul's well-known dislike of Soviet Communism, Collier wholly rejected the idea that a German invasion was imminent. In spite of this, he suggested that the details of the conversation between Hitler and Prince Paul and Hitler's could be relayed to the Kremlin. In Collier's opinion, warning the Soviets would 'only have a good effect' from the British point of view. It was possible that Stalin would conclude that the Soviet Union would be attacked regardless of any concessions that he made to Hitler. Thus, although Collier did not in fact believe that Hitler intended to invade the USSR on 30 June, relaying the details of the conversation might lead Stalin to rethink his 'policy of subservience' to Hitler.⁶¹⁹

The idea of warning Stalin of an impending German invasion on the USSR was not, however, limited to Collier. On 3 April, Cripps had been given a message from the Prime Minister for communication to Stalin. The contents of the message

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., minute by Collier, 5 April 1941.

⁶¹⁸ NA, FO371/ 29479/ N1316/ 78/ 38, Campbell to Athens, 30 March 1941.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., minute by Collier, 2 April 1941.

were highly significant, and marked Churchill's decision to intervene personally in Anglo-Soviet relations. Upon receiving intelligence that had come from the German air force Enigma intercepts, Churchill had decided to warn the Soviet Premier of German troop concentrations in Poland. This, according to the Prime Minister, could 'only mean Hitler's intention to invade Russia in May'.⁶²⁰

Cripps delivered Churchill's message on 19 April, a full sixteen days after he had been instructed to do so. More incredibly, days prior to the delivery of Churchill's message, Cripps had handed Vyshinsky a note warning of the impending German attack without making any mention of Churchill's message. Sargent could not disguise his disbelief over the extraordinary behaviour of the ambassador. On 13 April, ten days after the Prime Minister had requested Cripps to deliver his message, the Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary complained: 'Sir S. Cripps is incalculable. After arguing and refusing to communicate the Prime Minister's message for ten days he now suddenly, off his own bat, addresses a full-dress letter to Vyshinsky in which he formally raises the whole political issue'.⁶²¹ Incredibly, in his 'reappraisal' of Churchill's warning to Stalin, Gabriel Gorodetsky has argued that Cripps' behaviour in this matter has been 'blown up out of all proportion'.⁶²² He further argues that the incident figured prominently in Churchill's war memoirs in an 'obvious attempt to invoke the historical record to discredit his rival'.⁶²³ Gorodetsky's examination of Churchill's warning to Stalin is highly critical of the way in which the Foreign Office handled the intelligence reports relating to the impending German attack on the Soviet Union, and in particular how the reports were effectively disregarded. Central to

⁶²⁰ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm* (London: Reprint Society, 1950), pp. 446-50.

⁶²¹ NA, FO371/29479/N1573/78/38, minute by Sargent, 13 April 1941.

⁶²² Gabriel Gorodetsky, 'Churchill's Warning to Stalin: A Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, 29, 4 (Dec., 1986), 979-990 (p. 970).

⁶²³ Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps in Moscow*, p. 16.

Gorodetsky's argument is the idea that the evaluation of such intelligence was 'severely hampered by the entrenched political concept in the foreign office'.⁶²⁴ Although the reports of German intentions proved to be accurate, one must consider two crucial points before chastising the Foreign Office. Firstly, one cannot overlook the vast array of information that flowed into the Foreign Office on a daily basis, a large percentage of which was of doubtful reliability and origin. Secondly, Stalin's central axiom of pursuing economic appeasement of Germany at all costs in order to prevent German aggression was as convincing a reason as any to question the reliability of any warnings. German action against the USSR was rightly viewed as nonsensical, not least due to the negative impact any invasion would have on the German war economy. Therefore, until the Enigma intercepts were known to Churchill one can hardly criticise the conclusions drawn by Collier, Sargent *et al.* As Schwendemann has argued, it was the extensive and valuable Soviet economic aid to the Reich that led to Stalin's stubborn refusal to accept the inevitability of a German attack. As such, one should refrain from criticizing those British officials for reaching similar conclusions, at least until more definitive and persuasive information was available.⁶²⁵

Gorodetsky's conclusions are difficult to comprehend. Although one can appreciate the fact that Cripps had not been granted further audience with Stalin since their first and only meeting in July 1940, there is no excuse for Cripps' refusal to follow orders. As Miner has argued, the 'simple request' by Churchill 'triggered a minor controversy' both at the time and amongst historians since.⁶²⁶

Unsurprisingly, Cripps' actions angered his colleagues in the Foreign Office and compelled Sargent to compose a damning memorandum that criticised the

⁶²⁴ Gorodetsky, 'Churchill's Warning to Stalin', p. 980.

⁶²⁵ Schwendeman, 'German-Soviet Economic Relations', p.162.

⁶²⁶ Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 119.

ambassador's behaviour. In his analysis Sargent confessed his frustration at Cripps' behaviour. In his analysis Sargent confessed his frustration at Cripps' vacillation: 'at one moment he advocates and practices a policy of reserve and aloofness while at the next moment, although conditions have not materially changed, he is to be found addressing appeals and remonstrances to the Soviet Government which, I fear, may well produce on Stalin the impression of weakness and even panic which it ought to be our object to avoid above all else with the Soviet Government'.⁶²⁷ Cripps' latest display of stubbornness led to the discussion of his recall at the beginning of June.⁶²⁸

On 16 April it was Eden's turn to warn the Soviets of the looming threat of German aggression. In a conversation with Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador refused to discuss the state of Moscow's relations with Berlin, and merely repeated Stalin's desire to avoid being drawn into hostilities. In the course of what he described as a 'frank discussion on Anglo-Soviet relations', Eden told Maisky that His Majesty's Government believed Germany's military ambitions to be 'boundless'. Consequently, the Soviet Union was not safe from the German military menace that had swept across the continent. In light of the German threat, Eden broached the possibility of a *rapprochement* between Great Britain and the USSR, enquiring of Maisky whether the Governments of Britain and the Soviet Union could put aside past differences in order to make real progress.⁶²⁹ For his part, Maisky responded by expressing his belief that his Government had already shown by a number of minor gestures that they had wanted an improvement in its relations with Britain. Maisky did not respond to Eden's warning. One cannot be overly critical of the Soviet Ambassador during this meeting. Churchill's warning to Stalin had not yet been delivered. All Eden had

⁶²⁷ NA, FO800/279, memorandum by Sargent, 26 April 1941.

⁶²⁸ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, I, pp. 607-9, 611.

⁶²⁹ NA, FO371/29465/N1658/3/38, Eden to Cripps, 16 April 1941.

told the Soviet Ambassador was that the doctrine of Nazi Germany had centred around expansion. That would not have come as a surprise to Maisky.

In spite of the controversy surrounding the delivery of Churchill's warning to Stalin, on 18 April, during a meeting with Vyshinsky, Cripps handed the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs a paper in which he explored the interconnected issue of Anglo-Soviet relations and the German threat. Cripps' memorandum suggested that it 'was not outside the bounds of possibility' that if the war was protracted, His Majesty's Government might be tempted to come to some arrangement to end it 'on the sort of basis which had already been suggested in certain German quarters'.⁶³⁰ Once again, Cripps had been 'ignorant and reckless in his statements and proposals'.⁶³¹ Cripps then immediately proceeded to undermine his barely veiled threat by stating that 'at the moment there is no question whatever of the possibility of such a negotiated peace so far as His Majesty's Government are concerned'.⁶³²

He then explored the two likely possibilities as regards the development of the Eastern European situation. Hitler could obtain his supplies in one of two ways: either by agreement with the Soviet Union or, by resorting to force and simply taking what he wanted. The British Ambassador noted that in the second eventuality London and Moscow would share a common foe and a common goal – the destruction of Nazi tyranny.⁶³³

Vyshinsky was predictably cool in response to Cripps' warnings. Evidently, the necessary prerequisites for discussing wider political problems did not exist. Cripps gained the 'strong impression that the Soviet Government have not turned at

⁶³⁰ NA, FO371/ 29465/ N1828/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 18 April 1941.

⁶³¹ Beatrice Webb, *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1924-1932*, ed. By Margaret Cole (London: Longmans, 1956), p. 304. It is interesting to note that Beatrice Webb was Sir Stafford's aunt, and was rather critical of her nephew's political sensitivities.

⁶³² NA, FO371/ 29465/ N1828/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 18 April 1941.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

all in our direction as a result of recent events'.⁶³⁴ An exasperated Collier remarked on 21 April that as His Majesty's Government had realised 'M. Maisky's limitations as an interpreter of his government's views' he in turn could 'only hope the Soviet Government realise the limitations of Sir S. Cripps!'.⁶³⁵

Collier's frustration with the ambassador's recent behaviour and tardy delivery of Churchill's warning came at a time when Cripps' obsession over the Baltic States had warped his judgement. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Collier had already noted Cripps' unsuitability for conducting any negotiations with the Soviet Government over the issue of the Baltic States. As his recent activities had very clearly illustrated, Cripps was unwilling to carry out instructions from his political masters and was thus a liability for the British Government. The ambassador had been so determined to conclude an agreement with Moscow that he was willing to sacrifice the Baltic States in order to do so. For Collier, this position was fundamentally flawed. Cripps had been prepared to contemplate an agreement by which Great Britain would publicly recognise the Soviet Government as the *de facto* Government of the Baltic States, but Britain would not receive anything in return. The Soviets would merely continue to support Hitler economically, at least until Stalin had made up his mind whether to risk war or not. In Collier's opinion, it was clear that should Cripps be allowed to negotiate with the Soviet Government, he was likely to commit 'us to some serious concession without any adequate *quid pro quo*'.⁶³⁶

In spite of such scathing criticism, of which he was fully aware, Cripps' advice remained unaltered. In a memorandum summarizing the state of Nazi-Soviet

⁶³⁴ NA, FO371/29465/N1892/3/38, tel: Cripps, 18 April 1941.

⁶³⁵ NA, FO371/29465/N1713/3/38, minute by Collier, 21 April 1941. Exclamation mark courtesy of Collier.

⁶³⁶ NA, FO371/29465/N1725/3/38, minute by Collier, 22 April 1941.

relations he stated that the basic hostility between the two Powers had not diminished. Consequently, the Soviet Government would yield to German pressure so long as it did not impinge on Soviet war preparations. Should Hitler be satisfied with assurances and promises, there would be no need to attack the USSR. The whole question rested upon the amount and degree of compliance demanded by Hitler.⁶³⁷ Collier agreed that the Soviet Government would not allow German control over any part of their productive or distributive system for in the long run it would be fatal to Stalin's regime. Rather, Hitler would be satisfied with the present situation as the Germans had already obtained large amounts of supplies from the Soviet Union. Although the quantities had been liable to fluctuation, Hitler only had to 'bang the table hard enough to ensure that they will continue on at least the same scale as in the past'.⁶³⁸ Collier believed that Hitler would be satisfied with the present position for the time being, at least until he had tried his hand at an invasion of Great Britain. Once he had tried and failed to neutralize Britain, Collier believed that there were various motives that would impel the Führer to seriously consider an invasion of the Soviet Union.⁶³⁹

The following week, Collier again argued that Stalin would not allow the Germans to control anything of importance in the Soviet Union. Instead, Stalin would increase his economic support of Germany at the expense of the British blockade, thus making any Anglo-Soviet understanding impossible.⁶⁴⁰ Collier's conclusions were met with the approval of his superiors within the Foreign Office as well as that of Brigadier Skaife, who had been the military attaché to the Soviet Union between 1934 and 1937 and was now the Head of the Research Department in the Foreign

⁶³⁷ NA, FO371/ 29480/ N1761/ 78/ 38, Cripps to FO, 23 April 1941.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., minute by Collier, 24 April 1941.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ NA, FO371/ 29480/ N1819/ 78/ 38, minute by Collier, 29 April 1941.

Office.⁶⁴¹ In his own appraisal of the German threat to the USSR, Skaife agreed that it was to Germany's economic disadvantage to engage in a war with the USSR.⁶⁴²

Skaife believed it quite impossible to say whether Hitler was planning an attack on the Soviet Union. It was even more difficult to predict when an attack would happen should Hitler deem it necessary. The concentration of German troops on the Soviet frontier was 'sufficient for the task'; lending credence to rumours that spoke of the imminence of a German attack, as well as corroborating the information obtained from the Enigma intercepts. In Skaife's professional opinion it would be to Germany's economic disadvantage to engage in a war with the USSR and, more importantly, he believed that 'M. Stalin can hardly fail to realise what important trumps he holds in his hands'. Thus, Stalin would strive to postpone war for as long as possible through granting more and more concessions to Hitler 'in the hope of reaching next winter in peace'.⁶⁴³

As the debate continued, an unexpected event intervened which served further to complicate the issue of both Nazi-Soviet and Anglo-Soviet relations. On the night of 10 May Rudolf Hess arrived in Scotland. The arrival of the Deputy Führer was the cause of great confusion at the time, and there is still speculation as to whether Hitler had prior knowledge of Hess's mission. Cripps reported to the Foreign Office on 13 May that the Hess incident had intrigued the Soviet Government and confessed to fearing that it had aroused Soviet fears of a 'peaceable deal at their expense'.⁶⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that a mere ten days previously Cripps had raised the idea of threatening Molotov that Great Britain was tempted to conclude a compromise peace with Germany to the detriment of the USSR, an idea that had been categorically

⁶⁴¹ Thus, one would imagine him to be very well informed.

⁶⁴² NA, FO371/29481/N2234/78/39, minute by Skaife, 12 May 1941.

⁶⁴³ NA, FO371/29481/N2234/78/39, minute by Brigadier Skaife, 12 May 1941.

⁶⁴⁴ NA, FO371/29481/N2171/78/38, Cripps to FO, 13 May 1941.

dismissed by both Sargent and Eden.⁶⁴⁵ Collier believed it to be a good idea for the United States to warn Moscow that ‘collaboration with Germany will mean the complete cutting off of US supplies’. However, he could not approve Cripps’ overly dramatic and dangerous suggestion of threatening the Soviets with a separate Anglo-German peace.⁶⁴⁶ In his telegram of 13 May, in light of Hess’s mysterious mission, Cripps made yet another wild suggestion as to how the British Government ought to deal with this latest development. Although he was aware that Hess was unlikely to reveal anything pertinent, if he revealed anything at all, Cripps hoped that the Foreign Secretary would authorize him to use whatever information divulged by Hess in order to stiffen Soviet resistance to German pressure. Cripps proposed two alternative ways to achieve this. His Majesty’s Government could attempt to increase Soviet fears of being left to face Germany alone. Alternatively, the British could encourage Stalin to enter into cooperation with the prospect of facing the German menace together. Cripps was aware that this may not prevent the Soviet Government from succumbing to German pressure. Indeed, Stalin could instead extend Soviet economic support to Germany, rather than taking the initiative by attacking the Reich. Indeed, Cripps believed that the Germans would no longer be satisfied with a mere economic agreement with the Soviets, since there could be no guarantee that Moscow would not go back on an arrangement as soon as it deemed it safe to do so. For example, once they had achieved aerial supremacy in the war.⁶⁴⁷

Sargent doubted that the British Government would be able to get any useful material out of Hess that could be used by the ambassador. He was also critical of the two possible courses of action suggested by Cripps. His first idea of arousing Soviet fears was dismissed out of hand by Sargent. It would be altogether too dangerous to

⁶⁴⁵ NA, FO371/29480/N1933/78/38, minutes by Sargent and Eden, 7 May 1941.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, minute by Collier, 3 May 1941.

⁶⁴⁷ NA, FO371/29481/N2171/78/38, Cripps to FO, 13 May 1941.

excite Stalin's fears further as in his present state of panic it would most likely precipitate and complete his capitulation to Germany. Sargent suspected that Cripps wanted to suggest to Stalin that London was using Hess's presence on British soil in order to work for a compromise peace. Indeed, the idea of His Majesty's Government hinting at the possibility of a compromise peace with Germany was far too dangerous to be considered, a point with which Cadogan emphatically agreed.⁶⁴⁸ In addition, Cripps had hoped that Hess would supply military information regarding Germany's preparations for an invasion of the Soviet Union. Again, Sargent doubted whether such information would be forthcoming. He was equally critical of Cripps' other suggestion that His Majesty's Government should attempt to stiffen Stalin's resistance to Hitler's demands by convincing him that there were weak points in the German war machine. In Sargent's opinion, the possibility of persuading Stalin to ally with Great Britain against Germany was slim. Indeed, he fully believed that Stalin was so conscious of the weak points in his own military situation that no amount of evidence of Germany weakness would reassure him. The Deputy Under-Secretary concluded by stating that it was unlikely that Hitler's policy towards the USSR was having a disintegrating effect on German morale. Consequently, Sargent did not deem it necessary to reply to Cripps' telegram at that time.⁶⁴⁹ Cadogan was as equally critical of the suggestions put forward by Cripps. He doubted that the British Government would be able to 'turn this escapade to best account'.⁶⁵⁰ Christopher Warner, Collier's successor as Head of the Northern Department, joined the debate on 13 May. In response to Cripps' desire to use the Hess incident to Great Britain's

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 14 May 1941.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 14 May 1941.

advantage, Warner merely told the ambassador that if and when Hess provided material suitable for his use, he would let him know.⁶⁵¹

On 23 May Halifax reported that he had received information indicating that German troops were amassed on the Soviet frontier in force and were preparing to take action. Halifax believed this to be unlikely. During the recent Nazi-Soviet economic negotiations Hitler had easily obtained assent for increased supplies of raw materials.⁶⁵² The recent rumours stating that Germany was contemplating an attack on the USSR – a rumour that Halifax believed to be of German origin – had been largely replaced by stories that Moscow was on the eve of signing with Berlin a far-reaching economic agreement with military implications. Halifax believed that Stalin was gradually preparing to give Germany economic privileges in the Ukraine and in the Baku area. Although Ribbentrop had been in favour of such an arrangement, the German military believed that they could not allow the Soviets time to strengthen her military position. Indeed, according to Halifax, German military officials had argued that it was to Germany's advantage to attack the USSR whilst she was unprepared. Thus, the conflicting information had made Hitler's position difficult to assess, making it impossible to predict German movements.⁶⁵³

Similar reports from the British Ambassador in Stockholm, Victor Mallet, had reached the Foreign Office on the same day as Halifax's communication. During the course of a meeting with Erik Boheman, the Swedish Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs, Mallett had been told that Germany was 'quite likely to attack Russia in the middle of June'. According to his sources in Berlin – which Boheman did not name –

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., Warner to Cripps, 17 May 1941. Secondary sources make reference to Warner but there is very little information on his career and character, illustrating the fact that he was a far less colourful character than his predecessor. Collier had been removed from the fray and was appointed British Ambassador to Norway.

⁶⁵² NA, FO371/29481/N2388/78/38, Halifax to FO, 23 May 1941.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

the German General Staff imagined that they could successfully occupy Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa within three weeks.⁶⁵⁴

Although he dismissed Boheman's conclusions as mere guesswork, Coote, a clerk in the Northern Department, decided to transmit Mallet's telegram to Cripps.⁶⁵⁵ Warner was equally doubtful of the veracity of the information contained in Mallet's communication. He noted that similar reports had reached his desk,⁶⁵⁶ yet he believed that the decision depended not upon the opinions of German Army circles but whether the Soviet Government were prepared to accept German demands or not. One could not assess the situation from the Soviet point of view only.⁶⁵⁷ Sargent was more inclined to believe the reports of Halifax and Mallet. He remarked that in the face of mounting evidence one could argue that Hitler was preparing for an attack in mid-June, should Stalin refuse to conclude a treaty with Germany.⁶⁵⁸ Predictably, the Soviets dismissed rumours of an impending German attack as British and American propaganda and as being entirely without foundation.⁶⁵⁹

Cavendish-Bentinck, however, had adjusted his position slightly in light of fresh evidence of increased concentrations of German troop concentrations. According to the most recent intelligence that he had received of German military deployment, the Germans now had seventy-five divisions in East Prussia and Poland. He did not have precise information as to the number of German divisions on the Soviet-Roumanian frontier, but did not believe that they exceeded five divisions. Ominously, Cavendish-Bentinck wrote: 'I cannot remember how many divisions the

⁶⁵⁴ NA, FO371/ 29481/ N2392/ 78/ 38, Mallet to FO, 23 May 1941.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., minute by Coote, 24 May 1941. Coote was the Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow in 1933 before moving to the Northern Department in 1939.

⁶⁵⁶ Halifax's telegram of 23 May was an example of this.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., minute by Warner, 24 May 1941.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 25 May 1941.

⁶⁵⁹ NA, FO371/ 29481/ N2418/ 78/ 38, Craigie to FO, 24 May 1941.

Soviets have facing Germany, and I do not think it matters much as the Germans could cut through them like a hot knife through butter'.⁶⁶⁰

Evidently, as May drew to a close, there was still a good deal of uncertainty surrounding the question of Germany's intentions towards the Soviet Union. On 28 May, R.A. Butler, Sargent, Horace Seymour, Bowker and Warner met to discuss the rumours and their impact upon Anglo-Soviet relations. The meeting was far from satisfactory as it proved difficult to find ways in which a *rapprochement* with Moscow could be reached. Cripps was becoming increasingly isolated and his most recent attempt to meet with Molotov had been refused. Cripps had to be content with a meeting with Vyshinsky who had made it quite obvious that he was not interested in any discussion regarding a possible invasion by Germany or his Government's relations with Great Britain. Warner remarked on 28 May that the prevailing cause of Soviet hostility remained a fear of Germany, a fear that paralysed Stalin. Thus, it was 'extremely hard to think of any approach that we could make to the Soviet Government' that might 'induce them to brave German displeasure and complicate the negotiations which are presumably going on, or will shortly begin, and to flirt with us'.⁶⁶¹

In spite of the difficulties facing Cripps and his inability to meet with Molotov, he composed a lengthy memorandum for his colleagues in London on 27 May. The memorandum reached the Northern Department the day after the unsuccessful meeting between Butler, Sargent, Seymour *et al.* In his opening paragraph Cripps stated his opinion that the Soviet Government would not concede anything that would vitally affect their war preparations or preparedness, as Stalin had been under no illusions as to Hitler's ultimate intentions and was determined to resist

⁶⁶⁰ NA, FO371/29481/N2418/78/38, minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 26 May 1941.

⁶⁶¹ NA, FO371/29465/N2566/3/38, minute by Warner, 28 May 1941.

any German pressure that would be contrary to Soviet national interest. Indeed, Stalin was himself preparing for all eventualities. As H.W. Koch has noted, between the start of the war in September 1939 and the end of 1940 the Red Army had doubled its forces to four million on the western frontier of the USSR.⁶⁶² Although Soviet conscription had dramatically increased, it was not necessarily indicative of Stalin's belief in the inevitability of a German attack.

The difficulty with Cripps' argument is clear. Opinions would inevitably vary amongst the Soviet experts as to what would or would not render a given concession irretrievably harmful to Soviet vital interests.⁶⁶³ However, Cripps was aware that in recent weeks there had been numerous, though imprecise, signs that pointed towards a weakening of the Soviet Government's determination to resist German diplomatic pressure. As a consequence, Cripps confessed that his hopes of Soviet resistance had been somewhat shaken. It was possible that Stalin would agree to 'crippling economic concessions' in order to stave off a German attack, though Cripps could not state as much with any real degree of certainty. The cause of such uncertainty was simple. Not only was Cripps isolated in Moscow, ensuring that obtaining information was an extremely difficult task, but the nature and extent of German-Soviet collaboration remained highly secretive. Thus, Cripps' conclusions were necessarily speculative. The information that Cripps received in Moscow from his colleagues was equally speculative, as he illustrated in his memorandum of 27 May. Although he believed that information relating to German-Soviet cooperation in Iran was credible, for example, he noted that there was an abundance of 'less well established evidence' and 'rumours' circulating within diplomatic circles in which he placed little credence. How he verified the intelligence – both of reliable and unreliable origin – is

⁶⁶² Koch, 'Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa'', p. 911.

⁶⁶³ NA, FO371/29481/N2466/78/38, Cripps to FO, 27 May 1941.

unclear. Such an omission is frustrating. Cripps merely stated his belief that the rumours of German troop movements towards Iran through Soviet Russia were credible without any further explanation.

In a minute penned on 29 May Coote explored afresh the nature of Nazi-Soviet relations. Praising Cripps' reasoning, he believed that the ambassador had attempted to persuade the Soviets that they were in a strong enough position at that time to 'stand up to the Germans', and that any concessions that Stalin was prepared to make would be detrimental to the Soviet regime. Unfortunately, these efforts had been unsuccessful. Coote noted that in its present precarious position the Soviet Government had been forced to adopt a 'hand to mouth policy'; as such, any accurate estimation of how that policy might develop was extremely difficult. In spite of this difficulty, Coote predicted that the Germans would attack the Soviet Union as soon as possible should Hitler truly desire to do so as any delay would be detrimental to Germany. Moreover, rumours continued to circulate of Hitler's intention to invade the USSR the following year. Should that be the case, Coote postulated that in twelve months' time the Germans would be in an inherently weaker position. The Soviets would be in a stronger position, as Stalin would use the time to strengthen its frontiers and enlist soldiers for the impending conflict.⁶⁶⁴

The newly appointed head of the Northern Department expanded upon Coote's concluding point. Following a conversation with Professor Postan, Warner believed that the Germans did not intend to start a war with the Soviet Union at that time as it would negatively impact upon Germany's economic strength. The dislocation caused by the invasion would mean considerable delay in Soviet supplies to the Reich. Warner believed that nothing short of German control over the Central

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., minute by Coote, 29 May 1941.

Soviet bodies that had dictated Soviet economic policy would provide the Germans with a real guarantee that the Soviets would in fact fulfil any undertakings. Warner noted that, in Postan's opinion, it would be not be advantageous for Hitler to follow such a policy.⁶⁶⁵ Hitler could get all the supplies that he desired through the threat of force alone. To wage war would thus be pure folly on Hitler's part.⁶⁶⁶ Postan's conclusions were highly regarded within the Foreign Office. The opinions tendered by Postan reinforced Sargent's belief that the British Government ought to adopt a conciliatory policy towards the Soviet Union. It was vitally important for Stalin to be convinced that he need not buy off Germany with a new and unfavourable agreement, whether it be economic or political in nature.⁶⁶⁷

As May drew to a close no firm conclusions had been drawn on the much debated issue of Germany's future policy towards the USSR. Lord Halifax informed his colleagues that according to American sources, a report from Berlin had stated that a fresh Nazi-Soviet economic agreement was imminent.⁶⁶⁸ Warner was wary of such information, as he believed that the Germans often circulated false information in order to mislead Great Britain.⁶⁶⁹

On 28 May, the Joint Intelligence Committee [hereafter J.I.C.] composed a paper that was particularly significant. The memorandum analysed the vast array of information regarding Hitler's plans for the Soviet Union and came to the conclusion that a new agreement between Berlin and Moscow was nearing completion, thus dispelling the rumours that the *Wehrmacht* was preparing for an invasion in the

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., minute by Warner, 29 May 1941.

⁶⁶⁶ NA, FO371/29481/N2500/78/38, minute by Warner, 1 June 1941. Warner's minute was written following further discussions with Professor Postan on 31 May 1941.

⁶⁶⁷ NA, FO371/29481/N2466/78/38., minute by Sargent, 29 May 1941.

⁶⁶⁸ NA, FO371/29481/N2498/78/38, telegram: Halifax, 28 May 1941.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., minute by Warner, 30 May 1941.

East.⁶⁷⁰ This paper was the first in a three-part examination of Nazi-Soviet relations. Cavendish-Bentinck, the main contributor to the paper, noted that although in previous weeks rumours had been circulating throughout Europe of an impending German attack, the contrary was now the case. Central to his reasoning was the simple fact that Germany could not fight a long war without obtaining greater economic help from Soviet Russia. To draw the Soviet Union into the conflict would thus be contrary to German interests. A war against the USSR would on balance result in initial economic losses and the additional strain on the German air force would entail the postponement of major operations elsewhere. Thus, ‘the advantages ... to Germany of concluding an agreement with the USSR are overwhelming’.⁶⁷¹

In order to achieve an additional agreement, it was predicted that Hitler would exert extreme pressure on Stalin, supported by the threat of force, in order to obtain by negotiation the concessions that were required. However, Cavendish-Bentinck noted that the Soviet Government would refuse to sign any agreement that would endanger their effective control of the economic, strategic or political organization of the USSR. Cavendish-Bentinck concluded that the Soviet Government would endeavour to avoid a clash with Germany by yielding to Hitler’s demands, whilst making extensive preparations to meet the German threat should the worst happen.⁶⁷²

Cavendish-Bentinck revisited this issue in a further paper of 2 June. The previous J.I.C. memorandum had concluded that as a consequence of a war with the USSR, Germany stood to lose far more than she would gain. Although on purely

⁶⁷⁰ NA, FO371/ 29483/ N2893/ 78/ 38, J.I.C.(41) 218 (Final), 28 May 1941.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. As Schwendemann illustrated in his exhaustive examination of Nazi-Soviet economic relations following the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Soviet economic aid was vital in the opening stage of the war, with the Soviet Union becoming the most important supplier of raw materials to the Reich, thus further damaging the British blockade further. Unfortunately for those within the German military who were critical of the prospect of an invasion of the USSR, Hitler would not be swayed from his path of eradicating Soviet Russia. Schwendemann, ‘German-Soviet Economic Relations’, p. 162.

⁶⁷² NA, FO371/ 29483/ N2893/ 78/ 38, J.I.C.(41) 218 (Final), 28 May 1941.

economic grounds a German invasion would be disadvantageous, Cavendish-Bentinck now wrote that he had ‘long instinctively felt that such a war was a possibility’. He justified this assertion by stating that the German High Command had increased the strength of their armies to 250 divisions, thereby weakening their industrial potential and greatly straining the internal economy of Germany. A smaller number of divisions would have been sufficient to maintain the occupation of the conquered territories and to carry out offensive operations against Great Britain in the Mediterranean. Whilst he clearly believed that embarking on a war with the Soviet Union on purely economic grounds would be contrary to Hitler’s interests, Cavendish-Bentinck noted that the Führer’s Soviet policy may have been motivated by a more personal reason – revenge. Moreover, Cavendish-Bentinck mused that ‘Hitler has a tendency sooner or later to revert to the tenets enunciated in *Mein Kampf*’.⁶⁷³ The motivating factor of ideology, rather than economic or military considerations, had not been raised in previous discussions of the possibility of a German invasion of the USSR, nor was it raised to any great degree in the weeks prior to the German invasion. Certainly, there were allusions to politico-military motives, yet no one had referred to *Mein Kampf* and its possible influence on Hitler’s foreign policy.⁶⁷⁴ Further evidence of German military dispositions at the beginning of June suggested that Hitler was about to abandon his pro-Soviet policy in order to fulfil his aim of gaining *Lebensraum* in the East.

As a result of numerous reports of the imminence of a German invasion, including Cavendish-Bentinck’s most recent analysis, on 2 June Eden decided to inform Maisky that from the information available to His Majesty’s Government it

⁶⁷³ NA, FO371/ 29481/ N2500/ 78/ 38, minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 2 June 1941.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

was clear that a German move was imminent.⁶⁷⁵ Once again, Eden's warning fell on deaf ears. The Soviet leadership stated that rumours of an invasion were nothing more than British propaganda. However, Cripps' recall to London at the beginning of June had evidently unnerved the Soviet leadership.⁶⁷⁶ On 5 June Maisky asked the Foreign Secretary why Cripps was returning to London, to which Eden replied that it was for consultation with his Government. In an attempt to assure Maisky that nothing untoward was going on, Eden confirmed that Cripps would be returning to his post.⁶⁷⁷

Behind the scenes Eden's colleagues continued to debate whether Germany would invade Soviet Russia and on what grounds. By 5 June a consensus had finally been reached within the J.I.C. on this issue. They had reviewed their previously drawn conclusions in light of persistent reports of increased German military activity on the Soviet frontier. Cavendish-Bentinck now reversed his earlier position and began to argue that a German invasion of the USSR was in fact looming. On 5 June, in the final paper of a three-part exploration of the issue, Cavendish-Bentinck concluded that although the economic picture presented in the previous memoranda remained unaltered, the scale of German military preparations in Eastern Europe suggested Hitler's decision to invade the USSR in the near future.⁶⁷⁸ The previously held belief that should Stalin continue to grant greater and greater economic concessions in order to prevent German aggression against the USSR had been replaced by a belief that Hitler had decided upon the removal of a perceived Soviet threat on Germany's frontiers. Military and ideological considerations now

⁶⁷⁵ NA, FO371/ 29465/ N2570/ 3/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 2 June 1941.

⁶⁷⁶ H. Hanak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow, June 1941-January 1942', *English Historical Review*, 97, 383 (Apr., 1982), 332-344 (p. 333).

⁶⁷⁷ NA, FO371/ 29466/ N2628/ 3/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 5 June 1941.

⁶⁷⁸ NA, FO371/ 29483/ N2893/ 78/ 38, J.I.C. (41)218, 5 June 1941.

dominated German policy; no amount of Soviet economic appeasement would prevent the inevitable.⁶⁷⁹

As a consequence of the final paper composed by the J.I.C., Coote composed a memorandum entitled 'Basis for *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union'⁶⁸⁰ which outlined how any deterioration in Nazi-Soviet relations would impact upon His Majesty's Government's relations with Moscow. There were, he considered, only two possible outcomes. Firstly, the German Government would present the Kremlin with economic terms which, although severe, would be accepted by Stalin in an attempt to avoid war. In that case, there would be no possibility of Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*. The second possibility was that Germany would force a war by demanding unacceptable economic or political concessions from the Soviets. If the Soviet Union was thus forced into war, Anglo-Soviet cooperation would be of paramount importance.

In Coote's opinion, Anglo-Soviet collaboration in the aftermath of a German invasion would hinge upon effective military and economic cooperation. He noted that it was highly unlikely that His Majesty's Government would be able to offer military assistance due to geographical limitations. However, economic cooperation would commence, with Great Britain relaxing the blockade measures that had been put in place, thus allowing 'everything possible pass into the Soviet Union via Vladivostok and any other practical route'.⁶⁸¹

On the other hand, should the Soviet Premier decide to make further concessions to Hitler, whether economic or political, Anglo-Soviet relations would continue to deteriorate. Coote's pessimism was shared by Warner who commented that should the Soviet Union be dragged into the war, all that Britain could offer the

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ NA, FO371/ 29466/ N2889/ 3/ 38, memorandum by Coote, 8 June 1941.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

Soviets was an exchange of technical information and the prospect of a coordination of the general strategy of Britain and America with the USSR.⁶⁸² Coote and Warner were evidently still wary of Soviet Russia and did not place much confidence in the possibility of reaching an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*, as Stalin steadfastly refused to accept the imminence of a German attack, even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary.⁶⁸³

On 10 June Sargent shifted the focus of discussion and explored the motivations that had impelled Hitler along the course that he was now following. He now fully ascribed to the belief that economic considerations did not dictate Hitler's policy. The chief political motive, according to Sargent, was Hitler's desire to capitalise on his victories without further delay, bringing about the *Gleichschaltung* of the whole of Europe. This would inevitably require the transformation of the Soviet system into something that would be the Soviet equivalent of the Nazi system in Germany. Indeed, Sargent believed that Hitler had undoubtedly calculated that the destruction of Soviet communism would not only rally the Nazi Party, but would be welcomed by large sections of populations throughout Europe. In this way, Hitler hoped that his 'crusade against communism would turn public opinion in the USA and even in this country in his favour'.⁶⁸⁴ Should those political motivations prove valid, the Germans would have to act quickly 'if they are to produce their full effect on the progress of the war'.⁶⁸⁵

Sargent proceeded to examine the military motivations behind a possible German attack on the Soviet Union. Whilst he admitted that he was not competent to

⁶⁸² Ibid., minute by Warner, 8 June 1941.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ NA, FO371/ 29483/ N2893/ 78/ 38, minute by Sargent, 10 June 1941. Sargent's last statement was met with the approval of Eden, who had likewise believed that Hitler had hoped that his anti-communist crusade would sway public opinion of Great Britain and the United States in Germany's favour.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

speaking with any real authority, he attempted to ‘hazard a guess as to Hitler’s military reasons for an attack on the Soviet Union’. Sargent mused that Hitler might feel compelled to ‘settle his Russian problem’ during the summer months. Should Hitler decide to delay an invasion, he would have to wait until the spring of 1942 to launch an offensive. A successful invasion of the Soviet Union, in Sargent’s opinion, would ensure that Hitler would in one stroke ‘achieve all his political objectives’ and would be in a position to exploit the military advantages which free access to the Caucasus would give him. If, on the other hand, the Soviets put up an effective fight, Sargent was aware that Germany would be able to make a compromise settlement with Stalin in order to ‘pull out [of the conflict] without having worsened his general strategic position either in the Atlantic or in the eastern Mediterranean’.⁶⁸⁶

Although the Soviets continued to dismiss British warnings, Coote noted that the authorities in Moscow were becoming ‘uneasy’ in light of the persistent rumours of an impending German attack.⁶⁸⁷ However, when Cripps met with Maisky on 18 June the Soviet Ambassador did not betray a hint of apprehension. When discussing the present situation, Maisky simply informed Cripps that he ‘saw no reason for a break in Soviet-German relations’. In response, Cripps told Maisky of his belief that either Stalin would capitulate completely to Hitler or be dragged into the war against Germany. Upon hearing this Maisky ‘seemed much less positive’ that war might be avoided.⁶⁸⁸

As Geoffrey Roberts has noted, ‘despite all the intelligence, when the Germans attacked on 22 June 1941 they achieved complete surprise’. This surprise gave the Germans a distinct advantage that contributed to the success of the

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ NA, FO371/ 29482/ N2805/ 78/ 38, minute by Coote, 14 June 1941.

⁶⁸⁸ NA, FO371/ 29466/ N3099/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 19 June 1941.

Wehrmacht in the first weeks of the war.⁶⁸⁹ From the British point of view, the German invasion of the USSR, although finally removing the ‘problem of Germany’ from Anglo-Soviet relations, it sharpened the focus on another troublesome issue: the attainment of an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*.⁶⁹⁰ Great Britain and the Soviet Union were now fighting a common enemy, yet the long-standing mutual distrust clearly remained in the wake of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Additionally, a further problem was evident in the immediate aftermath of the invasion: would the Soviets be able to withstand the German onslaught? The onset of Operation *Barbarossa* thus posed many problems for the British Government and forced yet another examination of Anglo-Soviet relations in light of the Soviet Union’s new status as co-belligerent in the war against Germany.

⁶⁸⁹ Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War*, p. 137.

⁶⁹⁰ Lothar Kettenacker, ‘The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17, 3 (Jul., 1982), pp. 435-458.

Chapter three

‘It is essential to treat the Russians as though we thought that they were reasonable human beings’.⁶⁹¹

The German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, whilst seemingly taking the Soviets by surprise, had a significant impact upon the state of Anglo-Soviet relations as it had forced both the Kremlin and His Majesty’s Government once again to re-examine the current state of relations between the two Powers. London and Moscow were united by a common enemy, thus elevating the need for a *rapprochement* between the two Powers. It was at this time that the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister took a more active role in Britain’s relationship with Moscow. The wealth of knowledge and experience within the Northern Department was essential for Eden and Churchill during the period between Operation *Barbarossa* and the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 26 May 1942. It was in the months following *Barbarossa* that the advice tendered by Northern Department officials arguably held the most significance. With Christopher Warner at the helm one can appreciate a more level-headed and pragmatic approach to the issue of Britain’s relationship with the USSR, in contrast to the emphatic advice tendered by Laurence Collier. Anglo-Soviet relations had entered a new phase, and the new personnel within the Northern Department were more suitable for the task than their predecessors. The overhaul of personnel, with the arrival of figures such as Warner and Armine Dew, alongside the appointment of Archibald Clark Kerr as Cripps’ successor as ambassador to the Soviet Union, had occurred at a most opportune time. In January 1944, Warner wrote to Balfour and stated his belief that his superiors – Eden and Churchill in particular – were too prone to going to extremes in their treatment of, and responses to, Stalin and

⁶⁹¹ FO371/ 32876/ N927/ 5/ 38, minute by Strang, 20 February 1942.

Molotov. He believed that they ought to ‘take things in their stride’ and that ‘the attitude of mind which throws the hat high in the air when Molotov and Joe turn on their kindly and responsive mood for the benefit of the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, and get in a flap whenever the Soviet Press is a bit naughty, is most prejudicial to a sound conduct of policy’.⁶⁹² After all, Soviet manipulation and duplicity was neither new nor unusual. As for Archibald Clark Kerr, who was Ambassador in China from 1938 to 1942, he was very much a welcome successor to Cripps. One historian has noted that the new appointee appeared to have ‘brought with him few if any of the anti-Soviet prejudices characteristic of many British diplomats at this time’.⁶⁹³

Much like in previous years, the centrality of economic relations between Britain and the Soviet Union was evident following the German invasion of the USSR. The issue of economic cooperation gained greater significance as the coordination of supplies between Great Britain and the USSR, and of course the United States of America, now lay at the heart of British diplomatic activity in the aftermath of Hitler’s unprovoked aggression against the Soviet Union. Prior to *Barbarossa*, when Soviet Russia was a ‘neutral’ Power in the war, the Foreign Office had believed in the importance of Anglo-Soviet economic collaboration to the improvement of Anglo-Soviet political relations specifically.⁶⁹⁴ Following *Barbarossa* a great deal of discussion was generated by members of the Northern Department and the resulting advice tendered was often passed to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State to the Foreign Secretary himself. This chapter will explore

⁶⁹² NA, FO800. 302, Warner to Balfour, 25 January 1944.

⁶⁹³ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union, 1940-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 40.

⁶⁹⁴ It has been argued in the previous chapters that the Soviet Union was not strictly ‘neutral’ in the time prior to *Barbarossa* due to the extent of economic assistance to Nazi Germany. Soviet economic support to Germany rendered the British blockade ineffective, a point not lost on either Germany or Russia.

the progression of the economic and political relations between London and Moscow, leading to the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet alliance of 26 May 1942. The significance of the Northern Department will be demonstrated throughout, with the role of the department in the process being illustrated as vitally important, particularly in the preparations of Eden's visit to the USSR in December 1941.

At midday on 22 June it was Molotov rather than Stalin who addressed the Soviet people via a radio broadcast. Molotov emphasised the fact that Stalin had not received any demands or ultimata from Hitler and that the invasion was very much unprovoked.⁶⁹⁵ The Germans, on the other hand, had emphasised the fact that the invasion was a direct consequence of Soviet hostility towards Germany. During a conversation at 4am on 22 June, the Reich Foreign Minister told the Soviet Ambassador Dekanosov that previously he had hoped that 'the two countries would contrive a sensible relationship with each other'. Unfortunately, the recent agreement between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had illustrated 'the hostile policy of the Soviet Government toward Germany'. Ribbentrop had stated that the Soviet-Yugoslavian Pact, coupled with increased concentrations of Soviet forces on their borders, had constituted a serious threat to the existence of the German Reich. Due to the 'serious threat of a political and military nature', Hitler had been forced to act.⁶⁹⁶

Evidently, the Soviet belief they could stave off a German attack through granting greater economic concessions had been misguided. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the time of the German invasion there was no one in Whitehall who was in any doubt as to Hitler's ultimate intentions with the USSR; *Barbarossa* was inevitable. As Gorodetsky has argued, there was no lack of information reaching Stalin in Moscow of German intentions. As such, the sheer amount of information

⁶⁹⁵ Jane Degras (ed), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 3 (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), p. 490.

⁶⁹⁶ Sontag and Beddie, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, pp. 356-357.

being transmitted had made it incredibly difficult for the Soviet intelligence collators in Berlin to ignore the evidence of Hitler's intentions.⁶⁹⁷ Coote wrote on 22 June that 'the complacency of the Soviet Government' had been 'one of the most extraordinary things throughout'.⁶⁹⁸ Warner expressed a similar sentiment the following week, noting that it was 'really quite amazing that in spite of our warnings the Russians were taken by surprise'.⁶⁹⁹

In the months following the German invasion, Cripps undertook an examination of the events that had led to the outbreak of war between the USSR and Germany. The ambassador conceded that it was difficult under the existing circumstances accurately to analyse the course of events 'since the relationship between the two countries during the preceding two years remain for present wrapped in mystery'.⁷⁰⁰ In spite of such difficulty, Cripps started his review at the date of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The ambassador stated his belief that Stalin's adherence to the pact had been motivated by a desire to keep the USSR out of the war, whilst enabling him to acquire territory on the frontiers of the Soviet Union. According to the ambassador, the Soviets had 'never considered the Soviet-German Pact as anything more than a temporary expedient'. In typical fashion, Cripps' analysis of Soviet policy following the outbreak of war in September 1939 was wholly uncritical and at times apologetic for Soviet policy. In relation to Soviet policy from the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the German invasion in June 1941, the ambassador argued that 'stark nationalism' had been Stalin's primary motivation. As such, Stalin had pursued a policy that had made the USSR 'friends of the Fascists and hostile neutrals to the Allied democratic Powers.' Cripps' account of Soviet policy continued to make

⁶⁹⁷ Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, p. 294.

⁶⁹⁸ NA, FO371/29484/N3005/78/38, minute by Coote, 22 June 1941.

⁶⁹⁹ NA, FO371/29466/N3231/3/38, minute by Warner, 29 June 1941.

⁷⁰⁰ NA, FO371/29491/N5881/78/38, Cripps to Eden, 27 September 1941.

questionable conclusions, particularly in the matter of Soviet-Turkish relations and Britain's attempt to serve as a mediator to a possible understanding between the two countries. According to Cripps, Stalin had sincerely attempted to bring about a *rapprochement* with the Turkish Government, and the failure to do so was due more to the attitude and suspicion of the Turkish Foreign Minister than anything else.⁷⁰¹ Cripps' uncritical examination of the period, although not at all surprising, was somewhat alarming. Whilst Armine Dew, Fitzroy Maclean's successor as Warner's second-in-command, praised Cripps' communication as an 'admirable account of the causes and events leading up to the German invasion of the Soviet Union', Christopher Warner asserted that 'there is a good deal in the despatch which is not entirely objective'.⁷⁰² Cavendish-Bentinck, the chairman of the J.I.C., was equally critical of Cripps' memorandum. He wished to place on record the incorrect statements made by Cripps, as Cripps' account contained many contradictions and thus should be treated with caution.⁷⁰³ Cripps' most questionable conclusions can be found in the final paragraphs of his paper. Following a brief analysis of the Soviet-German-Yugoslav relationship, Cripps concluded that the Soviet alliance of friendship with the new Government of Yugoslavia – which had replaced the pro-German Government of Prince Paul – was the deciding factor that had precipitated the German attack on the Soviet Union, a conclusion that was categorically condemned by Cavendish-Bentinck.⁷⁰⁴ As for Stalin and Molotov's surprise over the German invasion, Cripps was once again sympathetic to the Soviet leadership. Cripps believed, much like Stalin, that Soviet economic appeasement would prevent any

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Ibid., minute by Dew, 14 October 1941, minute by Warner, 13 November 1941.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 November 1941.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., Cripps to Eden, 27 September, minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 12 November 1941. Cripps' argument mirrored that held by Ribbentrop during his meeting with Dekanosov on the morning of the German invasion.

German assault. Unfortunately for the Soviets, Hitler's ultimate objective was to 'crush the Russian forces' before they could strike first.⁷⁰⁵ Cripps' analysis of Nazi-Soviet relations is intriguing, not least as it was another example of his sympathy towards the Soviet leadership, but because it so clearly illustrated the different opinions held by key figures such as Cavendish-Bentinck and the Head of the Northern Department.

On the morning of the German invasion of the USSR Lacy Baggallay, who was in charge of the Moscow Embassy whilst Cripps had been recalled to London for consultation with the British Government, met with the Soviet deputy Foreign Minister to discuss the implications of *Barbarossa* on Anglo-Soviet relations. Although Baggallay had not yet received official instructions from London, he believed it to be axiomatic that the relationship between Moscow and London had altered. Baggallay told Vyshinsky that 'whether we like it or not we now have a common interest of defeating Germany', to which Vyshinsky gave 'cautious assent'.⁷⁰⁶ Maisky reiterated the same point in a conversation with Eden on 26 June. For Maisky, a larger measure of cooperation between the two governments was essential.⁷⁰⁷

Although Eden adopted a cautious approach to Maisky's suggestions, his actions following the interview told a different story. Eden deemed it necessary for Cripps to return to Moscow with both a Military and Economic Mission in order to facilitate cooperation between the two Governments. On 27 June Cripps arrived back in Moscow with the Missions. After formally introducing the leading members to Molotov, Cripps spoke of the determination of His Majesty's Government to

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., Cripps to Eden, 27 September 1941.

⁷⁰⁶ NA, FO371/29466/N3018/3/38, Telegram: Baggallay, 22 June 1941.

⁷⁰⁷ NA, FO371/29466/N307/3/38, Eden to Baggallay, 26 June 1941.

cooperate fully with their Soviet counterparts.⁷⁰⁸ Cripps informed the Foreign Office that Molotov had cordially welcomed the Mission and had once again stressed that the war had been forced upon the Soviet Union ‘through no fault of their own’.⁷⁰⁹ This latter point was raised by Churchill in his speech on 22 June, during which the Prime Minister had also declared that ‘the Russian danger is our danger’, thus illustrating a British desire to aid the latest victim of German aggression.⁷¹⁰

That evening, Molotov sent for Cripps in order to ascertain the British perspective on the future course of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Three questions were put to the British Ambassador: what was the degree of cooperation that the British proposed; did it include political cooperation and were His Majesty’s Government prepared to conclude a political agreement to define the basis of cooperation?⁷¹¹ Cripps adopted an unusually firm approach in his response, and informed Molotov that the maximum possible economic assistance would be rendered by Great Britain, although the amount of support was limited due to problems with transport. As for military aid, Britain had no men or materials to spare. However, Cripps conceded that they could offer advice and technical support to the Soviets. As for a political agreement, the ambassador stated that it was not contemplated at that time, and explained that the common enmity against Hitler was a basis for military and economic cooperation only. Cripps correctly noted that the new state of relations between London and Moscow was in its infancy and that it was necessary to build trust in the economic field before attempting to reach a political understanding. To his colleagues in the Foreign Office, Cripps proposed that the British authorities ought to remain ‘completely firm on this subject’ and should ‘insist upon cooperation

⁷⁰⁸ NA, FO371/ 29466/ N3250 3/ 38, Telegram: Cripps, 27 June 1941.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 1, p. 615.

⁷¹¹ NA, FO371/ 29466/ N3231/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 27 June 1941.

without any political agreement'.⁷¹² Cripps' first meeting with Molotov following the German invasion illuminates the dramatic change in the Anglo-Soviet relationship. In the weeks prior to *Barbarossa* it was the British who were anxiously trying to bring about a *rapprochement*, and were desperately trying to persuade the Soviets of the urgency of an Anglo-Soviet understanding in light of the mounting evidence of some German move against the Soviet Union. Following Cripps' interview it is clear that it was the Soviets who were the 'suitors', and that they were desperately scrambling to comprehend the British position and were seeking to strengthen Anglo-Soviet ties in the form of a political agreement.

Soviet dissatisfaction was again evident following a conversation between Eden and Maisky on 30 June. Maisky, whilst encouraged by the speed with which the missions were dispatched to Moscow, he had nonetheless complained that they held too little authority. Repeating the questions that Molotov put to Cripps on 27 June, Maisky told Eden that Stalin wanted to secure a definition of the type and extent of collaboration that the authorities in London had envisaged. Was it military only, military and economic or a combination of military, economic and political? For his part, Maisky stated his impression that his government was ready for all three, yet the British position remained somewhat ambiguous and that had caused concern in Moscow. Eden refuted Maisky's accusation and specified the type of cooperation London had wished to achieve with Moscow. The British Government was prepared to give all the military and economic help in its power in order to defeat Hitlerite Germany, but political collaboration was a more difficult issue due to British

⁷¹² Ibid.

uncertainty as to what type of agreement the Kremlin sought. Did it want an alliance or some less far-reaching agreement? That was the crux of the issue for Eden.⁷¹³

The issue of what type of agreement Moscow had hoped to obtain was at the heart of Cripps' meeting with Stalin on 8 July, the first such meeting since the German invasion. It was during this meeting that Cripps delivered Churchill's message to Stalin. Churchill promised Stalin that the British would 'do everything to help that time, geography and our growing resources allow', and noted that the longer that the war lasted the more help the British could afford.⁷¹⁴ Clearly, Churchill had feared either an early Soviet collapse or the possibility that Stalin would seek a separate peace with Germany. Either option would create an intolerable situation for Great Britain, who would thus once more bear the brunt of the conflict alone. Once Cripps had delivered Churchill's message, Stalin broached the question of reaching some kind of agreement between the two countries, 'without which in his opinion cooperation was not possible'.⁷¹⁵ Stalin had wanted to come to an agreement of a purely general nature that would entail mutual help without any precision as to quantity or quality whilst stipulating that neither country would conclude a separate peace. Stalin had thus clarified the Soviet position fully.⁷¹⁶ Stalin informed Cripps that an understanding would be invaluable for the morale of the USSR and Great Britain. In his response, Cripps told Stalin that he had misunderstood Molotov's request during his meeting of 28 June, as he believed that Stalin had intended something much more specific as regards to a political agreement. Cripps pointed out that whilst the British Government was in agreement with the two points raised by Stalin, he felt that it was 'not necessarily easy or advisable to reduce them to a formal

⁷¹³ NA, FO371/ 29466/ N3304/ 3/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 30 June 1941.

⁷¹⁴ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3529/ 3/ 38, FO to Cripps, 7 July 1941. The Prime Minister's message to Stalin was enclosed in the Foreign Office communication to the ambassador.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Cripps to FO, 8 July 1941.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*

agreement at this early stage'. The predominant reason for British hesitancy to conclude a formal agreement with Soviet Russia was a fear that public opinion would not approve of such a union, as it was widely believed within the Foreign Office that the British people were still firmly against a *rapprochement* with the USSR.

Thus, following his meeting with Stalin, rather than wanting to conclude a formal agreement, Cripps was instead in favour of an exchange of notes on military matters. Cripps recommended that the Foreign Office should 'seize this opportunity without delay in order to bind the Russians to continuing their resistance' and stated that he could 'see no possible drawback to our stating our determination to do so'.⁷¹⁷ Cripps informed the Foreign Office that his discussion with Stalin was both 'frank and easy'. And, more importantly, Stalin had attempted to justify his reluctance to improve relations with the British in the months prior to the German invasion. Stalin told Cripps that to do so 'would have been tantamount to attacking Germany'. Any improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations, even if limited to the economic sphere, would have been viewed as directed solely against Germany.⁷¹⁸

Predictably, Cripps' interview with Stalin generated a great deal of interest in London. The widespread interest within the Foreign Office clearly illustrates the importance attached to the issue of Anglo-Soviet cooperation in the aftermath of the German invasion of the USSR, whilst simultaneously highlighting the various strands of opinion within Whitehall. The day following Cripps' communication, Sargent composed a lengthy memorandum outlining the possible courses of action in light of Cripps' conversation with Stalin. In Sargent's opinion, there were five courses open to the authorities in London in this matter. Firstly, there was the view adopted by Cripps in his meeting with Molotov on 28 June, namely that a political agreement

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ NA, FO371/29467/N3528/3/38, Cripps to FO, 8 July 1941.

could not be contemplated until there was a greater measure of trust cultivated between London and Moscow. According to Cripps, in order to overcome the mutual distrust there would have to be a period of military and economic cooperation. Until then, an Anglo-Soviet political agreement could not be reached. At the time of the circulation of Sargent's memorandum, however, Cripps had altered his stance on the most favourable course of action – a not uncommon occurrence. Cripps now believed that an exchange of notes was preferable. Sargent discounted that option as it was 'hardly a suitable method of placing on record a political agreement of this importance'. Furthermore, Sargent believed that it would fail to produce an impact on world opinion. The third possibility, according to the Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary, was the conclusion of a joint declaration by the two governments that would mirror the Anglo-French agreement of March 1940, when Britain and France undertook not to make a separate peace with Germany. The fourth option would be the conclusion of a formal treaty of mutual assistance that would include a no separate peace provision. The final option was for the British to ask the Soviet Government to suggest the text of either a draft declaration or agreement so as to give His Majesty's Government more time to consult the Dominions and the United States.⁷¹⁹ Eden was clearly anxious to reach an agreement with the Soviets and wanted to seize the opportunity without delay. He dismissed Cripps' suggestion of an exchange of notes as an 'inappropriate and inadequate' method of recording what the Foreign Secretary deemed to be a decision of high policy. Rather, Eden favoured a joint and formal declaration of the two governments.⁷²⁰ Thus, as a result of Cripps' interview with Stalin, one can already see the foundations of the forthcoming 'July Agreement'.

⁷¹⁹ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3561/ 3/ 38, memorandum by Sargent, 9 July 1941.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, minute by Eden, 10 July 1941.

The two terms that Stalin had deemed central to any Anglo-Soviet agreement were debated within the Foreign Office immediately upon receiving Cripps' communication. For Britain, as Cripps had informed Stalin on 7 July, it was necessary for the government to keep both the United States and the Dominions informed as to the nature of the Anglo-Soviet negotiations and the progress made. On 9 July, Eden informed Halifax in Washington of Cripps' conversations with Stalin. Although Eden professed not to attach any undue importance to any assurance by Stalin, the Foreign Secretary informed the ambassador that 'it was clearly a good sign that he should ask us to join him in a statement that neither country would make a separate peace'. Consequently Eden felt that 'we should be right to clinch this offer as soon as possible'.⁷²¹ Eden evidently wished to conclude an understanding with Moscow without delay, but was aware that no such move could be made without the approval of America. In an attempt to persuade the Americans, Eden met with Winant, the American Ambassador in London. Eden stated that he was fully alive to the American opposition to a formal treaty being concluded between London and Moscow, as 'a treaty had an especially serious sound in the United States'.⁷²² To that end, the Foreign Secretary sought the opinion of the American Ambassador in order to reach a compromise that would suit both British and American opinion. Winant replied that should Eden deem an exchange of notes inadequate, the authorities in Washington would agree to a joint declaration between London and Moscow.⁷²³

The debate surrounding Stalin's proposal to Cripps on 8 July quickly progressed through the political echelons to the War Cabinet. The following day, the War Cabinet convened to discuss Stalin's terms where general consensus of opinion was reached. It was believed that an Anglo-Soviet joint agreement would be the most

⁷²¹ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3603/ 3/ 38, Eden to Halifax, 9 July 1941.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ Ibid.

favourable course to pursue. However, with regard to Stalin's persistent demands for the recognition of Soviet territorial gains that had resulted from the Nazi-Soviet Pact, it was clear that such demands could not be met. The British Government had insisted that territorial frontier questions would have to be settled in accordance with the wishes of the indigenous people and on general ethnographical lines. In addition, those people must be free to choose their own form of government and system of life, something that was undoubtedly stipulated in order to avoid the possible spread of Communism in those states.⁷²⁴ It was generally agreed that it was most important that the Soviet advance should be met with 'an immediate and generous response'.⁷²⁵

The conclusions drawn by the War Cabinet formed the basis of Churchill's message to Stalin, and were communicated to Cripps on 10 July. It was decided that the terms of the proposed Anglo-Soviet declaration should fall under two headings. The first term related to the delivery of mutual help without any precision as to quantity or quality, and the second stipulated that neither country would conclude a separate peace.⁷²⁶ Whilst the British authorities had agreed to Stalin's terms verbatim, Sargent then proceeded to raise an issue that had not yet been discussed. He noted that in any agreement with the Soviet Government the British should presumably not want to pledge themselves, either explicitly or implicitly, to go to war with Finland, Roumania and Hungary, merely because they happened to be cooperating with Germany in the attack on the USSR.⁷²⁷ It was for that reason that the draft declaration enclosed in the communication to Cripps was confined to

⁷²⁴ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3607/ 3/ 38, Churchill to Eden, 9 July 1941.

⁷²⁵ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3614/ 3/ 38, Extract from War Cabinet Conclusions, 67(41), 9 July 1941.

⁷²⁶ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3561/ 3/ 38, FO to Cripps, 10 July 1941.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, minute by Sargent, 9 July 1941.

Germany.⁷²⁸ Cadogan was in agreement with his deputy on the issue and refused to contemplate declaring war on Finland, Roumania and Hungary.

Cripps delivered Churchill's message to Stalin on 10 July. Stalin insisted upon stating the fact that Great Britain and the Soviet Union were supporting one another in the war against Hitlerite Germany, as he believed that by specifically referencing the German Führer it would 'split the German people'. Stalin was clearly eager to reach an agreement as soon as possible in order to silence the pro-German Communist speakers within the USSR.⁷²⁹ It is interesting to note that Cripps did not question this statement, in spite of the fact that it was utterly preposterous. Following Germany's unprovoked attack on the Soviet Union it seems wholly unlikely that there would be many pro-German Communists in the USSR, and, had they existed, one would imagine that they would not dare proclaim their pro-German stance in public. In spite of such a glaring act of manipulation, Eden was determined to conclude an agreement with Moscow without delay, and asked Halifax to inform Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, of Britain's intention to sign a declaration with the USSR. In an attempt to ease the concerns of the Americans, Eden wanted Halifax to assure those in Washington that the British Government did not wish to extend the theatre of war and that the proposed agreement related only to a war with Germany.⁷³⁰

On 12 July the Foreign Office informed Cripps that he was authorized to sign the agreement as soon as possible, but that he ought categorically to state the British position with regard to Poland. Warner told the ambassador that should the Soviets raise the question of the British obligation to the Polish Government, Cripps ought to refer to Article 7 of the Anglo-Polish Treaty of 25 August 1939 in which it was agreed that they would not conclude an armistice or treaty of peace except by mutual

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3565/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 10 July 1941.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., Eden to Halifax, 11 July 1941.

agreement. The British position in that respect in regard to the Soviet Union and Poland would thus be identical.⁷³¹ Consequently, the Anglo-Soviet ‘Joint Declaration’ was signed by Cripps and Molotov at 5.15pm on 12 July 1941 and marked the first official Anglo-Soviet agreement of the war. The agreement was to come into force immediately and was not subject to ratification. Pravda praised the Agreement as a ‘document of greatest historical and political significance’⁷³² whilst Cripps expressed his delight with the Agreement in a diary entry of 12 July, writing: ‘I feel at last that I have accomplished something worthwhile’. The ambassador, who believed that a ‘far more hopeful chapter’ in Anglo-Soviet relations had opened, emphatically spoke of the significance of the July Agreement.⁷³³

Although the ‘July Agreement’ had marked the first step towards Anglo-Soviet wartime collaboration, in the week following its signature Maisky had told the Foreign Secretary that ‘he was apprehensive of a situation in which, though we [the British] gave Russia generous assurances of help, we could not find it possible to give effect to them’.⁷³⁴ Dew noted that it was of the utmost importance from a psychological point of view that the British authorities do all they could to give tangible evidence of assistance in order to bolster Soviet resistance. To that end, he had hoped that fighters would be made available in the near future in order to appease Soviet protestations of being left to fight the German menace alone.⁷³⁵

Maisky’s complaints mirrored those raised by the British Military Mission in Moscow. At the end of July Cripps transmitted a telegram to the Foreign Office and relayed the numerous problems that the Mission faced on a daily basis. General

⁷³¹ Ibid., Warner to Cripps, 11 July 1941.

⁷³² NA, FO371/ 29467/ N3709/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 14 July 1941.

⁷³³ Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps in Moscow, 1940-1942: Diaries and Papers* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), pp. 124-5.

⁷³⁴ NA, FO371/ 29487/ N3933/ 78/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 18 July 1941.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., minute by Dew, 21 July 1941. Dew had served in the Moscow Embassy between 1938-1940 and returned to the Northern Department in 1941 after being stationed in Belgrade

Mason MacFarlane, the Head of the British Military Mission to Moscow, had complained of the continual delays when arranging meetings with the Soviet High Command. In addition, liaison between the air staff was non-existent. Consequently, the only real usefulness in liaison had been in naval affairs. Cripps proposed to raise the matter with Molotov that day, and asked Eden to see Maisky in order to express his disappointment at how inaccessible the Soviet High Command was proving to be for the British Mission. Cripps highlighted the fact that no Soviet officer had ever visited the British Mission in order to explain the delays, whilst Colonel Firebrace in London was 'more or less at the permanent disposal of the Soviet Mission in any way he can'.⁷³⁶ That afternoon Cripps informed his colleagues at the Foreign Office that General MacFarlane had had a satisfactory interview with General Panfilov, who was appointed commander of the 316th Rifle Division following the German invasion of the Soviet Union. As a result Cripps had asked Eden not to talk with Maisky.⁷³⁷

Unfortunately for the British Mission, MacFarlane's interview with Panfilov did not mark the start of an illustrious and cooperative relationship. On 5 August, Cripps was once again complaining to the Foreign Office about the refusal of the Soviets to allow General MacFarlane to visit the front, in spite of the fact that the visit had previously been approved in principle. Cripps' disillusionment was very much shared by MacFarlane. The British Mission had been in Moscow for five weeks and in spite of frequent requests the General had not yet visited the front.⁷³⁸ Warner replied to Cripps' most recent complaints the following day. Warner was wary about voicing complaints to Stalin. Instead, he preferred that the ambassador attempt to gently persuade Stalin to reconsider his position regarding Anglo-Soviet cooperation.

⁷³⁶ NA, FO371/ 29526/ N4070/ 3014/ 38, Cripps to FO, 26 July 1941.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, Cripps to FO, 26 July 1941.

⁷³⁸ NA, FO371/ 29562/ N4289/ 3014/ 38, Cripps to FO, 5 August 1941. One can most certainly understand why the Russians would refuse MacFarlane's requests to visit the front line due to the heavy losses of the Red Army.

Warner noted that such visits should have been among the chief duties of the British Mission and the Soviet refusal to cooperate fully made any assistance difficult.⁷³⁹ This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that the Soviet Mission in London showed a similar reluctance to cooperate with the British. Brigadier Stowell complained to Dew that the Soviet Mission had asked for visits to naval bases and establishments but had not seemed at all interested in army visits at that time.⁷⁴⁰ Dew believed that the Soviet refusal to cooperate was because ‘the Russians are quite clever enough to see that our attempts to force them to visit Army units are intended to extract from them a *quid pro quo*’. Until the Soviet authorities in Moscow saw fit to extend facilities to the British Mission, and particularly to the Army branch of the Mission, Dew feared that little progress would be made. Promises of collaboration as evinced in the Joint Agreement of July remained unfulfilled.⁷⁴¹ There are two possible explanations for the Soviet attitude. In the first instance it is quite possible that the Soviets were merely distrustful of British intentions, a distrust that was magnified as a result of the distinct lack of assistance from the British. The Soviets had often stated their belief that Britain was content to allow the Nazi-Soviet war to continue to the ‘last drop of Russian blood’.⁷⁴² British inaction was regarded as further evidence of this. Secondly, this fear would have no doubt been compounded once Moscow heard of Churchill’s trip to Placentia Bay on 14 August 1941. It was during that visit that the Atlantic Charter was drawn up by Churchill and Roosevelt.

The key motivation behind the meeting at Newfoundland was for the Prime Minister and President to lay down the principles of Great Britain and the United States. The Charter stated that neither country sought any kind of aggrandizement,

⁷³⁹ Ibid., Warner to Cripps (War Cabinet Distribution), 6 August 1941.

⁷⁴⁰ NA, FO371/29562/N4433/3014/38, Brigadier Stowell to Dew, 8 August 1941.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., minute by Dew, 9 August 1941.

⁷⁴² NA, FO371/29471/N6583/3/38, Cripps to FO, 26 October 1941.

and that no territorial changes would occur if they did not accord with the ‘freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned’. Churchill and Roosevelt had wished to see the sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of their rights. It is interesting to note that Stalin had not been invited to Newfoundland, though it is not at all surprising.⁷⁴³ The Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland was very much motivated by a Soviet desire for territorial aggrandizement, as was the Soviet action in Poland and Roumania and the absorption of the Baltic States in 1940. Indeed, the Soviets had stated that their absorption of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia was legal, as the general elections held in the immediate aftermath had illustrated the desire of the Baltic peoples for Soviet rule. Whether the peoples of the Baltic States were able to ‘choose the form of government under which they will live’ is highly doubtful, due to Soviet tactics of voter intimidation. Had Stalin been invited to Placentia Bay, it is doubtful that he would have readily agreed to such terms. He would have no doubt been in favour of the desire of Britain and America to see the final destruction of Nazi tyranny, as stated in the sixth term of the Charter, yet the desire to ‘see an established peace that would afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries’ would not have been keenly ascribed to by Stalin.⁷⁴⁴ Thus, it is conceivable that Soviet policy at that juncture was dictated by an immense mistrust of the British Government. British aid to the Soviet Union had yet to materialize,⁷⁴⁵ whilst the news of the Atlantic Charter may have led Stalin to believe that London and Washington were colluding to create an Anglo-American peace in which Moscow would be largely excluded.

⁷⁴³ Furthermore, the Soviet Government was only given a declaration of support by Britain and America. It is unsurprising that Stalin was disgruntled by this.

⁷⁴⁴ NA, FO181/977/3, ‘The Atlantic Charter’, 14 August 1941.

⁷⁴⁵ However, one must be aware of the excessive requests of the Soviet Government. For example, the Russian Chiefs of Staff asked for 3,000 modern fighter aircrafts, 3,000 bombers and 20,000 light anti-aircraft guns in June, to which even Cripps declared that he ‘held out little hope of our being able to meet many of these demands’. NA, FO371/29466/N3239/3/38, Cripps to WO, 29 June 1941.

Indeed, on the day of the historic Churchill-Roosevelt meeting at Placentia Bay, Mason MacFarlane was once again complaining to the Foreign Office that the level of cooperation with the Soviet Military Mission remained unsatisfactory, whilst the Soviets had informed MacFarlane that he ‘cannot expect improvement as long as the British Army are doing nothing on land to help us in our struggle’.⁷⁴⁶ Both Dew and Cripps were in agreement that the only way to dissipate Soviet suspicions was to provide active assistance to the USSR.⁷⁴⁷ Cripps wished to make Stalin aware that Great Britain was fully alive to how vitally important the steadfast resistance of the Soviet Union was to the final defeat of Hitlerism. Therefore, Cripps stated to his colleagues and superiors in London that they ought to be alive to the consequences that would undoubtedly arise should Britain fail to act quickly in the planning of the future allocation of Anglo-American resources.⁷⁴⁸

The Anglo-Soviet financial and commercial agreement signed by Mikoyan and Cripps on 16 August 1941 was a promising step on the long road towards Anglo-Soviet cooperation. The agreement provided for the supply of considerable quantities of British goods to the USSR as well as the supply of Soviet goods to the United Kingdom.⁷⁴⁹ However, it was clear that for the Soviets a mere financial agreement would not be sufficient. Thus, on 29 August the Cabinet decided to send a British delegation to Moscow led by Lord Beaverbrook in order to expand upon the recently signed financial agreement. Beaverbrook appeared to be a fitting appointment, as he had suggested to Maisky in the immediate aftermath of the German invasion of the USSR that Great Britain and the Soviet Union should combine naval, air and land

⁷⁴⁶ NA, FO371/ 29489/ N4612/ 78/ 38, MacFarlane to WO, 14 August 1941.

⁷⁴⁷ NA, FO371/ 29468/ N4689/ 5/ 38, minute by Dew, 15 August 1941, NA, FO371/ 29571/ N4744/ 3084/ 38, Cripps to FO, 15 August 1941.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Cripps to FO, 15 August 1941.

⁷⁴⁹ NA, FO371/ 29570/ N4591/ 3084/ 38, telegram by Cripps, 16 August 1941.

operations.⁷⁵⁰ Beaverbrook has been described by Steven Merritt Miner as a man who ‘loved power for its own sake and courted powerful people, regardless of their political convictions’.⁷⁵¹ As Minister of Supply he was the obvious choice to head the British delegation, and it was hoped that his pro-Soviet sympathies would help ease Soviet suspicions of British insincerity. Averell Harriman, Beaverbrook’s American counterpart, was the United States’ Lend-Lease representative in London. Harriman was thought to be the logical successor to Harry Hopkins who had visited Moscow in July but had been unable to take part in the Mission in September due to poor health.⁷⁵² Hopkins, Roosevelt’s friend and advisor, had flown to Moscow in July in order to express the President’s wish to coordinate Anglo-American supplies to the USSR.⁷⁵³ During his meeting with Stalin, Hopkins had informed his host of his desire to see a three-cornered meeting between Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. The proposed meeting was to deal with the strategic interests of the three Powers and it was hoped that a greater degree of reciprocity of information would be obtained and that a timetable for the delivery of Anglo-American supplies to the Soviet Union would be worked out. Thus, the arrival of the Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission was to build upon the work of Hopkins and help put relations between the three Governments on an even footing. The timing of the Cabinet approval was crucial. By the beginning of September 1941 the Soviets were becoming increasingly disheartened by British inaction, whilst the British were

⁷⁵⁰ NA, FO371/ 29486/ N3260/ 78/ 38, Cripps to FO, 29 June 1941. During Cripps’ meeting with Molotov, the Soviet Commissar told the ambassador of Lord Beaverbrook’s conversation with Maisky regarding British support for the Soviet Union.

⁷⁵¹ Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 157.

⁷⁵² John Daniel Langer, ‘The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission and the Debate over Unconditional Aid for the Soviet Union, 1941’, *JCH*, 14, 3 (Jul., 1979), 463-482 (p. 469).

⁷⁵³ Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 318.

becoming increasingly frustrated over the Soviet refusals to cooperate with the British Military Missions and divulge military information.

On 4 September Maisky met with Eden and Churchill in order to deliver a message from Stalin. During the course of the meeting Maisky 'emphasised with great earnestness the seriousness of the present situation' following German successes on the Eastern Front. He asked the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister whether, if the proposal to establish a second front had been ruled out, fresh efforts could now be made to meet Soviet requirements in respect of munitions and supplies as set out by Stalin. As Tuvia Ben-Moshe has noted, it was the German invasion of the USSR that had given birth to the Soviet demand for a second front,⁷⁵⁴ and from the Soviet point of view the British response was far from satisfactory. Churchill informed the Soviet Ambassador on 4 September that prior to the German invasion the Chiefs of Staff had been considering the possibility of an invasion of the French coast or off the coast of Norway. However, plans were dismissed as 'military opinion was unanimously against such a course' due to the limited resources of Great Britain.⁷⁵⁵

That day, Vyshinsky handed Cripps a personal message from Stalin that was to be delivered to Churchill. In the communication, Stalin stated his belief that the only remedy for the situation was for the British to establish a second front in the Balkans or in France in order to divert some thirty to forty German divisions from the Eastern Front. For Stalin, without such assistance the Soviet Union would either be defeated or at least weakened in their fight against Hitlerism.⁷⁵⁶ Cripps agreed fully with Stalin's message and emphatically stated that 'unless we can now at the last moment make a super-human effort we shall lose the whole value of any Russian

⁷⁵⁴ Tuvia Ben-Moshe, 'Winston Churchill and the "Second Front": A Reappraisal', *Journal of Modern History*, 62, 3 (Sep., 1990), 503-537 (p.505).

⁷⁵⁵ NA, FO371/ 29490/ N5096/ 78/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 4 September 1941.

⁷⁵⁶ NA, FO371/ 29490/ N5105/ 78/ 38, Moscow to FO, 4 September 1941. Enclosed in the dispatch was Stalin's message to Churchill.

front ... possibly for good'. The Ambassador had feared that it was 'almost too late' to save the front, unless Great Britain was prepared to commit fully to the Soviet Union.⁷⁵⁷ Churchill outlined such practicalities in his reply to Stalin on 5 September. He informed Stalin that there was no possibility of any British action in the West – except air action – that would draw the German forces from the East before winter. Furthermore, there could be no second front in the Balkans without the help of Turkey, but Churchill did concede to previous Soviet demands relating to Finland. Churchill told Stalin that Britain was willing to put pressure on the Finns, including immediate notification that Britain would declare war upon them should they continue beyond the old frontiers, and that he had asked Roosevelt to take all possible steps to influence Finland in that regard.⁷⁵⁸

Churchill's point-blank refusal to open a second front in the Balkans was criticised by Cripps in a communication to the Foreign Secretary on 15 September. The Prime Minister's statement that it would be impossible to give any actual military help on any other front at that time had only served to increase Stalin's distrust of Great Britain. The British position, combined with the ambassador's isolation in Moscow, had made Cripps' job of promoting greater Anglo-Soviet cooperation difficult. Alongside his complaints about Churchill's most recent message to Stalin, Cripps informed Eden of the varying obstacles that he faced. He and his staff were 'almost entirely confined to the embassy' which made it impossible to have any contact with the Soviets. Any reliable information as to what was going on in the country was thus difficult to obtain. Consequently, Cripps complained that he was 'living in a vacuum' so far as information was concerned. Cripps' successor, Archibald Clark Kerr, made similar complaints. In April 1942 Clark Kerr spoke of

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., Cripps to FO, 4 September 1941.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., FO to Cripps, 5 September 1941. Churchill's message to Stalin was enclosed in the Foreign Office dispatch.

the 'isolation' that was imposed upon him by the Soviets.⁷⁵⁹ A lack of interaction with their hosts had made the jobs of both Cripps and Clark Kerr difficult. The only positive and arguably insignificant point that could be gleaned from the situation, according to Cripps, was that the Soviets had been kind in social settings. However, although his personal relationships with the Soviets had been fair, 'the hopes of close collaboration which were entertained at the beginning have not been realised'. In order for him to bring about a strengthening of Anglo-Soviet ties, Cripps believed that London ought to abandon the idea of bargaining with the Soviets.⁷⁶⁰ Sargent disagreed with the ambassador. Bargaining for information, he noted, even amongst co-belligerents, was a necessary tactic.⁷⁶¹ Parallels can most certainly be drawn between the advice tendered by Cripps over the opening of a second front in 1941 and the matter of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States in 1940. What Cripps failed to grasp, however, was that to grant concessions in order to gain Soviet friendship would amount to little more than appeasement.

In his message to Churchill on 16 September Stalin informed the Prime Minister of his belief that the absence of a second front 'favours the designs of our common enemy', and stated his belief that Great Britain should be able to land twenty-five to thirty divisions at Archangel 'without any risk' in order to relieve the strain on the Eastern front.⁷⁶² This extraordinary request was ignored by Churchill in his reply which merely stated that he had hoped that the forthcoming arrival of the Harriman-Beaverbrook mission in Moscow would help alleviate Soviet suspicions and cultivate better relations between London and Moscow. The mission was to work

⁷⁵⁹ FO800/ 300, Clark Kerr to Eden, 27 April 1942.

⁷⁶⁰ NA, FO371/ 29490/ N5447/ 78/ 38, Cripps to Eden, 15 September 1941.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 15 September 1941.

⁷⁶² NA, FO371/ 29490/ N5421/ 78/ 38, Cripps to FO, 16 September 1941.

out with Stalin a definite programme of monthly delivery of resources.⁷⁶³ This avoidance of Stalin's request served to exacerbate the difficulties faced by Cripps and the British Military Mission in Moscow.

Four days later the Soviet General Staff were complaining that the British were not doing enough to help the Soviets, an accusation examined by Dew. He believed that the Prime Minister's avoidance of Stalin's request would halt any progress in collaboration. In order to improve Britain's relations with the USSR it would be wise to send a large force to the Caucasus, as one or two divisions would not be sufficient. For Dew, the repeated references by Stalin and Maisky to the need for assistance by Britain on land in order to relieve the strain on the Soviet forces may have reflected the serious danger in which the Soviet Union was now placed, or it could have been indicative of a more sinister problem. He mused that Soviet complaints may have been raised merely in order to prepare the ground prior to putting the blame on London should things deteriorate on the Eastern Front, or, more crucially, if Stalin was contemplating seeking a separate peace with Germany.⁷⁶⁴ Thus, two months following the Joint Declaration, Anglo-Soviet relations were far from satisfactory, with members of the Foreign Office fearing that the Kremlin would renege on the agreement due to continued German successes in the USSR. As Dew noted, the recent German successes would induce Hitler to press forward energetically with the Soviet campaign; the next few weeks would thus be a crucial point in the war.⁷⁶⁵ The possibility of either a Soviet collapse or a Nazi-Soviet peace at that juncture would have had catastrophic consequences for Great Britain.

The need for a British gesture of solidarity was more crucial than ever, a point not missed by Cripps in Moscow or Coote in London. Coote had hoped that the

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, Churchill to Stalin, 17 September 1941.

⁷⁶⁴ NA, FO371/29490/N5501/78/38, minute by Dew, 22 September 1941.

⁷⁶⁵ NA, FO71/29491/N5620/78/38, minute by Dew, 28 September 1941.

efforts of MacFarlane and Cripps of disproving Stalin's allegations would prove successful and that a measure of Anglo-Soviet cooperation would be possible.⁷⁶⁶ For Cripps, the problems facing the British Military Mission and thus the possibility of fruitful Anglo-Soviet cooperation were political in origin, due to an inherent Soviet distrust of British intentions. It was Cripps' belief that Molotov was acting as the main channel of supply through which all political information reached Stalin, and the Commissar's long-standing anti-British attitude was beginning to have the desired effect on Stalin.⁷⁶⁷

At the end of September the Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission arrived in Moscow to outline a comprehensive long-term aid programme. With the conclusion of the 'First Soviet Supply Protocol' between Great Britain and the Soviet Union, in which 'uniquely generous' and unilateral British aid to the Soviet Union was established, economic relations between the two Powers were strengthened. Dew, Warner and Cripps hoped that Anglo-American promises of economic aid would reduce the mistrust emanating from the Kremlin. Thus, the spirit of collaboration that was evident during the Harriman-Beaverbrook conversations could help to consolidate and strengthen Anglo-Soviet cooperation in both the economic and political realm. Whilst the details of the Mission will not be explored here, as a wealth of excellent works have comprehensibly examined the topic,⁷⁶⁸ it is important to note that Sir Stafford Cripps had not been invited to attend the conference, a fact that had severely disgruntled the ambassador.

Despite the cordial nature of the Beaverbrook-Harriman conversations in Moscow, the onset of German successes on the Eastern Front in the aftermath of the

⁷⁶⁶ NA, FO371/29490/N5542/78/38, minute by Coote, 26 September 1941.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Cripps to FO, 23 September 1941.

⁷⁶⁸ For example, see Langer, 'The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission', pp. 463-482 and relevant sections in Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*.

Anglo-American-Soviet talks ensured that any optimism was short lived. On 26 September Mallett informed the Foreign Office that, according to a telegram received from the Swedish Ambassador in Berlin, 'a wave of optimism' had 'spread both in German official circles and amongst the German people as a result of the fall of Kiev and of recent military operations in the direction of the Crimea'. Consequently, he warned that should the Red Army experience further material losses on the Eastern Front there could be a Soviet collapse before winter.⁷⁶⁹ Cavendish-Bentinck believed that Soviet resistance would be more resolute in the face of German pressure. Furthermore, as a consequence of the Anglo-Soviet action in Iran,⁷⁷⁰ the Soviets were able to receive supplies at all times of the year via Iran as well as over the Trans-Siberian Railway. Consequently, the *Wehrmacht* would have to maintain several million men in the East should Hitler decide to try and stabilise the front there.⁷⁷¹ Cavendish-Bentinck's optimism as to the viability of Soviet resistance was, however, not shared by members of the Northern Department. The recent German successes would inevitably induce the Germans to press energetically forward. As Dew reiterated, the coming weeks would be crucial.⁷⁷²

Rather than improving the relations between the co-belligerents, the Beaverbrook-Harriman Mission widened the rift between the three Powers. Promises of aid had failed to materialize, leading the Soviets to once again raise the issue of a second front. In a minute on 18 October, Dew illustrated the fundamental problem facing the British Government with regard to this issue. He noted that, although Stalin had on several occasions accepted the explanation proffered to him about the

⁷⁶⁹ NA, FO371/ 29491/ N5620/ 78/ 38, Mallett to FO, 26 September 1941.

⁷⁷⁰This action was barely discussed in the Northern Department as it was more of a military rather than a political affair. The invasion took place on 25 August 1941 and was regarded as necessary in order to ensure that the USSR's channel of supply remained open. Oliver Harvey, *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1941-1945*, ed. John Harvey (London: Collins, 1978), p. 36.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Cavendish-Bentinck to Mallett, 1 October 1941.

⁷⁷² NA, FO371/ 29491/ N5620/ 78/ 38, minute by Dew, 28 September 1941.

ability of the British military to create a second front, it was clear that this was not accepted by Molotov.⁷⁷³ Both he and Maisky continued to complain about British inaction in the East, with the Soviet Ambassador urging Eden to take action in the majority of their interviews. In Maisky's meeting with the Foreign Secretary on 18 October he had proclaimed that a 'token force' would be insufficient. For Dew, there was no doubt that should Britain send a force to the Caucasus it would go a long way to both inspire Soviet confidence and help to dispel Soviet suspicion of Britain. Dew agreed with Cripps' previous statements that to increase British support to the Soviets would also greatly aid the all-important goal of denying Caucasian oil to the Germans.⁷⁷⁴ Thus, there was a belief shared by the ambassador in Moscow and Dew in London that British action was essential, and that time was of the essence.

As October progressed, Cripps' pleas were becoming increasingly emphatic. Following a meeting with Molotov on 22 October, in which the Commissar had shown quite clearly that he was against any British troops coming into the USSR 'unless they were going to proceed direct to some active front', Cripps re-registered the Molotov's displeasure with the British position.⁷⁷⁵ Three days later, Cripps was once again pleading with Eden. Relations between Great Britain and the USSR were 'getting worse and not better', and, should Britain fail to relieve pressure on the Soviets by action elsewhere, 'the only way in which we can improve matters is to send some troops to this country'.⁷⁷⁶ Cripps feared that the Soviet obsession about British inactivity would result in a crack in Soviet morale during the winter months

⁷⁷³ NA, FO371/ 29492/ N6132/ 78/ 38, minute by Dew, 18 October 1941.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid. Cripps repeated such sentiments in a communication to the Foreign Office on 22 September. NA, FO371/ 29492/ N6103/ 78/ 38, Cripps to FO, 22 October 1941.

⁷⁷⁵ NA, FO371/ 29492/ N6103/ 78/ 38, Cripps to FO, 22 October 1941.

⁷⁷⁶ NA, FO371/ 29492/ N6168/ 78/ 38, Cripps to FO, 25 October 1941.

thus creating further obstacles to fruitful Anglo-Soviet cooperation. Such fears continued to be expressed by Cripps throughout this period.⁷⁷⁷

Unfortunately for Cripps, Churchill did not share his sympathy with the plight of the USSR. He told the ambassador that the Soviets had brought their fate upon themselves. The Nazi-Soviet Pact had let Hitler loose on Poland and had thereby started the conflict in which both Britain and the Soviet Union were now embroiled. As for Soviet complaints about the lack of a second front, Churchill quite rightly believed that the Soviets had cut themselves off from an effective front when they allowed the French Army to be destroyed. Indeed, Churchill declared, ‘if they [the Soviets] harbour suspicions of us it is only because of the guilt and self-reproach in their own hearts’.⁷⁷⁸

Christopher Warner entered the debate at the beginning of November. Warner had not yet vocalised his opinions on the issue of Anglo-American aid to the USSR and the need for a second front. The continued complaints of the British Military Mission in Moscow forced his interjection. Unlike Collier, who regularly expressed his opinions on each and every issue relating to Anglo-Soviet relations, Warner would only intervene in discussions should he deem it useful and necessary. In response to Mason-MacFarlane’s communication to the War Office in which he spoke of the need to adopt a ‘very firm line’ with the Soviets, Warner expressed his opposition to such an approach.⁷⁷⁹ Although he sympathised with Mason-MacFarlane and recommended that the matter be raised with Maisky by either himself or Eden, Warner noted that he was ‘always a little nervous when the General starts talking about “taking a very firm line”’. MacFarlane was too quick to think in terms of threats. Rather than threatening the Soviets, Warner instead suggested that MacFarlane should state that it would be

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ NA, FO371/29471/N6583/3/38, Churchill to Cripps, 28 October 1941.

⁷⁷⁹ NA, FO371/29471/N6774/3/38, MacFarlane to WO, 1 November 1941.

mutually beneficial for the British Mission to know where the British tanks and instructional personnel were to be situated in order for them to be used to the best advantage. For Warner, 'the case ought to be put reasonably to the Russians' as 'the General and Ambassador won't take them by storm'.⁷⁸⁰

It was at this time that Cripps received a telegram from the Foreign Office divulging the nature of the Beaverbrook-Harriman conversations. On 5 November an outraged Cripps registered his disbelief that 'these most important conversations should now be reported to me for the first time and that apparently little notice has been taken of them by anyone at all'.⁷⁸¹ One can sympathise with Cripps over his treatment in this matter. Although issues of supply were at the heart of the conversations in September, Cripps was not unjustified in stating that his absence had placed him 'in an entirely false position as regards Molotov' as the Commissar could easily have concluded that Cripps possessed very little authority to discuss vital matters that had affected Anglo-Soviet relations. Cripps complained that he had since discussed many of the issues raised in the Beaverbrook-Harriman conversations with the Soviet Commissar, and presumed that as a result the Soviets would think him 'most disingenuous for not disclosing any knowledge of them'. More pointedly, he feared that he would be viewed as 'so little trusted by His Majesty's Government' that he was 'not given any information about them'. Cripps' complaint encapsulated both his outrage over his absence during the discussions and the fact that British inaction had continued once the talks had concluded. Beaverbrook had expressed his belief that an Anglo-Soviet treaty would be advantageous, yet the matter had not been taken up by London. It was conceivable that, as a result, Stalin would conclude that the British Government was not truly desirous of reaching an agreement with the Soviets.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., minute by Warner, 2 November 1941.

⁷⁸¹ NA, FO371/29493/N6544/78/38, Cripps to FO, 5 November 1941.

Cripps' frustration is most certainly understandable. However, his statement that 'in these circumstances I can see no use in my remaining here to act as an occasional post-box', was somewhat childish and petulant.⁷⁸²

In his response to Cripps, Eden sought to appease the disheartened ambassador. Eden regretted that he had felt that he was in a 'false position' with Molotov, but drew the ambassador's attention to the fact that the communication of 5 November had 'extracted every item of diplomatic consequence out of a conversation of fifteen hours on supply'. Furthermore, Beaverbrook had assured Eden that Stalin had not attached undue importance to the exchanges as there were 'no serious diplomatic talks at all'.⁷⁸³ Indeed, had the Soviets attached any importance to Beaverbrook's suggestion of an Anglo-Soviet treaty, Stalin would have raised the matter at every available opportunity. Warner was in agreement with Eden and disagreed with Cripps' complaint that Beaverbrook's conversations with Stalin were 'essential to the picture' and that the ambassador should have been present at the meetings.⁷⁸⁴

The Harriman-Beaverbrook conversations in Moscow clearly illustrated that the issues of Anglo-American supply to the USSR and the creation of a second front in Europe were of paramount importance in the period following the German invasion of the Soviet Union. As was evident throughout the whole of this period, discussions that centred around economic cooperation had wide-ranging political implications. Stalin's speech on 6 November illustrated his frustration over the British refusal to open a second front that would force Hitler to fight a war on two fronts. However, in an attempt to inject a sense of optimism, Stalin spoke of the fact that Great Britain, the USSR and the United States were 'united in a single camp which has for its object

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., Eden to Cripps, 6 November 1941.

⁷⁸⁴ NA, FO371/ 29470/ N6429/ 3/ 38, minute by Warner, 9 November 1941.

the disruption of [the] Hitlerite imperialists and their usurping armies'.⁷⁸⁵ In spite of Stalin's cutting remarks over the second front issue, Dew praised this 'excellent speech' that had frankly expressed the difficulties with which the Soviet Union was contending; yet it was 'at the same time full of confidence'. Dew agreed with Stalin's statement that a second front in Europe must be realized in the near future as it would ease the position of the Red Army, and would thus be damaging for Germany.⁷⁸⁶

On 12 November Eden met with Maisky and told the ambassador that the Cabinet was considering Stalin's most recent message to Churchill.⁷⁸⁷ Whilst Eden could neither comment nor reply to the message, he remarked that 'the Prime Minister and Cabinet were surprised and pained at the tone and contents of the message'.⁷⁸⁸ Maisky's reply was predictable. Noting the reasons for the suspicions that had arisen during recent years between Moscow and London, Maisky continued to state that Stalin's requests were not unreasonable. Stalin had been far from satisfied to discover that the British Generals in Moscow could not discuss post-war policies. The Soviet Ambassador thus suggested a further visit of personnel who would be authorized to discuss such matters. The meeting concluded with Maisky informing Eden that should Britain fail to open a second front, 'Soviet suspicions of Britain allowing Germany a free hand in the East would be elevated'. Hence, 'the presence of British soldiers in Russia was of such great political importance quite apart from their military value'.⁷⁸⁹ Dew was sympathetic to the Soviet point of view. It seemed obvious that while they were fighting the same enemy the British and Soviet Governments ought to reach an understanding on both war and peace aims, as well as an agreement on mutual military assistance against Hitlerite aggression in Europe. As

⁷⁸⁵ NA, FO371/ 29493/ N6473/ 78/ 38, tel: Cripps, 9 November 1941.

⁷⁸⁶ NA, FO371/ 29494/ N6631/ 78/ 38, minute by Dew, 8 November 1941.

⁷⁸⁷ The contents of which shall be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

⁷⁸⁸ NA, FO371/ 29470/ N6288/ 3/ 38, minute by Eden, 12 November 1941.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

for Maisky's statement that His Majesty's Government had not definitely answered the Soviet request that Britain should send troops to the USSR, Dew noted that Great Britain simply did not have the forces, and especially not the thirty divisions that Stalin had requested. However, the fact that no reply had been sent to Stalin would only serve to increase his suspicions, a point which Warner seconded.⁷⁹⁰

It was at this juncture that the Warner penned a memorandum that explored the state of Anglo-Soviet relations and concluded with a series of recommendations on how best to proceed. Notwithstanding the critical nature of Stalin's speech of 6 November, it was Stalin's communication to the Prime Minister that had sparked Warner's paper. As Hanak has noted, 'the decision to send Eden to Moscow was the direct consequence of Stalin's outburst'.⁷⁹¹ Upon Sargent's instruction, Warner composed a lengthy memorandum examining not simply what Stalin had communicated to Churchill, but the implications of his accusations. This particular message to the Prime Minister from Stalin has been identified by numerous historians as the catalyst that prompted Eden's visit to Moscow in December 1941, and whilst the trip to the Soviet Union was his first as Foreign Secretary, it was his second visit as an official of His Majesty's Government. On 27 March 1935, Eden became the first British minister to visit the Soviet Union since the revolution. In an account upon his return to London, Eden noted that the discussions had been a positive step towards improved Anglo-Soviet relations.⁷⁹² What historians have thus far neglected to illuminate, however, is the highly important role of the Northern Department in the preparations of the Foreign Secretary's visit to Moscow. That much was evident from

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., minute by Dew, 15 November 1941.

⁷⁹¹ H. Hanak, 'Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow, June 1941-January 1942', *English Historical Journal*, 97, 383 (Apr., 1982), 332-344 (p.338).

⁷⁹² The Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 162.

the Deputy Under-Secretary's request that Warner himself should deal with the issues raised from Stalin's message.

Firstly, in relation to the sharp tone adopted by Stalin, Warner mused that, although it was difficult to account for, it may have been a tactic used by Stalin, or it may have merely been a consequence of the 'strain of the immense burden Stalin bore while the fate of Moscow hung in the balance'.⁷⁹³ Warner advised that certain paragraphs in the message ought not to be assumed to be provocative, as it was possible that the tone in which it was transmitted was the result of imperfect translation. As for the contents of the message itself, Warner noted that Stalin was clearly still intensely suspicious of the sincerity of the British desire to cooperate to the full and, indeed, that he 'suspects that we want the Soviet Union to be crippled in crippling the Germans and to be of no account in the peace settlement'. With regard to Stalin's speech of 6 November, Warner was less flattering than Dew. For his part, Warner surmised that Stalin had not only cited the lack of a second front as 'one of the major reasons for the Russian setbacks' but he also 'appeared to hold out to his people the hope that a second front in Europe would materialise shortly'.⁷⁹⁴ It was clear to Warner that Stalin had not appreciated the severe limitations on the amount of direct military help that Great Britain could give him, 'thus he suspects that we are evading him out of a lack of goodwill'.

After dealing with the contents of the message, Warner proceeded to identify possible lines of reply. In the first instance, the British had to decide whether or not to make an effort to conciliate Stalin. A key point to consider was the fact that if London wished to satisfy the Soviets, His Majesty's Government would 'find this impossible and we may be forced from one gesture of conciliation to another'.

⁷⁹³ NA, FO371/ 29471/ N6540/ 3/ 38, memorandum by Warner, 12 November 1941.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid.

Warner held no illusions as to the difficulties facing the British attempts to bring about a *rapprochement*, as the Soviets were in the habit of hoarding up every complaint against London. Those complaints could then be used to convince the Soviet people and world opinion generally of the weaknesses and failures of the British Government. However, the possibility of Stalin seeking a separate peace with Germany did not worry Warner, due in large part to the many German successes on the Eastern Front. What did trouble him were the consequences attached to sending a negative reply to Stalin. Soviet morale would suffer further and this could very well result in capitulation to Germany, thus allowing the Germans to turn their attentions to Great Britain once again. It appeared necessary, therefore, for the British reply to allay the suspicions of the Soviets, even if they could not meet their wishes.

Warner predicted that the issue of post-war aims would prove to be the biggest stumbling block to closer Anglo-Soviet cooperation as Soviet ideas in the post-war era would inevitably run counter to those held by both London and Washington. Finland and the Baltic States in particular appeared to be key obstacles to fruitful collaboration. In order to avoid a clash with the Soviets in the post-war era, the British authorities would have to illustrate that they were ‘anxious to reach a close understanding with the Soviet Government with regard to war and peace aims’, a task that was rendered much more difficult due to the fact that ‘we ourselves have not found it possible to define our war and peace aims in any detail’.⁷⁹⁵ British aims during the war were confined to the defeat of Hitler and his satellites as soon as possible in combination with all those who would join in the struggle. The position of Britain and America were not definite beyond the Atlantic Charter, yet Maisky’s declaration endorsing the Charter at the Inter-Allied Conference was encouraging.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

Stalin's fundamental aim was the liberation of Soviet territories and people 'from the German Fascist yoke'. As such, the Soviet Government would assist any country in its 'struggle for liberation against Hitlerite tyranny' whilst later 'permitting them freely to settle their own destiny in their own land'. The Soviet endorsement of the fundamental principles laid down in the Atlantic Charter was a positive step in the Anglo-Soviet relationship, yet Warner counselled that it would be idle at that time to think in terms of a political post-war settlement as no one knew how and in what conditions Hitlerism would be defeated.⁷⁹⁶

Evidently Warner believed that, although His Majesty's Government could not yet discuss political post-war issues with the Soviets, a gesture was necessary to illustrate the British desire for cooperation. It was due to his wish to allay Soviet suspicions that Warner suggested that a 'suitable representative', such as the Secretary of State, should discuss these matters with Stalin in person, alongside a highly qualified representative of President Roosevelt.⁷⁹⁷ Should Eden journey to the USSR, Warner believed that he ought to stipulate that the talks should be held in Moscow and that they should involve discussions with Stalin himself, as had been the case with Beaverbrook and Harriman.

Warner then dealt with the accusations contained in Stalin's message to Churchill. He was clearly of the opinion that Stalin should be told unequivocally that Great Britain would give the Soviet Union large-scale military assistance if it were at all possible. The British refusal to send thirty divisions to the Eastern Front was not due to a desire to see the USSR and Germany mutually exhausted. It simply was not possible. Responding to the criticism over British hesitancy to disclose detailed information about its armed forces, Warner stated that should the British divulge in-

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

depth information about their military forces and capabilities to the Soviets and the Eastern Front then fall, British military secrets could fall into the hands of the Germans. In order to assuage Stalin of his suspicions, Warner believed that if Eden could provide him with sufficient information and convince him of its accuracy, Stalin would 'see the problem of its true proportions' and would 'draw the logical conclusions'. Warner believed that Stalin was a 'realist' who was capable of reason. In order to achieve fruitful cooperation with the Soviet's it was essential that such a reasonable approach be adopted. In this sense Warner seemed to be the ideal man to aid the improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations. Warner believed that ideological prejudices, whether justified or not, had to be put to one side in order to defeat the German menace. Should his advice be adopted, Warner considered it advisable to renew the offer to send Generals Wavell and Paget to Moscow in order to discuss specific military information with Stalin.

Warner suggested that if Stalin was told of the limited resources of Great Britain he would not expect the impossible. Warner believed that it would remove suspicion and induce Stalin to receive the Generals, even in the midst of his present overwhelming preoccupations. Although Warner was prepared to disclose military information in order to convince Stalin of British sincerity, he was firmly against combining military and political discussions as the issue of war and peace aims could not be resolved while the military and political situation was so fluid.⁷⁹⁸ Furthermore, Warner was anxious not to lose the opportunity to appease Stalin over the issue of declaring war on Finland, Roumania and Hungary as the declaration of war on the

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

three states would have rather insignificant consequences for Britain whilst gaining the crucial advantage of easing Stalin's distrust.⁷⁹⁹

In spite of the fact that Warner's memorandum advised a large measure of accommodation of Stalin's requests, Cripps expressed his dismay to the Foreign Office the following day.⁸⁰⁰ He deplored the decision not to discuss the post-war organization of peace and did not accept the argument put forward by Warner that it would be unwise to do so when British peace aims had not yet been formulated. Cripps was doubtful that any negotiations would be successful due to the Government's refusal to discuss details of peace objectives outside of those expressed in the Atlantic Charter. Consequently, the ambassador told the Foreign Office that he found it 'difficult to know how I am to prepare the ground in a hard frost without any implements'.⁸⁰¹ Adopting a good deal of hyperbole, Cripps informed his colleagues in London that he had gone to Moscow 'to do a special job and not as a professional diplomatist' and that once his job was done he would return to London. As he was not able to discuss peace aims with the Soviets, Cripps believed that he could no longer be of any use. Once again he asked to be removed from his post.⁸⁰² Two days later, Cripps attempted to qualify his position in response to Warner's memorandum, urging the Foreign Office to act promptly as 'temporisation and delay will not in my view improve matters nor will soft words of praise'.⁸⁰³

Cripps' inability to sympathise with the difficult position in which his government was placed undoubtedly frustrated his colleagues and superiors, yet his request to return to London was rejected. Churchill, who composed a patient reply to Cripps, informed him that it would be a mistake to leave his post and abandon the

⁷⁹⁹ NA, FO371/ 29471/ N6540/ 3/ 38, minute by Warner, 12 November 1941.

⁸⁰⁰ Warner's memorandum had been transmitted to Cripps on the day of its composition.

⁸⁰¹ NA, FO371/ 29471/ N6574/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 13 November 1941.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ NA, FO371/ 29471/ N6605/ 3/ 38, Cripps to FO, 15 November 1941.

Soviets, not least as his friends in Great Britain would not understand it.⁸⁰⁴ Eden, for his part, reinforced the conclusions drawn in Warner's memorandum. He did not intend to convey that all fruitful discussion with the Soviet Government on peace objectives and Anglo-Soviet post-war collaboration would be excluded at that time. Collaboration with the Soviets in such matters would be attempted. However, as Warner argued, it would be difficult for the British Government precisely to define the lines of such collaboration. The manoeuvrability of His Majesty's Government was limited due to its adherence of the Atlantic Charter. To go beyond the terms of the Charter would inevitably result in the introduction of the Americans into the discussions. Washington had repeatedly asked London not to undertake during the war commitments that would bind them once the war was over. Thus, the hands of the British Government were tied.⁸⁰⁵

Upon Warner's suggestion, then, it was decided that Anthony Eden should visit Moscow for a second time in order to convince Stalin of the British desire to collaborate with the Soviets. On 19 November Cripps wrote to Eden to advise him as to how best to deal with the Soviet leaders, and with Stalin in particular. Mere expressions of goodwill and cordiality meant very little to Stalin, and, as the Beaverbrook-Harriman Mission had illustrated, the Soviet leader was capable of 'playing up and reciprocating' utterances of goodwill when there was 'a basis of solid fact and solid advantage'. In order to dispel Stalin's fears that Britain had intended to 'leave Germany with enough strength to serve as a barrier against the Soviet Union in time of peace', a gesture of goodwill was crucial. Consequently, His Majesty's Government had to formulate concrete plans on post-war reconstruction and the safeguarding of Soviet frontiers in the Baltic. If they failed to do so, 'the only

⁸⁰⁴ NA, FO371/29471/N6575/3/38, Churchill to Cripps, 15 November 1941. Eden initialled Churchill's telegram, thus registering his agreement to Churchill's response.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, minute by Eden, 17 November 1941.

outcome of the discussions will be an increased distrust of our ultimate motives'.⁸⁰⁶ Evidently, Warner's memorandum and the subsequent statements by Eden that London had not formulated concrete plans with regard to the post-war organization of peace continued to fall on deaf ears, with the ambassador towing the Soviet party line rather than that of his own government.

The significance of the Northern Department in the weeks prior to Eden's visit to Moscow was again evident at the end of November when Dew composed a memorandum exploring Stalin's complaint in his message to Churchill on 8 November. Stalin had declared that a 'lack of clarity' existed and that this was an obstacle to improved relations between the USSR and Great Britain. The purpose of Dew's paper was to discuss what progress could be made with regard to Stalin's particular grievance that there was no definite understanding on war aims and the post-war organization of peace. His paper embodied the results of a meeting that had been held in Cadogan's room on 18 November at which Law, Sargent, Strang, Harvey and Ronald were present. It was generally agreed that Stalin suspected that the British wished to see the Soviet Union so weakened in the struggle with Germany that they would be excluded from the peace discussions.⁸⁰⁷ Evidently, it was essential to make every effort to dispel both British and Soviet suspicions of one another's intentions if a *rapprochement* were to be reached. Yet it was not merely the mutual distrust that would make any such understanding impossible. The Foreign Office was unsure as to what Stalin had in mind with regard to his war aims and the post-war settlement as the Soviet authorities had been 'extremely reticent in defining their ideas' on these issues. What was certain, in Dew's opinion, was that Stalin would seek a treaty, as he had mentioned that desire in his conversation with Beaverbrook in

⁸⁰⁶ NA, FO181/962/8, Cripps to Eden, 19 November 1941.

⁸⁰⁷ NA, FO371/29472/N6839/3/38, memorandum by Dew, 21 November 1941.

September.⁸⁰⁸ Thus, whilst the authorities in London were aware of some of the basics of what the Soviets envisioned, and were alive to the fact Soviet Government had stated its adherence to the fundamental principles of the Atlantic Charter during the Inter-Allied Conference at St. James's Palace in September, the specific Soviet aims were far from clear. Ambiguities such as these had made the preparation for Eden's impending trip problematic. According to Dew, the fact that His Majesty's Government had not made up its mind as to the questions of an economic and political settlement would leave Eden at a 'serious disadvantage'. The desire of both Dew in London and Cripps in Moscow for Britain clearly to define its aims put them at odds with their colleagues and superiors in the Foreign Office. The conclusions drawn at the meeting on 18 November were no doubt unsatisfactory for Dew and Cripps. It was decided that Eden ought to confine any agreement with the Soviet Union to a declaration reaffirming the intention of Great Britain and the USSR to continue the war until the defeat of Germany. Both countries would declare a willingness to cooperate in making the peace settlement and cooperation thereafter in maintaining that settlement, and it was essential for Eden to convince Stalin of Britain's desire to treat the USSR on the basis of equality in such matters.⁸⁰⁹

An interview between Eden and Maisky on 1 December resulted in a clarification of the Soviet position. Stalin wanted the agreement to be in two parts. The first would cover the period of the war in which neither Power would sign a separate peace and would offer one another military assistance for the duration of the fighting. The second related to the post-war period, including the organization of peace.⁸¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, Dew praised the Soviet Government's clarification of its position and stated that Stalin was taking a very reasonable line, not least as and the

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ NA, FO371/ 29472/ N6893/ 3/ 38, Eden to Cripps, 1 December 1941.

points covered were not at odds with the terms envisaged by the British Government.⁸¹¹

In order to convince the Soviets of its solidarity and support on 6 December 1941 Great Britain declared war on Finland, Roumania and Hungary. By doing so, and in spite of previous hesitancy by Churchill, the British succeeded in removing an oft-raised Soviet grievance. In a message to Stalin in November, Churchill had expressed his doubts as to whether it was good business for Great Britain to declare war on the three states. No doubt Stalin's message to the Prime Minister of 8 November served not only to illustrate the need for Britain to send a high-ranking official to Moscow in order to discuss both military and political issues but also the pressing need to make a gesture of good faith. The timing of the British declaration of war on Finland, Roumania and Hungary coincided within twenty-four hours on the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Upon hearing the news, Churchill decided to visit Washington immediately, a decision that most certainly threatened to impact upon Eden's forthcoming trip to Moscow. As Oliver Harvey recalled in his diary, Eden feared that Churchill would 'take all the limelight off the Moscow visit'.⁸¹²

In spite of the chaotic atmosphere that preceded Eden's visit, and the fact that Eden could offer nothing more than 'promises for the future',⁸¹³ Foreign Office officials were very much convinced of the importance of a successful outcome in Moscow. Sargent recognized the problematic situation that had arisen as a result of the Japanese attack, and feared that recent events had rendered obsolete the papers on the general strategy of the war that Eden was to take with him. In spite of such difficulties, Sargent believed that Eden needed to emphasise the British resolve to

⁸¹¹ Ibid., minute by Dew, 2 December 1941.

⁸¹² Harvey, *War Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p. 64.

⁸¹³ Lothar Kettenacker, 'The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17, 3 (Jul., 1982), 435-458 (p.440).

provide the Soviets with all the political and military assistance possible in their fight against Germany.⁸¹⁴

Eden arrived in Moscow on 16 December. In his meetings with Stalin, at which Molotov and Maisky were also present, the Foreign Secretary was joined by Alexander Cadogan, Oliver Harvey and Sir Stafford Cripps. Although Eden was inclined to exclude Cripps from the conversations, as Beaverbrook had done in September, Cadogan intervened and persuaded him that a repeat of September would be unfortunate.⁸¹⁵ The first meeting took place on 17 December and lasted for approximately four hours. It was Eden's intention to achieve a 'full survey of the political situation' and he was pleasantly surprised to discover that the two draft treaties composed by the Soviets did not differ greatly from the papers composed by Cadogan and Cripps the previous day.⁸¹⁶ Until Stalin suggested a secret protocol that would embody the joint views of London and Moscow for a settlement of post-war frontiers, Eden had not foreseen 'any insuperable difficulty' in coming to an agreed text with the Soviet leader. Eden admitted to Stalin that although he agreed with much of the latter's proposal, he could not enter into a secret agreement.⁸¹⁷ Not only would Eden's acceptance of a secret protocol put him at odds with the government of the United States, but Britain's own discussion of a peace settlement had not advanced to a point whereby definite aims had been identified. Thus, the Foreign

⁸¹⁴ NA, FO371/ 29655/ N7462/ 7462/ 38, Sargent to Ismay, 16 December 1941.

⁸¹⁵ Oliver Harvey, *War Diaries*, p. 72. In his diary entry Harvey explained the Foreign Secretary's inclination to exclude Cripps as motivated by a desire to get Stalin to talk freely, something that Eden believed to be unlikely should Cripps be present. Cadogan's advice to include the ambassador was tendered in order to avoid further upset with the already frustrated Cripps.

⁸¹⁶ NA, FO371/ 29655/ N7463/ 7462/ 38, Eden to FO, 17 December 1941. In the British draft agreement that had been drawn up by Cadogan and Cripps, the main points included Anglo-Soviet collaboration until the final defeat of Germany; a promise that neither country would sign secret agreements with third parties that dealt with postwar matters; a promise that Moscow would be fully included in the postwar reconstruction of Europe and promises of mutual economic assistance in the postwar era. Alexander Cadogan, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, ed. David Dillks (London: Cassell, 1971), p. 421.

⁸¹⁷ Stalin's request for a secret protocol on post-war frontiers was raised in order to His Majesty's Government to recognize the Soviet Union's 1941 frontiers, before the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Thus, the Soviets would remain in control of Finland and the Baltic States.

Secretary informed Stalin that he would have to consult his colleagues on the proposal. Stalin was satisfied with this reply. He expressed his desire to obtain American support, yet made it clear that he deemed Anglo-Soviet agreement on ‘essential war aims’ to be of paramount importance. Without an agreement on war aims, Stalin declared, ‘there was no true alliance’.⁸¹⁸ Eden concluded that his first meeting with Stalin had been most cordial and informed his colleagues in the Foreign Office that ‘[the] treaties in their final form will not be more formidable than proposed [the] declarations’. Nevertheless, he warned that the ‘Russians attach importance to [the] term “treaty”’. In order to ease any worries from Cabinet colleagues, Eden stated that one ought not to have any anxiety about the contents of the proposals contained in Stalin’s draft as they would ‘generally accord with [the] memorandum which the Cabinet have already approved’.⁸¹⁹ His concluding sentence clearly illustrated his desire to come to an understanding with the Soviets, primarily due to his sincere desire to improve Anglo-Soviet relations. It was moreover highly likely that Eden did not want his visit to be overshadowed by Churchill’s trip to Washington: ‘It is clearly essential that my visit here should be marked by some agreement which will convince the Russians of the sincerity of our collaboration both now and in the future’.⁸²⁰

The question of a second front was predictably raised by Stalin in his conversations with the British Foreign Secretary. When Eden pointed out that Britain had opened a second front through her operations in North Africa, Stalin stated that he had ‘fully agreed with our [British] military policy’ yet he also asked whether Great Britain would now be able to open up a second front in Europe by a landing in the

⁸¹⁸ NA, FO371/ 29655/ N7463/ 7462/ 38, Eden to FO, 17 December 1941.

⁸¹⁹ To which Eden was referring to the paper written by Cadogan and Cripps on 16 December 1941.

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

Balkans.⁸²¹ In an attempt to appease Stalin, Eden stated that a landing on the continent in the immediate future was not possible but that one of the objectives of the British campaign in Libya was to secure a base from which attacks could be made on Italy. Whilst Eden's reply was unsatisfactory, Stalin merely expressed his opinion that the morale of the German army in the USSR was low after suffering heavy casualties. Furthermore, the onset of winter would place the Germans at a distinct disadvantage as they would not be equipped to face such severe climatic conditions.⁸²²

During the final meeting on 20 December Stalin told Eden that despite their failure to sign a treaty during the visit it should not be regarded in 'too tragic a light'.⁸²³ In spite of Stalin's display of goodwill, Eden was very eager to meet Stalin's request for British military support and informed the Foreign Office on 22 December that there was a 'strong political reason why we should put through this joint operation if we possibly can'. Central to his reasoning was a belief that it would be a visible sign of Anglo-Soviet solidarity and would have a 'far-reaching psychological effect' on the Soviets and thus improve Anglo-Soviet relations.⁸²⁴

On 1 January 1942, Cripps informed his colleagues in London of the positive response to Eden's visit in the Soviet press.⁸²⁵ In a radio broadcast three days later Eden expressed his belief that 'there was no real conflict of interest between the Soviet Union and this country'.⁸²⁶ Both the British and Soviet Government used flattery and words of praise in lieu of any definitive expression of solidarity. On 4 January the Foreign Secretary asked Warner to compose a memorandum for Winant

⁸²¹ NA, FO371/ 29655/ N7466/ 7462/ 38, Eden to FO, 18 December 1941.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ NA, WP(42) 8, 'War Cabinet: Mr Eden's Visit to Moscow', 5 January 1942.

⁸²⁴ NA, FO371/ 29655/ N7469/ 7462/ 38, telegram: Eden, 22 December 1941.

⁸²⁵ NA, FO371/ 32874/ N22/ 5/ 38, Cripps to FO, 1 January 1942.

⁸²⁶ NA, FO371/ 32874/ N / 5/ 38, minute by Eden, 4 January 1942.

in order to relay the details of Eden's conversations in Moscow and to illustrate his genuine desire to reach an understanding with the Soviets. In order for the British Cabinet to agree to Stalin's demands it was essential to gain the support – or at least the reluctant approval of Washington.

In the subsequent memorandum Warner dealt exclusively with Stalin's request for immediate British recognition of the Soviet claims to the 1941 frontiers with Finland, the Baltic States, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. It was believed that the Soviet Government regarded the question as a 'test of our real intention to cooperate as allies', and, should His Majesty's Government find it impossible to meet Stalin in that regard, Warner noted that intimate consultation and collaboration with the Soviets would subsequently be confined to matters relating to Anglo-American aid to the USSR; military and political matters would thus be excluded from any future discussions. Should such a situation arise, he predicted that the British Government would neither be able to engage in any useful discussions with the Soviets nor receive help if it was needed. In essence, to refuse to recognize the Soviet claims would make any real Anglo-Soviet collaboration highly unlikely. In response to critics of Soviet intentions, particularly in relation to their adherence to the Atlantic Charter, Warner acknowledged that 'it is true that the Russian claims in our eyes seem difficult to reconcile with the first three clauses of the Atlantic Charter', yet one could credibly argue the Soviet point of view. Warner noted that the first clause of the Charter would create no conflict between the Anglo-American and Soviet standpoints. Stalin could argue that the Soviet Union was in possession of the territory in question when the Germans launched their attack. With regard to the second and third clauses, the Soviets had already claimed during Eden's visit that the Baltic States formed part of the USSR according to the Soviet constitution on the basis of the elections that had

followed the annexation.⁸²⁷ Warner admitted that ‘while we find it hard to take this statement at face value, one can hardly use this argument with the Russians’. The only way in which Warner could see a solution to the issue was if Stalin would ‘agree to the recognition of their claims being subject to an expression of the will of the inhabitants of the territories in question’. Furthermore, he warned that the authorities in London would not be able to impose their will once the war had been won. Should the Soviets emerge victorious from the conflict, they would be able to establish the frontiers in question and, once the territories were under Soviet control, ‘we shall certainly not be able to turn them out’. The concluding paragraph neatly summed up the predicament: ‘On the grounds of security against a revived Germany, the Russians undoubtedly have a strong case; and, in so far as their claims in regard to Finland and the Baltic States are concerned, it is clearly in the general interest that the Russians should be in a stronger position on the Baltic.’⁸²⁸

Upon reading this memorandum, Churchill reprimanded Eden. The Prime Minister bluntly reminded the Foreign Secretary: ‘We have never recognised the 1941 frontiers of Russia except *de facto*. They were acquired by acts of aggression in shameful collusion with Hitler.’⁸²⁹ Furthermore, to transfer the peoples of the Baltic States, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina against their will to the Soviet Union would be contrary to the founding principles of the Atlantic Charter. Churchill proceeded to dismiss the issue off-hand, declaring that ‘there can be no question of settling frontiers until the Peace Conference’. As for Eden’s belief that the question of frontiers was regarded by Stalin as the ‘acid test of our sincerity’, Churchill declared that British sincerity could be illustrated through the maintenance of the

⁸²⁷ NA, FO371/ 32874/ N108/ 5/ 38, (Draft) memorandum for the US Ambassador, 4 January 1942.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., Churchill to Eden, 8 January 1942.

principles of the Atlantic Charter.⁸³⁰ In spite of the uniform agreement of Warner, Sargent, Cadogan and Eden, Churchill wholly rejected the advice tendered by the Foreign Office.

In the aftermath of Eden's visit to Moscow Cripps once again complained about the uncooperative behaviour of the Soviet Government. He believed that this was the result of Eden's refusal to agree immediately to Stalin's requests for the recognition of the USSR's 1941 frontiers. Stalin's behaviour would have come as no surprise to those in London, yet his attitude remains somewhat difficult to understand. Stalin had agreed that Eden should consult His Majesty's Government and the Dominions, and had suggested that the signature of an Anglo-Soviet agreement ought to be postponed with a view to signing a treaty at a later date. Unfortunately, Eden's initial optimism upon his return to London appeared to have been misplaced. This optimism was the result of Stalin's statement in their final interview during which he had announced that Eden's visit had helped to dispel the mutual mistrust that had plagued the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Consequently Eden believed that 'no doubt... the conversations were worth the effort and the time taken up by the journey'.⁸³¹

In light of Stalin's refusal to cooperate with the British Missions in Moscow, Cripps had suggested that London ought to delay responding to the most recent Soviet request for information. Warner believed that there would be an advantage to such an approach, unless his colleagues believed that to do so would directly hamper Soviet operations against the Germans. Rather than informing Stalin that information would be exchanged on a *quid pro quo* basis, Warner suggested that Cripps should seek to

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

trade information with the Soviets. Should that prove unsuccessful, the delivery of British information would be delayed as a consequence.⁸³²

Warner's suggestion generated discussion within both the Foreign Office and the J.I.C. Sargent fully endorsed Warner's suggestion whilst Cavendish-Bentinck suggested an alternative approach. He agreed with Air Vice Marshal Medhurst who had recently declared that he was 'opposed to a policy of bartering information with the Russians'.⁸³³ He advised that one must take the Soviets as one found them. If they required information that could help them defeat the 'Huns', then Britain must oblige. Air Vice Marshal Collier had thus been instructed to give information to the Soviets 'without any instructions to attempt to barter'.⁸³⁴ Medhurst's instruction confounded Sargent. He could not believe that Medhurst was 'in favour of a self-denying ordinance by which we abstain from asking for information from the Russians which we want to obtain'.⁸³⁵ Warner's minute had sparked a flurry of activity, with both Cavendish-Bentinck and Sargent composing two minutes in one day. Following Sargent's criticism of Medhurst's instructions, the J.I.C. was informed that a further request had been submitted by the Soviets for British intelligence on the present order of battle of the German air force on the eastern front. Consequently, Air Vice Marshal Collier had been told not to bargain with the Soviets but that he should simply make it clear that it was 'high time that we received from them some of the information for which we have repeatedly asked'.⁸³⁶ Cavendish-Bentinck believed that the outlook was more hopeful. The Soviets had told the British Mission that they had recently acted upon information supplied by Great Britain. The Soviets consequently attacked four aerodromes containing concentrations of German aircraft.

⁸³² NA, FO371/ 32897/ N495/ 23/ 38, minute by Warner, 27 January 1942.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, minute by Sargent, 28 January 1942, minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 28 January 1942.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 28 January 1942.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, minute by Sargent, 28 January 1942.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 28 January 1942.

In both cases the attacks had been successful, and the successful outcome had, in the opinion of the J.I.C., illustrated the fact that the Soviets had valued the British intelligence. Moreover, it was felt that the intelligence directly contributed to Soviet successes against Germany.⁸³⁷ Warner had the final say in the discussion. The following day he reminded Cavendish-Bentinck that his suggestion had been made subject to the condition that the British should not withhold information if it would hamper Soviet operations against Germany. Although Air Vice Marshal Medhurst had thought that withholding information would further tarnish Anglo-Soviet collaboration, Warner urged that the situation should remain under constant review. At that time the Soviets were ‘getting everything for nothing’; it was obviously ‘not a good thing that even our most active ally treats us with contempt’.⁸³⁸

It was at this juncture that Cripps left his post and returned to London. On 14 January, Lacy Baggallay wrote to Eden and praised the work of Sir Stafford Cripps during his time as ambassador in Moscow. Baggallay wished to express to the Foreign Secretary ‘the regret that I and others feel who have served under him [Cripps] feel at the departure of one to whom we are indebted for constant kindness and consideration’. Members of the diplomatic corps in Moscow felt as if a ‘bulwark’ had been removed. Cripps was regarded as a man of ‘strong personality’ who had a genuine interest in the official and personal affairs of the Soviet officials he came into contact with. Furthermore, Cripps would always do what he could ‘to help in the face of the often incalculable moves of the Government to which they were accredited’. In Baggallay’s opinion, although ‘diplomatic worlds may change quickly ... I think Sir Stafford’s appointment will long be remembered in this post’.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., minute by Warner, 29 January 1942.

⁸³⁹ NA, FO371/ 32941/ N1234/ 188/ 38, Baggallay to Eden, 14 January 1942.

In his farewell message to the Soviet people on 21 January, Cripps praised the Soviet resolve in defeating the Germans.⁸⁴⁰ In spite of Cripps' words of praise, the manner his departure from the Soviet Union was not befitting a man who had worked in earnest to improve Anglo-Soviet relations. There was no fond farewell for the ambassador. A possible explanation for this was Eden's refusal to acquiesce in the Soviet demands over the 1941 frontiers. Whatever the motivation behind the treatment of Cripps upon his departure, it caused a good deal of indignation in Whitehall. Sargent suggested to Cripps that he ought to put on record the details of his 'ungracious treatment by the Soviet authorities'.

Sargent believed that the behaviour of the Kremlin towards Cripps was symptomatic of the present Soviet attitude towards Britain which in turn supported the views that he had expressed to Churchill and Eden about the 'great importance of meeting Stalin's demand for recognition of his present frontier claims in the West'.⁸⁴¹ Geoffrey Wilson, the Third Secretary at the British Embassy in Moscow, noted not merely that Stalin's failure to see Cripps or even to reply to the ambassador's request for a farewell interview was in itself strange, remarking that 'even in the worst days of 1940-41, requests for interviews always elicited replies of some sort'.⁸⁴² Dew remarked that although it was not unusual for the Soviets to be discourteous, one would not expect such behaviour amongst allies, whilst Cadogan believed that 'this is so bad ... it must have been deliberate'.⁸⁴³

In spite of these examples of Soviet petulance, Eden was unrelenting in his belief that the British Government ought to grant Stalin's demand over his 1941 frontiers. On 28 February he composed a memorandum simply entitled 'Policy

⁸⁴⁰ NA, FO371/ 32875/ N456/ 5/ 38, Cripps to FO, 21 January 1942.

⁸⁴¹ NA, FO371/ 32941/ N697/ 188/ 38, minute to Sargent, 30 January 1942.

⁸⁴² NA, FO371/ 32941/ N698/ 188/ 38, minute by Wilson, 6 February 1942.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*, minute by Dew, 7 February 1942, minute by Cadogan, 12 February 1942.

towards Russia'. Since his conversations with Stalin in Moscow, the Foreign Secretary had been contemplating two key problems facing the British Government. In the first instance, Eden was concerned about post-war cooperation. He was also concerned with Stalin's demand for the recognition of the Soviet Union's 1941 frontiers. Taking the assumption that Germany would be defeated and that France would be militarily weak at the end of the war, Eden noted that there would be no counterweight to the USSR in Europe. Continued cooperation with the USSR was thus necessary. If the British did not attain an understanding with the Soviets, Stalin could be tempted to conclude a separate peace with Germany.⁸⁴⁴

Eden proceeded to examine further reasons to maintain the Anglo-Soviet relationship. For the Foreign Secretary, an understanding with Soviet Russia would secure the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe and the British could hope to temporize Soviet behaviour, whilst militarily encircling the *Wehrmacht*. In the event of the Red Army defeating Germany, Eden predicted that 'Russian prestige will be so great that the establishment of Communist Government's in the majority of European countries will be greatly facilitated'. He also believed that the Soviet Government would undoubtedly work towards such a goal. In the event of that happening, Moscow would not be inclined towards cooperation with London or Washington. If, on the other hand, the Soviet Union emerged from the war thoroughly exhausted, Stalin would need Anglo-American assistance in the mammoth task of post-war reconstruction. Thus, the Soviet Government would be compelled to follow, albeit temporarily, a more conciliatory policy towards Britain and the United States. In that event, His Majesty's Government would not need to make concessions

⁸⁴⁴ NA, FO371/ 32875/ N563/ 5/ 38, memorandum by Eden, 28 February 1942.

to the Soviet Union over the 1941 frontiers, as the Soviets would be dependent on Anglo-American aid.⁸⁴⁵

Eden acknowledged that it would be difficult to harmonise day-to-day Anglo-Soviet cooperation with Anglo-American cooperation as Soviet policy was ‘amoral’, whilst American policy was ‘exaggeratedly moral’. In order to garner the support of both the Government of the United States and the American public, it would be necessary to draw people’s attention to the ‘realities of the war’. German aggression had united Britain and the USSR against a common foe. Eden acknowledged that there was a fundamental problem in that the frontier question was wholly in conflict with the principles laid down in the Atlantic Charter. In spite of understandable misgivings within the United States Government, Eden believed that superficially at least the frontiers demand appeared very reasonable. From a strategic point of view it could have been in Britain’s interest for the USSR to be established once again on the Baltic in order to rival German naval influence in the region. On the other hand, he noted that ‘the arguments in favour of acceding to M. Stalin’s demand would be overwhelming if it were not for the serious difficulty created by the Atlantic Charter and opposition in the USA to anything that would appear to sacrifice the freedom of independent nations’. In an attempt to illustrate his ability to examine the problem in its entirety and not merely to state the reasons as to why Anglo-Soviet collaboration was desirable, Eden asserted that ultimately Anglo-American cooperation was more indispensable and more ‘natural’ as it rested on ‘broader and older foundations than Anglo-Russian cooperation’. On the other hand, Eden was eager to avoid adopting a policy that would intensify Stalin’s existing suspicion that Britain was ultimately

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

aiming to bring about an Anglo-American peace ‘in which Russian interests would be thwarted or ignored’. Eden thus advocated tripartite discussions.⁸⁴⁶

Eden’s thought-provoking memorandum resulted in the composition of a lengthy minute by Sargent. Sargent’s paper explored the impact of the Nazi-Soviet war on the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Sargent noted that the ‘orthodox view’ within Great Britain was that the German army would be stabilized on a European line in order to rest and regroup and that in the spring there would be a renewed German offensive with a view to reaching the Caucasus. Whilst the outcome of the forthcoming offensive could not be predicted, it would gain Britain and America valuable time within which they could improve their position and develop plans for an eventual re-entry into Europe. Sargent believed that such an outcome was dependent upon the German army being able to stabilize in time whilst still in occupation of substantial tracts of Soviet territory. The picture would be radically changed if the Red Army were able to maintain its present pressure until the spring and force the Germans out of all the territories that they had conquered since June 1941. Although Sargent doubted whether the Soviets would emerge from the war in such a dominant position, he believed that it was necessary to examine the political repercussions that could ensue in the event of such wide-ranging Soviet successes.⁸⁴⁷

Sargent noted that the Germans would be fully alive to the fact that they had launched Operation *Barbarossa* too late in 1941. As such, Hitler would launch the new offensive much earlier. Soviet pressure could potentially overwhelm the *Wehrmacht*; it was thus possible that the Germans might abandon the planned offensive altogether. Should the Germans retreat, the Soviets would no longer be fighting for the survival of the USSR. Instead they would be fighting to acquire the

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁷ NA, FO371/ 32905/ N885/ 30/ 38, minute by Sargent, 5 February 1942.

territory lost since June 1941. Thus, the Nazi-Soviet relationship would be radically altered and the policies of both the German and Soviet Governments might in consequence undergo far-reaching changes. It was not beyond the realms of possibility that in that instance the Soviets would combine their military operations against German territory with a political offensive and 'set about to create a series of autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics in different parts of Germany'. In that eventuality, the Soviet Government would have fulfilled both its ideological and military object against their Nazi invaders.⁸⁴⁸

If, however, the German offensive resulted in a deadlock, it was possible that Stalin would seek a separate peace. In that case, Sargent believed that 'both dictators would realize that it would only be a truce until one or other was ready to renew the struggle' and it would be Stalin who would benefit from the situation. This would allow the Soviets to watch from the side lines as Germany, Great Britain and the United States exhausted themselves. The termination of the war in such a way would be highly detrimental to British interests. In effect, the Soviets would emerge from the conflict in a position whereby the European continent would be dominated by the Soviet Union. The Kremlin would control the peace negotiations as a result. To avoid that rather terrifying possibility, Sargent advised that London ought to improve Anglo-Soviet relations while the conditions were still 'easy'.⁸⁴⁹

The central conclusion drawn by Sargent in his paper indicated that he did not advocate Great Britain offering Stalin one-sided surrenders and sacrifices. He believed that it was essential that the British Government negotiate a Treaty of Alliance to cover not only the war but the peace-making and the post-war reconstruction. To that end, Sargent declared that 'it is obvious that we shall have to

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

make concessions not only on the Baltic issue but probably in other matters'.⁸⁵⁰ In order to prepare Anglo-Soviet relations for the more difficult period ahead, such concessions would be worthwhile, but only if they were balanced by corresponding concessions from Stalin. As such, Anglo-Soviet relations would rest upon strong foundations that could be cultivated in the post-war era. Furthermore, to grant concessions in 1941 when Soviet strength was waning was an infinitely more desirable option. Should the British Government wait until the end of the war, it was possible that by that time the Soviets could be in a stronger position. The authorities in London were therefore faced with the rather irksome reality: they simply could not gamble on the hope that the Soviets would be so weakened by the end of the war that the peace would be an Anglo-American affair. Cadogan entirely agreed that it would be wise to grant concessions, no matter how unappealing that prospect might be.⁸⁵¹

Eden was unshakeable in his belief that an Anglo-Soviet alliance was the best course for His Majesty's Government. On 10 February he wrote to Halifax outlining his point of view and explaining his reasons for working towards a *rapprochement* between London and Moscow. Since his return from Moscow in December, one overwhelming preoccupation for the Foreign Secretary had been a consideration of Stalin's demands for recognition of his 1941 frontiers in Finland, the Baltic States and Roumania. Eden was fully alive as to why Washington would object to this demand as it was contrary to the principles of the Atlantic Charter. In spite of this understandable hesitancy, Eden reiterated his familiar statement that, although the frontier demand was an 'awkward one to satisfy', he believed it to be a test of British sincerity in the eyes of the Soviets. To refuse it would reinforce in Stalin's mind the idea that the British were not sincere in their desire for cooperation with the Soviet

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 7 February 1942.

Union either during or after the war. Eden believed that Stalin's fear was 'the fruit of a long period of suspicion and misunderstanding'.

Eden informed Halifax that he had relayed Washington's standpoint on the frontier question to Stalin during his discussions in Moscow in December, with the intimation that this should be relayed to the Americans. However, it does not appear that during his visit to Moscow Eden put the American objections across too strongly. Indeed, one could argue that Eden was somewhat sympathetic to Stalin's argument that Hitler had 'forced him into a war by an unjustified aggression' and that as such the Soviet Union was in possession of the disputed territories. In response to Eden's lacklustre protestations that the proposed annexation would be contrary to the principles of the Atlantic Charter, Stalin had pointed out that following the Soviet absorption of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the ensuing plebiscites had legalized the Soviet move; as such the principles of the Charter had not been contradicted, an argument that Eden appeared willing to accept. Eden agreed with Cripps that to protest and haggle with Stalin over the issue would only serve to increase his suspicions. Rather than merely rejecting the demand over the 1941 frontiers, Eden suggested telling Stalin that while he could not agree at that time to the restoration of the 1941 frontiers, Great Britain and the United States could 'immediately give assurances that on grounds of Soviet security we would support, when the time comes, a demand by the Soviet Government to establish Soviet bases in territories contiguous to Russia, and especially on the Baltic and Black Sea from which her security might be threatened'.

Eden argued that should the Soviet Government accept such assurances, it would not preclude them from putting forward at the peace conference their claim to

absorb the Baltic States, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and parts of Finland.⁸⁵² It is evident from Eden's communication to Halifax not only that he completely understood the justifications put forward by Stalin but that he was also prepared to make questionable concessions in order to bring about an understanding with Moscow. Eden was, however, alive to the fact that Great Britain could not make any concessions to Stalin without requiring a suitable *quid pro quo*. To that end, Eden suggested that His Majesty's Government make two demands. Firstly, it should be stipulated that the Soviet Union would not interfere in the internal affairs of other peoples. Secondly, post-war collaboration between the British, American and Soviet Governments was to be based on the principle that none of the Powers would seek territorial aggrandizement or interference in the sovereignty of any nation.

Eden had believed that there was a 'powerful reason for establishing close relations with Russia' whilst her policy was 'still in a fluid state' as His Majesty's Government would be able to 'exercise as much influence as possible on her future course of action'. Eden's central argument was clear. Much like Sargent, Eden believed it unwise to gamble on the USSR emerging from the war in a weakened state. Rather, Eden maintained that Britain would need to act quickly to secure the post-war collaboration of the Soviet Government.⁸⁵³ Eden reiterated his belief that Stalin was suspicious that close Anglo-American collaboration would be pursued at the expense of Soviet interests and that during the peace negotiations those interests would be largely ignored. Hence, it was necessary to show Stalin that Great Britain desired tripartite consultations with the Soviet Union.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵² NA, FO371/ 32876/ N1093/ 5/ 38, memorandum by Eden, "Policy towards Russia", W.P.(41)96, 24 February 1942. Eden's paper was based upon his telegram to Halifax on 10 February 1942.

⁸⁵³ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

For Dew the exclusion of the Soviets from newly formed organizations such as the Raw Material Board was contributing to Stalin's distrust of Great Britain. To compound the difficulties in achieving an Anglo-Soviet alliance, following the signature in Moscow of the Beaverbrook-Harriman protocol on 2 October, Dew believed that relatively ineffective machinery had been set up in Moscow to deal with the British military and civil supplies to the Soviet Union. He was thus inclined to think that the combination of the exclusion of the Soviets from the Raw Materials Board and the failure of Great Britain to supply the Soviet Union had effectively hindered cooperation with the Soviets. From a purely practical point of view, Dew believed it to be wise for the Soviets to be brought into the various controlling organizations 'on terms of equality'. If they saw themselves excluded from any Allied council of common war strategy as well as from the organizations that dealt with the pooling of supplies, Dew argued that 'we shall certainly not be doing the best to bring about close cooperation between ourselves, the Russians and the Americans during the war and still more during the post-war period'.⁸⁵⁵

The issue of Anglo-Soviet collaboration and how it could be achieved continued to be a greatly debated topic within the Northern Department. Dew stressed the importance of convincing Stalin of British sincerity for a more collaborative relationship and believed that treating the Soviets on the basis of equality was key, even in the face of the mounting difficulties facing the British officials in the Soviet Union. On 15 February Lacy Baggallay complained that there was a distinct lack of cooperation with the Soviets in the economic sphere, yet the root cause of the problem was undoubtedly political. He viewed the Soviet Government as naturally suspicious of His Majesty's Government. As a

⁸⁵⁵ NA, FO371/ 32862/ N1227/ 1/ 38, minute by Dew, 15 February 1942.

consequence, the Kremlin was only interested in the British as allies if they could assist Soviet victory in the war and ensure that Soviet security interests were considered during the peace negotiations. On both accounts the Soviets were suspicious. The fact that no British forces had been sent to the Eastern Front had made the Soviets doubt the British desire to furnish practical assistance. Material aid was important but not decisive. Baggallay noted that the Soviets had seemingly accepted the explanations politely, yet they were 'not interested in the reasons or motives'. British refusals to bow to Stalin's demands over his 1941 frontiers accentuated Soviet suspicions to 'an unbelievable degree'. That fact alone had made any measure of cooperation with the Soviets incredibly difficult to achieve, and, according to Baggallay, although the Soviets were no different from other people in that they would only enter into a reciprocal relationship, the Soviets were 'more thorough and consistent in their egotism and they do not realize that generosity is sometimes the best policy'.⁸⁵⁶

Dew believed that Baggallay's analysis of the Soviet attitude and policy was an accurate account of the current state of Anglo-Soviet relations, and was hopeful that British attempts to relieve Soviet suspicions would prove to be successful. He acknowledged that the chance of reducing Soviet apprehension was slim and that those who worked towards an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* 'may suffer disillusionment and annoyance by so doing'. However, Dew did not accept Baggallay's belief that Stalin would not necessarily become more difficult to deal with should Britain maintain its position with regard to his territorial demands. That would only apply over matters of secondary importance. Dew believed that the

⁸⁵⁶ NA, FO371/ 32897/ N841/ 23/ 38, Baggallay to FO, 11 February 1942.

refusal to accept the territorial claims would certainly increase animosity between Stalin and members of the British Embassy in Moscow.⁸⁵⁷

Indeed, Baggallay's telegram prompted Warner to compose a detailed and incredibly important paper that tackled the question of tactics, whilst simultaneously illuminating his position in the matter.⁸⁵⁸ He believed that a consensus should be reached within the British Government with regard to the best tactics for dealing with the Soviets. Once a consensus was reached, according to Warner, all British Departments and Missions which had direct contact with the Soviets should uniformly adhere to the same tactics. Warner believed that British tactics thus far had been wrong and had 'given the Russians a completely wrong impression of ourselves'.⁸⁵⁹

In order to place Anglo-Soviet relations on a more equal footing, Warner advocated that British officials should moderate their adulation of the Soviet war effort and not offer assistance to them when they had not asked for it. Once the Soviets requested British aid, they should receive a straight answer 'based on reasonable and fully explained grounds'. There was not a hint of emotion or exaggeration in Warner's memorandum. Indeed, should the British feel that they were not getting a satisfactory deal from the Soviets, Warner believed that instead of showing displeasure through complaints or threats – an oft-used tactic adopted by Sir Stafford Cripps during his tenure as ambassador – the British ought not to respond nor make a fuss. Rather than treating the Soviets as if they were something peculiar, Warner advised that they be 'treated in a normal way and not cajoled nor treated to fine complementary phrases'. To achieve true collaboration with the Soviets, His Majesty's Government had to take the Kremlin into its full confidence. Stalin must be told what Britain could and could not do. In this way there would be a reasonable

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., minute by Dew, 15 February 1942.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., minute by Warner, 16 February 1942.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

and collaborative basis of exploration of issues as and when they arose. As Martin Folly has illustrated: ‘The key to understanding the Foreign Office approach was that firmness was always to be associated with frankness, which centred on an open exchange of views, stating one’s interest without fear that doing so would stymie cooperation.’⁸⁶⁰

Furthermore, Warner was mindful not to treat the Soviets as if they belonged to a ““peculiar” category of allies’. Instead, it was necessary for His Majesty’s Government to consult the Kremlin ‘on [the] day-to-day matters concerning the wider conduct of war and peace’. Warner was ‘perfectly aware that this would be a counsel of perfection’ and consultation on ‘many of these wider matters would be difficult, if not impossible’.⁸⁶¹ Cadogan noted with some point that it was the Soviets who had made such collaboration difficult.⁸⁶² Nevertheless, Warner believed that the British ought to do all they could to overcome such difficulties. At the very least, those who had to deal with the Soviet Government ought to try and limit the bad effect of neither consulting the Soviets nor keeping them informed of aspects of British policy. Should the British Government continue to keep the Soviets in the dark, fruitful collaboration would be impossible.

The setting up of the Anglo-American supply and production machinery was an example of London and Washington acting in concert without any consideration of the Soviets. Warner fully believed that Stalin would have been aggrieved as the matter had been dealt with as a purely Anglo-American concern, fuelling the belief that the war was primarily an Anglo-American concern which would inevitably lead

⁸⁶⁰ Martin Folly, ‘“A Long, Slow and Painful Road”: The Anglo-American Alliance and the Issue of Co-operation with the USSR from Tehran to D-Day’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 23, 3 (2012), 471-491 (p.478).

⁸⁶¹ NA, FO371/ 32897/ N841/ 23/ 38, minute by Warner, 16 February 1942.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, comment by Cadogan, 28 February 1942.

to an Anglo-American peace.⁸⁶³ Warner's concerns were very much in line with those raised by Dew two days earlier when he had warned that the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Raw Materials Board would negatively impact upon Anglo-Soviet relations. Although there were numerous reasons against bringing the Soviets into the fold, Warner believed that it was necessary for His Majesty's Government to do just that.⁸⁶⁴

The response within the Foreign Office to Warner's recommendation that all British Departments must adopt an agreed doctrine on how to deal with the Soviets was largely positive. William Strang was in agreement with the conclusions drawn by Warner. For Strang, it was 'essential to treat the Russians as though we thought that they were reasonable human beings', in spite of the abundant evidence to the contrary. Stalin, Strang continued, was 'dominated by an almost insane suspicion' and His Majesty's Government had to respond accordingly. British officials had to treat the Soviets with infinite patience whilst avoiding an indication of distrust. Furthermore, it was essential to avoid either threats or demonstrations of undue adulation in any dealings with the Soviets. Experience had shown that either approach would produce a negative response. For Strang, the Soviets had been pursuing their own interests and had expected the British to do the same. It was only through British military successes that the Soviet Government would respect Britain. In Strang's eyes, the 'rather hysterical magnification of their [Soviet] successes by our press and public' had 'aroused in them something akin to contempt'.⁸⁶⁵

At the end of February Sargent noted that Warner's advice deserved further investigation, yet doubted whether the British would be able to reach a final agreed doctrine in that way. What was possible, however, was for His Majesty's

⁸⁶³ Ibid., minute by Warner, 17 February 1942.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., minute by Strang, 20 February 1942.

Government to lay down certain rules as to how not to treat the Soviets. For example, Sargent believed that the British Government were 'too prone to think that as we have nothing tangible to offer the Soviet Government' they could 'make up for the deficiency by frequent administrations of flattery and congratulations in the form of messages and telegrams'.⁸⁶⁶ To be sure, such expressions of praise had their uses, but, in Sargent's opinion, only when applied in addition to definite actions on the part of the British authorities. Taken in isolation, according to Sargent, that treatment was 'merely a form of appeasement' and would be open to the same objections raised in response to Britain's appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s. The Permanent Under-Secretary, whilst not objecting to the line adopted by both Warner and Sargent, drew attention to a point they had overlooked. Cadogan noted that Warner and Sargent had written as if the British Government 'had made no attempt to consult with the Russians or treat them as normal allies'. Cadogan was clearly exasperated, and argued that 'we have done so, again and again'.⁸⁶⁷

Thus, the discussion within the Foreign Office focused on ways and means of bringing about an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*. In spite of the large measure of agreement within Whitehall over this matter, it was essential to gain the approval of the American Government, a point not lost on the Foreign Secretary. On 21 February Halifax responded to Eden's communication of 10 February in which the latter had expressed his keen desire to come to terms with Stalin, even over the latter's frontier demands. Following a conversation with Welles, it was clear to Halifax that Roosevelt would not consent to any agreement over frontiers at that time. During the course of his conversation with Welles, Halifax was informed that the President had felt that it was premature to attempt a detailed treatment of the problem of frontiers.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., minute by Sargent, 28 February 1942.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 28 February 1942. Emphasis in original.

Rather than leaving the issues in the hands of Great Britain, Roosevelt instead wished to negotiate directly with Stalin. The President would impress upon Stalin the fact that whilst he fully appreciated his claim for security he could not take a final decision on the matter at that time. Halifax suspected that Welles had influenced the President's attitude, as Welles had been 'much impressed with the policy of the Atlantic Charter and of the effect on US public opinion'.⁸⁶⁸

Dew expressed his disappointment the following day. He noted that in adopting their attitude towards Stalin's territorial claims, the authorities in London had considered what would prove best in the long run, which was most certainly attaining an agreement with Moscow.⁸⁶⁹ The attitude of America was creating a large barrier towards *rapprochement*. Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, shared Dew's disappointment. In a conversation with the Foreign Secretary on 26 February, he highlighted the fact that his Government had not asked the Americans to sign an agreement with the Kremlin. Rather, the Soviets were 'only asking them to acquiesce in our [Great Britain's] signature'. Eden agreed that that was no doubt true in so far as the Soviet Government was concerned, yet the British position was equally clear. Great Britain was committed to the United States Government and had agreed not to enter into any engagements that would affect the sovereignty of any nation in the post-war organization of Europe. However, Eden expressed his fear that Britain's relationship with the USSR had stagnated. The Foreign Secretary feared that as it had been eight weeks since he returned from Moscow, 'the goodwill that had been created by my visit was being dissipated'. A further period of long delay would only serve to exacerbate Soviet fears of British insincerity.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁸ NA, FO371/ 32876/ N1025/ 5/ 38, Halifax to FO, 21 February 1942.

⁸⁶⁹ NA, FO371/ 32876/ N1023/ 5/ 38, minute by Dew, 22 February 1942.

⁸⁷⁰ NA, FO371/ 32876/ N1115/ 5/ 38, Eden to Baggallay, 26 February 1942. Litvinov reappeared on the political stage in time for Eden's visit to Moscow in December 1941.

Evidently, the long delay had negatively impacted upon Soviet opinions of British sincerity. On 18 December, during the course of his conversation with Eden, Litvinov had 'spoken strongly on the necessity after the war of the United States, Russia and Great Britain remaining absolutely together, since it was impossible to expect the German mentality to change for at least a generation'.⁸⁷¹ By February 1942 Litvinov was far less sympathetic towards Anglo-American justifications for military inaction in the USSR. On 13 February, during an interview with the President, Litvinov had raised the second front issue, much to the dismay of both Dew and Warner. Dew was convinced that Litvinov had acted upon instructions from his political masters, whilst Warner believed that the ambassador had not been kept completely informed. Warner had not seen any other signs that Stalin no longer accepted the view that a second front against the Germans – other than in Libya – was impracticable for the British.⁸⁷² Eden agreed. Stalin had 'certainly understood well enough when we were in Moscow that a second front was not in our power'.⁸⁷³ Thus, despite of the statements made by Litvinov in December 1941 insisting on a continuation of the current state of unity between the three Powers, Sargent remained critical of the former Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Sargent noted that although Litvinov had been 'allowed back into favour', he was 'only on probation'. As a result, Sargent predicted that Litvinov would 'feel it necessary to go out of his way to demonstrate that he has broken entirely with his pro-British past' and would find it advisable to 'model himself on Molotov's earlier style of brutal frankness as regards the inefficiency and unreliability of the Soviets' allies, particularly Great Britain'. The only way in which Sargent could foresee a change in Litvinov's attitude towards the allies, and particularly towards Great Britain, would come as a result of a change

⁸⁷¹ NA, FO181/962/8, Eden to Moscow and Kuibyshev, 19 December 1942.

⁸⁷² NA, FO371/32876/N897/5/38, minutes by Dew and Warner, 15 February 1942.

⁸⁷³ NA, FO371/32876/N939/5/38, minute by Eden, 21 February 1942.

in Molotov's attitude in such matters. Consequently, Sargent declared that Litvinov was a 'somewhat contemptible figure'.⁸⁷⁴ Thus, at a time when it was hoped that Anglo-Soviet relations would blossom, the old antipathy towards the Soviet statesmen remained.

Warner believed that a pertinent issue at that juncture was how Hitler viewed the conflict with the USSR and whether a Nazi-Soviet separate peace was likely. It was widely believed in the Foreign Office that the Germans still had the upper hand on the Eastern Front. As such, according to Warner, 'the point surely has been all along whether Hitler is willing and can afford to offer Stalin terms that the latter could accept', a situation not dissimilar to that prior to *Barbarossa*.⁸⁷⁵ In any case, according to Warner, Stalin could not have accepted anything less than the complete evacuation by Germany of all Soviet territory. Warner asked: 'Do we think that Hitler is yet in a mood to offer this?'⁸⁷⁶

He then proceeded to criticize the argument that Stalin had adopted a non-cooperative attitude. On the contrary, Stalin had sought from His Majesty's Government a discussion on war and peace aims, and it had been the British who had refused to discuss such matters at that stage of the war. Warner conceded that Stalin's frontier demands and the renewed propaganda about a second front could certainly be interpreted as Soviet deviousness, but he felt that it could merely be Stalin 'turning the heat on' in order to secure the answer that he required to his so-called 'acid test' of British sincerity. Warner concluded by declaring that he was not unduly disturbed by rumours of a separate peace 'unless it is thought that on military grounds Hitler must offer Stalin the very favourable terms that he alone could accept without

⁸⁷⁴ NA, FO371/ 32918/ N2647/ 50/ 38, minute by Sargent, 23 June 1942.

⁸⁷⁵ See relevant sections in chapter two.

⁸⁷⁶ NA, FO371/ 32876/ N1156/ 5/ 38, minute by Warner, 2 March 1942.

endangering his own position and that of the regime'.⁸⁷⁷ Both the Deputy Under-Secretary and Permanent Under-Secretary agreed with Warner's conclusions.⁸⁷⁸

In the face of growing concerns over a Nazi-Soviet peace, the Foreign Secretary continued to champion the need for Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*. On 2 March Eden sent yet another frantic telegram to Halifax drawing attention to the situation. Eden opened his communication by expressing the fact that he was 'increasingly impressed with [the] great desirability of replying to Stalin's demands in as favourable a manner as possible at [the] earliest moment'.⁸⁷⁹ The Foreign Secretary did not wish to give the impression that Great Britain was 'unduly alarmed' over the separate peace rumours nor did he deny the likelihood that Stalin would accept a peace offer from Hitler should it serve his interests. Although he was not 'unduly alarmed', Eden expressed his keen desire to 'have very early discussions on [the] whole conduct of [the] war in order, if possible, to find out what is on their minds'. Eden was convinced that discussions would be impossible 'until Stalin's demands are got out of the way'. Betraying a hint of desperation, he concluded by highlighting a further argument in favour of a 'speedy settlement'. Should the British Government concede to Stalin's demand, it would give Sir Archibald Clark Kerr the 'maximum chance of good and close relations with the Soviet Government immediately upon his arrival'. It was Eden's hope that following his arrival in the USSR, the new ambassador would 'proceed without delay' towards securing an understanding with Stalin.⁸⁸⁰

Halifax's response to this rather frantic communication dashed the Foreign Secretary's hope of gaining American approval before an agreement was reached with

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., minutes by Sargent and Cadogan, 4 March 1942.

⁸⁷⁹ NA, FO371/ 32877/ N1174/ 5/ 38, Eden to Halifax, 2 March 1942.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

Moscow. During a meeting with Roosevelt and Hopkins, Halifax discovered that the President's position on the frontier question remained unaltered. He informed Eden that the President had continued to feel the 'greatest difficulty' in agreeing to any of the courses proposed by His Majesty's Government, and had 'professed strong conviction that we need not be afraid of Russia quitting the war on this'. Halifax complained that 'in the course of [a] long discussion I was quite unable to shake his main position'.⁸⁸¹ Sargent criticised Halifax for not putting across the main point from the British standpoint. It was not that acquiescence in Stalin's frontier demands would keep the Soviet Union in the war. Rather, it was of 'the first importance at this juncture to get into real contact with the Russians on the conduct of war'. Sargent's second point was critical of the American President himself. In his opinion, the British Government had made it clear that should the President not consent to any of the courses suggested by Britain, 'he should at least stand aside and allow us to exercise our own judgment'.⁸⁸²

Cadogan, on the other hand, was critical of the accusations contained in Sargent's minute. To reach an understanding with Moscow without the consent of America would inevitably produce 'dangerous' results. Furthermore, Cadogan doubted that compliance with Stalin's demands would make any real difference to his conduct during the war; nor would it 'assure his loyal and intimate consultation and cooperation with us'. Indeed, it was more likely that compliance with Stalin's demands would merely lead to others. Consequently, it would be a gamble to attempt to gain Soviet friendship at the expense of American friendship: 'Rightly or wrongly

⁸⁸¹ NA, FO371/ 32877/ N1279/ 5/ 38, Halifax to Eden, 9 March 1942.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, minute by Sargent, 9 March 1942.

we decided to consult the United States ... and I should take it as axiomatic that we can only go ahead on lines agreed with them'.⁸⁸³

Predictably, Eden's response was emphatic:

You have reported that President holds firm conviction that Russia would not quit war on this matter. This leads us to fear that President does not grasp the real reason for the importance we attach to giving Stalin satisfactory answer. We regard it of the highest importance at this stage of this war to leave nothing undone which may enable us to get into real contact with Stalin, to exchange ideas freely on all subjects connected with the conduct of the war and thus give ourselves maximum chance of securing that Soviet Government should pay some attention to our views and those of the United States Government.⁸⁸⁴

For Eden, it was 'deplorable' that there had been no significant consultation with Moscow at that juncture in the war. He expressed his belief that it was the 'height of unwisdom that we should deprive ourselves of [the] chance of establishing such contacts by refusing to admit Stalin's claim to the Baltic States, implementation of which we shall be quite unable to prevent, as President recognises'. The British Foreign Secretary had abandoned the Baltic States in order to achieve an Anglo-Soviet alliance, branding it as a logical concession for His Majesty's Government. Eden concluded by declaring that should the British Government not grant concessions to the Soviets and Anglo-Soviet relations deteriorate further, 'we shall always reproach ourselves for not having done all we could while there was still time'.⁸⁸⁵

To that end, Warner wrote a paper on behalf of the Foreign Secretary and distributed it throughout the Foreign Office. In the paper Warner noted that the

⁸⁸³ Ibid., minute by Cadogan, 10 March 1942.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., Eden to Halifax, 10 March 1942.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid.

Cabinet had called for a greater measure of cooperation with Soviet Russia. The Cabinet had decided that ‘in order to meet Soviet suspicions and guard as far as may be possible against the risk of Russia following an entirely independent policy, [we] wish to work for tripartite consultations with the Soviet Government and to reach tripartite solutions’.⁸⁸⁶ Warner’s memorandum continued to explore the current Soviet attitude towards the Anglo-Saxon Powers. It had long been acknowledged that Moscow was suspicious of Britain and America working together in order to bring about an Anglo-American peace. The Soviet Union was only useful in contributing to the defeat of a common foe. Warner neatly summed up the British fear: ‘Unless every effort is made to break down this suspicion, the Russians are likely to pursue entirely selfish aims, both during and after the war’.⁸⁸⁷

It was hoped that tripartite collaboration would be the decisive factor in the war. Once again it was hoped that increased cooperation in the economic sphere would impact upon the political relations between London and Moscow. In order to strengthen Anglo-Soviet economic ties, there needed to be tripartite consultation in the sphere of supply and production. Up to that point, consultation over issues of supply and shipping had been confined to Beaverbrook and Harriman’s discussions with Stalin in September 1941 which resulted in the Anglo-Soviet Protocol of 2 October. As the Protocol was due to expire at the end of June 1942 it was suggested that a new agreement be negotiated prior to that date. Any future conference was to replicate the Beaverbrook-Harriman conversations in order to plan the common war effort. The final paragraph of Warner’s memorandum clearly illustrated the eagerness of the Cabinet to continue tripartite cooperation in the economic sphere, stating that it would ‘be well to make clear to the Russians that similar conferences would meet as

⁸⁸⁶ NA, FO371/ 32863/ N1544/ 1/ 38, memorandum by Warner, 11 March 1942.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid.

often as necessary to allocate supplies in the light of the general strategic situation, in order to make it clear to them that we were proposing a regular system of consultation to last throughout the war'.⁸⁸⁸

Although Warner's memorandum had illustrated Eden's desire for a greater measure of Anglo-Soviet consultation, Dew highlighted a considerable obstacle to cooperation with Moscow prior to the arrival of the new ambassador to the Soviet Union. Should an interview between Clark Kerr, Molotov and Stalin be arranged upon Clark Kerr's arrival, there was the problem that His Majesty's Government was 'not in a position to report any progress as regards our answer to Stalin's territorial demands'. Therefore, it was essential for the Foreign Office to advise Clark Kerr as to what could be discussed in any interview with the Soviet leaders.⁸⁸⁹

Using Churchill's communication to Stalin of 9 March as a framework for his paper, Dew examined the three possible topics that the British Government was prepared to cover with Stalin. Firstly, there was the issue of Soviet frontiers at the end of the war. Churchill had informed Roosevelt of the British position and had illustrated his desire to conclude an agreement with Stalin. Consequently, any problems arising would be seen as the fault of the Americans. Dew believed that Clark Kerr could make it clear that whilst the British Government was ready to conclude an agreement, they were committed not to sign any such agreement without consulting Washington and the Dominions, as Eden had stated during his visit to Moscow in December. Dew predicted that Stalin would merely say that Britain need only inform the United States and the Dominions of the pending agreement rather than gaining their approval prior to its signature.⁸⁹⁰

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁹ NA, FO371/ 32877/ N1438/ 5/ 38, minute by Dew, 11 March 1942.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid.

The second issue that could be discussed was the question of supplies to the USSR. The Prime Minister stated in his message to Stalin that the supplies promised by Great Britain under the Protocol of 2 October 1941 would continue uninterrupted.⁸⁹¹ As previously mentioned, it was hoped that tripartite consultations would prove successful and that a new agreement would be negotiated prior to the expiration of the existing Protocol. Should these recommendations be approved, it was possible that Clark Kerr would be in a position to suggest a further conference in Moscow for the negotiation of a new agreement.

Finally, Dew predicted that Stalin would wish to discuss war strategy with Clark Kerr. The issue of the second front would undoubtedly be raised. Churchill had promised the resumption of a heavy air offensive against Germany, alongside a British commitment to 'study other measures for taking some of the weight off the German attack on Russia'. Neither Stalin nor Molotov would miss the evasiveness of these assurances. In order to ward off any criticism from the Soviet leadership, which would undoubtedly diminish Clark Kerr's ability to bring about 'good and close relations with the Soviet Government immediately upon his arrival', Dew urged his superiors in Whitehall to provide the ambassador with 'some concrete information on this subject as well as a review of the war situation as we see it today'.⁸⁹²

In March, some two months after Sir Stafford Cripps had departed from Moscow, Clark Kerr arrived in the USSR and assumed his role as ambassador. Dew's paper of 11 March clearly illustrated the lack of progress with regard to Britain's policy towards the Soviet Union during that time. Indeed, during the interim Anglo-Soviet relations had stagnated. Although the Foreign Secretary and his closest advisers agreed about the necessity to acquiesce in Stalin's demands without bartering

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

⁸⁹² Ibid.

or time wasting, no progress had been made. Thus, when Clark Kerr arrived at Kuibyshev on 17 March, the state of Anglo-Soviet relations had not significantly altered since the departure of Cripps.

The relationship between the British and Soviet Missions, however, had deteriorated quite considerably. Prior to Clark Kerr's arrival, General Mason MacFarlane, who was known to be hot-headed and to have a particular dislike of the Soviets, continued to exacerbate the situation through his tempestuous and brusque treatment of the Soviets. On 10 March Dew was informed by MacFarlane of the steady deterioration in his relationship with Panifilov. Dew noted that MacFarlane seemed to have 'enjoyed making the most or the worst of his instructions' from His Majesty's Government and that he simply did not understand – nor would he ever understand – the line that the British Government had wished him to follow with the Soviets.⁸⁹³

Warner's response to MacFarlane's most recent display of poor behaviour was direct. Warner stated: 'I am afraid the General is hopeless and my own belief is that he has done and is doing incalculable harm'. As such, Warner wished to see MacFarlane removed from his post as soon as possible.⁸⁹⁴ Those who advocated the conclusion of an Anglo-Soviet understanding had placed great importance on economic and military cooperation as a means of strengthening Anglo-Soviet political relations. In the absence of an ambassador in the USSR, the smooth running of relations between the Missions was paramount, particularly in light of the Cabinet's indecision as to the concessions that could properly be made to the Soviets. This indecision had led to a political stagnation, which, combined with the deterioration of relations between the various military missions, served to enhance the difficulties

⁸⁹³ NA, FO371/ 32898/ N1294/ 23/ 38, minute by Dew, 10 March 1942.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, minute by Warner, 12 March 1942.

facing the incoming ambassador, thus thwarting Eden's plans for *rapprochement* between London and Moscow.

These plans were also thwarted by the attitude of President Roosevelt. Much to Eden's dismay Roosevelt arranged an interview with Litvinov on 13 March without prior consultation. Evidently, the President had felt that nothing would be gained from delay and had not appreciated the fact that his decision 'was in the highest degree embarrassing' for Great Britain.⁸⁹⁵

Halifax's subsequent report on the Roosevelt-Litvinov conversation would have undoubtedly frustrated not merely Dew and Warner in the Northern Department, but also Sargent and Eden; all of whom were advocating the speedy conclusion of an Anglo-Soviet understanding. Upon receiving Halifax's communication, Dew composed a detailed minute that clearly illustrated his frustration with President Roosevelt, a frustration very much shared by Warner who described Roosevelt's actions as 'lamentable'.⁸⁹⁶ During the course of his conversation with Litvinov, Roosevelt had intimated that the United States was ready to support Stalin's claims to security after the war but that nothing would be done about it prior to the final defeat of Germany. Dew criticised the stance of the United States Government as 'pitifully inadequate' and claimed that the President had aggravated the situation. He clearly would not recognise the Soviet frontier demands during the war, yet refused to indicate if he would do so after the war.⁸⁹⁷ Furthermore, Dew gleaned from Halifax's summary of the interview that there was little hope that the President would ever agree to the incorporation in the Soviet Union of the Baltic States and possibly not even of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina.⁸⁹⁸

⁸⁹⁵ NA, FO371/ 32877/ N1318/ 5/ 38, Halifax to FO, 12 March 1942.

⁸⁹⁶ NA, FO371/ 32877/ N1364/ 5/ 38, minute by Warner, 12 March 1942.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, minute by Dew, 14 March 1942.

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Clearly, the President had not been convinced of the Soviet justification that incorporation was essential for the 'legitimate needs of the Russian people for their security'. Dew correctly stated that the main obstacle to any meaningful cooperation between Great Britain, America and the Soviet Union was the continued mistrust between all of the Powers. The President adopted the stance that he was confident that the USSR and the United States would 'cooperate completely and without any mistrust in the aim of winning the war', yet Stalin had made it clear to London that he did not feel that there could be any measure of real trust and confidence unless there was a common agreement on war aims. For Stalin, the recognition of its 1941 frontiers was paramount. Dew asserted that Roosevelt ought to assure Stalin that should Soviet troops occupy the Baltic States neither Great Britain nor the United States Government would turn them out.⁸⁹⁹

How, then, should His Majesty's Government proceed? Dew had clearly formulated ideas for his superiors in the Foreign Office. As the President had made it abundantly clear that he would refuse to sign any secret or public treaty defining frontiers before the end of the war, Great Britain had been 'forced into the position either of paddling along in the President's wake or of pursuing an independent policy without the support of the United States'. The British were forced into choosing from three possible courses of action. They could await Stalin's reaction to the President's message without taking any further action with the Soviets or the Americans; they could tell Stalin that they felt 'compelled to support the line' that the President took but that they were 'ready to give the fullest assurances about the recognition of Russia's claims to security after the war'. The third possible course was clearly the one advocated by Dew. Dew believed that while Britain awaited Stalin's reply to

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

Roosevelt, they could 'indicate to the Russians that the President has acted on his own and that we will be prepared to continue discussions with them when Stalin's reply is received'. In the likely event of an unsympathetic response from Stalin, the second suggestion of supporting the President's policy had clear drawbacks. Stalin would inevitably believe that he would get no help from his Western allies in his attempt to recover his frontiers as Great Britain 'clearly do not dare to take an independent line and are shackled to the Americans'. Dew begrudgingly accepted that it was advisable at that time to adopt alternative one and let the matter rest for the time being. Dew was scathing of Roosevelt and the 'fearful mess' that he had created.⁹⁰⁰ The Foreign Secretary agreed with Dew's conclusions and was equally critical of Roosevelt, noting that his interview with Litvinov was an example of 'a dismal tale of clumsy diplomacy'. The President had shown no consideration for the British point of view and, as such, had increased the difficulties facing His Majesty's Government.⁹⁰¹ As Eden exclaimed to Clark Kerr, all that was required from Roosevelt was that he should approve, or at least acquiesce, in the proposed Anglo-Soviet Treaty. The President's interview with Litvinov undermined the position of Great Britain and illustrated the distinct lack of unity of opinion between the two Western Powers.

Eden's difficulties were exacerbated following a memorandum composed on 14 March by Mr Donaldson, the Secretary of the Allied Supplies Executive [hereafter A.S.E.], the thrust of which ran contrary to conclusions previously drawn within the Foreign Office. Donaldson's paper was written in response to the memorandum of 11 March in which the Warner had advised that in order to stave off the possibility of Moscow following an entirely independent policy, Stalin must be made aware of Britain's desire to 'work for tripartite consultations with the Soviet Government and

⁹⁰⁰Ibid., minute by Dew, 14 March 1942.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., minute by Eden, 15 March 1942.

to reach tripartite solutions'.⁹⁰² Donaldson criticised this suggestion, which had been approved by the Cabinet. In light of the impending expiration of the 2 October 1941 supply Protocol, Donaldson explored the three courses open to His Majesty's Government. A new conference, as suggested by Warner, could be arranged in which a new Protocol would be agreed. Alternative courses to pursue would be to invite the USSR to participate as a full partner in the Anglo-American machinery for munitions assignment and raw materials allocation, or to invite the USSR to appoint representatives to discuss future Soviet requirements with the Anglo-American Boards. Donaldson argued that the introduction of a new partner would complicate the development of the Anglo-American machinery as it was still in its infancy. To pursue the second course would cause confusion and delay. The choice was thus between tripartite consultations or the appointment of Soviet representatives to the Anglo-American Boards.

For Donaldson, the pertinent consideration was how the British Government viewed the nature of the Soviet association with the Anglo-American war effort. If the Anglo-American-Soviet association was regarded as a full and permanent one, he agreed that Britain ought to aim at reaching agreed decisions based on full consideration and discussion of mutual resources and requirements, alongside full discussion on the strategic issues involved in such collaboration. If, on the other hand, Great Britain accepted the position that any tripartite cooperation was a 'purely temporary association', that would, in Donaldson's opinion, inevitably afford greater benefits for the Soviets. The best course to follow was to 'treat supplies to Russia as a self-contained question' that would 'inevitably bring it into the sphere of political bargaining'. The prevalent opinion within the A.S.E. was that Britain should aim at

⁹⁰² NA, FO371/ 32863/ N1544/ 1/ 38, memorandum by Eden, 11 March 1942.

adopting the third course with the intention of going forward to the second if it became advisable and practicable. The A.S.E. believed that the third option would give the Soviets 'a far better impression of our good faith and seriousness of purpose' than the first course.⁹⁰³

Once Donaldson's memorandum reached the Foreign Office, Dew was the most vocal critic of the conclusions drawn. Donaldson's scheme had the advantage of introducing Soviet representatives onto the Anglo-American boards, yet it suffered from the disadvantage that the Soviet representatives would not be able to take decisions on their own. Dew believed that the 'whole virtue of the proposal put in the Foreign Office paper was that at the proposed conference in Moscow we and the Americans would be prepared to talk strategy as well as [the issue of] supplies'. Furthermore, the appointment of Soviet representatives would merely be an exercise in futility. Very few people were in a position to talk strategy and supplies in the Soviet Union. In order to make any real progress in the matter of military supplies for the USSR, only direct discussions with Stalin would bear any fruit.⁹⁰⁴

As a result of the War Cabinet's approval of Warner's conference proposal, on 18 March the Chairman of the London Munitions Assignment Board composed a paper supporting the suggestions put forward by Donaldson. Although Lyttleton, the author of the paper, was undoubtedly in a position to discuss issues surrounding supply to the Soviet Union, his analysis did not consider the political implications of economic and military aid, an issue that was very much a predominant consideration for Warner *et al* in the Foreign Office. Lyttleton criticised the suggestion put forward by the Foreign Office that tripartite consultations should take place in Moscow. The idea of achieving any real measure of cooperation was nothing short of delusional,

⁹⁰³ NA, FO371/ 32863/ N1545/ 1/ 38, memorandum by Donaldson, 14 March 1942.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, minute by Dew, 15 March 1942.

due in large part to the secretive nature of the Soviet Government. In any case, should British and American personnel arrive in Moscow with the avowed intention of nurturing a spirit of collaboration between the three Powers in the economic and military sphere, Stalin would 'know only too well that our delegation cannot afford to leave Moscow without an agreement'.⁹⁰⁵ There is a fundamental flaw in Lyttleton's reasoning. Whilst one cannot dispute the importance of Great Britain reaching an understanding with Moscow, Stalin likewise needed to secure an agreement securing Anglo-American aid. The war was taking place on Soviet soil; Stalin desperately needed war supplies in order to continue to fight the German aggressor. A greater degree of support from the Western Powers was crucial for the USSR at that juncture of the war. Lyttleton predicted that the conference proposed by Warner would merely result in His Majesty's Government making a commitment that was 'probably in excess of the existing one' and that the Soviets would 'squeeze' the British 'while despising us as the offerers at bribes'. Evidently, Lyttleton's perspective was skewed by a suspicion of the Soviet Government. Lyttleton noted that since the introduction of the October Protocol, Great Britain had 'scrupulously' fulfilled its obligations 'at great cost to ourselves', yet the Soviets had not imparted 'the slightest information on military or supply matters'. Soviet suspicion was due in large part to the fact that they had been 'doing all the fighting' whilst Great Britain had been observing from the sidelines. Lyttleton accepted the argument that continued Soviet resistance was essential for Great Britain, 'as incalculable damage would be done to our cause if the Russians were defeated'. However, it was also possible that Great Britain and America could very well lose the war if they continued to supply the Soviet Union in excess of what was truly needed. To do so could be to the detriment of British forces

⁹⁰⁵ NA, FO371/ 32863/ N1546/ 1/ 38, memorandum by Lyttleton, 18 March 1942.

in the vital Middle Eastern and Indian Ocean theatres. Consequently, Lyttleton agreed with Donaldson. The most favourable course for His Majesty's Government to adopt was the third option proposed in Donaldson's paper. The third option would allow Soviet representatives on the Anglo-American Board, giving them the opportunity to raise issues pertinent to the Soviet Government.⁹⁰⁶

Predictably, Dew defended the recommendations put forward by Warner. Dew contested Lyttleton's assertion that during any tripartite conference the Soviets would blackmail the British delegation into 'giving everything without our receiving any information in return'. In order to combat that possibility, Dew suggested that when His Majesty's Government proposed the idea of a conference to the Soviets, they ought to make them aware from outset that information had to be imparted by both sides and that the preparatory work had to be done well in advance. Dew continued to point out the obvious criticism that arose from Donaldson and Lyttleton's conclusions: it was not merely the Western Powers who needed an agreement. Should the conference fail, all three Powers would be in a disadvantageous position. Indeed, one could argue that the Soviets would get the worst of it, as their need for armaments was acute.⁹⁰⁷

Warner was equally critical of the alternative course suggested by Donaldson whose proposal he considered 'psychologically wrong'. More to the point, Donaldson had failed to comprehend the motivation behind Warner's proposal. It was intended that tripartite consultations would 'put the Russians on a basis of equality' in the negotiations for the renewal of the Protocol. Any negotiations would need to take place in Moscow as Stalin would not delegate responsibilities to representatives abroad. Such minor concessions could potentially reap bountiful

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., minute by Dew, 19 March 1942.

rewards, not merely in relation to Anglo-American supply to the USSR. Tripartite discussions were considered by Warner to be ‘highly desirable on general grounds’.⁹⁰⁸ Questions of supply did not exist in a vacuum; they contributed to the general spirit of collaboration between the USSR and the Western Powers. Much like in the early stages of the war when London had attempted to negotiate a war trade agreement, it was hoped that a general atmosphere of cooperation would extend to the political realm. Lyttleton’s minute clearly illustrated his belief that the Foreign Office’s attempt to reduce the innate Soviet suspicion of the capitalist Powers had failed; Warner argued the opposite. As Graham Ross has noted, the British policy of ‘cautious reasonableness’ following *Barbarossa* was adopted in an attempt to give the Soviets as little cause for complaint as possible. One could not expect immediate results; such a policy would take time to blossom, ‘but the hope was that it would have a cumulative effect which would make post-war collaboration possible if not easy’.⁹⁰⁹ As Warner argued, the Moscow Conference had resulted in ‘good results psychologically’ and the proposals put forward by the Foreign Office were ‘psychologically better calculated than his own’.⁹¹⁰

On 27 March the A.S.E. informed the War Cabinet of its final decision over the matter of supply for the Soviet Union. The A.S.E. admitted that the course favoured by Donaldson and Lyttleton might have enabled Great Britain to acquire full information from the Soviets whilst leading them into strategical discussions. Ultimately, however, the A.S.E. drew similar conclusions to Warner. The Executive agreed that the Soviet Government would not delegate authority on a matter of such importance. Instead, the A.S.E. favoured the first proposal and expressed its

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., minute by Warner, 19 March 1942.

⁹⁰⁹ Graham Ross, ‘Foreign Office Attitudes to the Soviet Union, 1941-45’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, 3 (Jul., 1981), 521-40 (p. 521).

⁹¹⁰ NA, FO371/ 32863/ N1546/ 1/ 38, minute by Warner, 19 March 1942.

agreement with Warner's suggestion that tripartite discussions should be held in Moscow. It would be stipulated that a 'full discussion and disclosure of information concerning all matters affecting the allocation of supplies' would be at the heart of the conference. The A.S.E., much like Warner and Dew in the Northern Department, had hoped that the tripartite conference would 'become the beginning of a regular system of consultation between the three Governments, to continue throughout the war'.⁹¹¹

The A.S.E. paper not merely adopted all of Warner's suggestions, but illustrated a keenness for genuine Anglo-Soviet collaboration. Upon his arrival to the USSR, Clark Kerr believed that such keenness was reciprocated by the Soviets. Clark Kerr wrote of 'friendly welcome' that he had received from Molotov, whose 'manner was pleasant and easy'. During the course of the conversation, Molotov had spoken with obvious concern about the war situation and expressed his belief that the year 1942 would be 'critical if not decisive'. Consequently, the Commissar told the ambassador that the situation called for 'supreme effort on the part of each one of the allies', particularly should the anticipated German spring offensive materialise. Molotov believed that it would take a 'stupendous effort' on the part of the allies in order to deal blows at the enemy, a point to which Clark Kerr readily agreed. In an unusual display of affability, Molotov informed the ambassador that Great Britain could count upon the fullest cooperation from both himself and his Government.⁹¹²

Clark Kerr's report would have been welcomed in Whitehall, yet there were also troubling reports flowing into the Foreign Office that once again raised the spectre of a Nazi-Soviet peace. On 22 March a telegram off Halifax was received by Geoffrey Wilson at the Moscow Embassy. Halifax provided an overview of a conversation which had taken place between Sir R. Campbell, the British Ambassador

⁹¹¹ NA, FO371/ 32863/ N1714/ 1/ 38, War Cabinet Offices, A.S.E.(42) 93, 27 March 1942.

⁹¹² NA, FO371/ 32877/ N1498/ 5/ 38, Clark Kerr to FO, 22 March 1942.

in Lisbon, and Hubert D. Henderson.⁹¹³ Campbell and Henderson expressed their fears of the possibility of a Nazi-Soviet peace following Stalin's Order of the Day speech. In Henderson's opinion, Stalin had attempted to make British flesh creep with the thoughts of a separate peace in order to force the latter to re-double their efforts to supply the USSR. Halifax, however, stated firmly that 'if Stalin decided to make peace no amount of flattery or promise on our part would prevent him'. The only way in which to prevent such an eventuality was either to continue to send supplies to the Soviet Union or to open a western front.⁹¹⁴ Wilson stated that although no one had taken the possibility of a separate peace seriously, he believed that the pressure for a second front was a more pressing consideration. Indeed, 'the pressure for a second front is becoming much stronger and may indicate a very real apprehension among the Russians about the German spring offensive'.⁹¹⁵ Thus, at that juncture of the war, with the spring offensive looming, the issue of collaboration between London, Washington and Moscow had gained a greater significance. Although the predominant consideration centred on supplies to the Soviet Union, the importance was not limited to the economic sphere. The issue of Anglo-American supply impacted upon the political relations of the three Powers – the two spheres were intrinsically linked. Should economic and military relations deteriorate, that deterioration would inevitably transfer to the political sphere.

On 27 March Dew penned a minute that was circulated throughout the Foreign Office – recipients included the Southern, Central, Eastern and Far Eastern Departments. Although relatively short in comparison to the majority of Dew's minutes, it was highly significant as it reiterated the wish of His Majesty's Government to conclude a treaty with the Soviet Government, barring any strong

⁹¹³ Hubert D. Henderson was an Economic Adviser in the British Treasury.

⁹¹⁴ NA, FO371/ 32906/ N1492/ 30/ 38, telegram: Halifax, 19 March 1942.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, minute by Wilson, 22 March 1942.

views that may have been expressed by President Roosevelt. The principal point in the British proposal for an alliance with Soviet Russia was the recognition of Stalin's claims to his 1941 frontiers with Finland, the Baltic States and Roumania with the agreement to support his claim to the restoration of those frontiers after the war.⁹¹⁶ Dew's minute marked a culmination of the widely discussed and divisive issue of concessions to Stalin and of how far His Majesty's Government were prepared to go in order to secure an understanding with Moscow.

At the beginning of April logistical discussions were underway in Whitehall. Sargent requested that it should be considered whether negotiations should be carried out in London with Maisky or through Clark Kerr with Molotov. Dew was confident that there would be little difficulty in concluding two public treaties; one outlining the nature and scope of an Anglo-Soviet military alliance and the second detailing post-war cooperation that would largely be along the lines of the text prepared by Cadogan and Cripps prior to Eden's visit to Moscow in December 1941. Dew believed that it would be better for the Treaty negotiations to take place in London through Maisky. After all, Eden had travelled to Moscow for Treaty discussions so to send another British delegation to the Soviet Union might be viewed as overly zealous. Thus, from the point of view of propaganda within Great Britain, Dew believed that by holding the Treaty negotiations in London and the supply Protocol negotiations in Moscow, public opinion would view the discussions in a more favourable light.⁹¹⁷ Warner confirmed on 3 April that the Treaty negotiations would take place in London; the stage was now set, all that remained was for members of the British Foreign Office to advise the Secretary of State on the desired terms for any Anglo-Soviet Treaty.

⁹¹⁶ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N1910/ 5/ 38, minute by Dew, 27 March 1942.

⁹¹⁷ NA, FO371/ 32941/ N1731/ 188/ 38, minute by Dew, 1 April 1942.

To that end, Dew composed another lengthy minute on 2 April in which he provided a detailed overview of Anglo-Soviet relations following Eden's trip to Moscow in December 1941. Attached to this minute was a draft of the proposed terms for the Treaty. The first article stated that the two Allied Powers would afford one another military assistance and support of all kinds during the war against Hitlerite Germany; the second related to the issue of a negotiated peace with their common enemy. It was stipulated that no armistice or peace treaty with Germany would be concluded except by mutual consent. The third article included the promise that neither His Majesty's Government nor the Kremlin would take part in any coalition directed against the other Contracting Party.⁹¹⁸

As there have been a plethora of works that have provided excellent and thorough examinations of the discussions in the weeks prior to the signature of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, it is not intended to delve into an already well-explored aspect of British diplomacy at that juncture. Rather, the discussion surrounding the publicity of the Anglo-Soviet alliance will be explored here. The question of publicity for the Anglo-Soviet Treaty received a great deal of attention within the Foreign Office, provoking three minutes from Cadogan alone. In addition, the Foreign Secretary had called a meeting in his room on 10 April due to the interest that was being generated by the issue. The question of publicity for the forthcoming alliance arose following a meeting at the Ministry of Information on 9 April at which Sargent, Bruce Lockhart, Ridsdale and Neville Butler were present. The meeting took place in the room of Peter Smollett who was the Head of the Soviet section at the Ministry of Information.⁹¹⁹ During the course of the discussions of 9 April it was agreed that although the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet agreement would cause 'grave concern'

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ The Ministry of Information was a Central Government department for publicity and propaganda. It is interesting to note that Smollett was subsequently identified as a Soviet agent.

in both Europe and the Middle East ‘where fear of Communism as an international force is still maintained’, it was held that ‘the considerations in favour of the agreement ... are so powerful as to outweigh the anticipated effect on certain sections of world opinion’. The central focus of the meeting was British acquiescence to the USSR’s frontiers demand and the anticipated backlash from the British public and press. It needed to be emphasised that should Britain refuse Stalin’s request it would undoubtedly compound his suspicions and possibly weaken Soviet resistance. It was further supposed that should the USSR attain her ‘essential’ security by agreement, there was good reason to believe that the Soviet Union would ‘join the ranks of the satisfied powers’ and was less likely to make further demands on Great Britain. There is some merit to that idea. As Sargent had argued on 5 February, it was far better to agree to Soviet demands whilst Soviet power was compromised. The meeting concluded by dramatically declaring: ‘It is only by Anglo-Soviet collaboration in this spirit that a recurrence of the German menace can be avoided’.⁹²⁰ Evidently, it was proposed for the publicity surrounding the Treaty to emphasise the need for Anglo-Soviet solidarity against the German menace that was threatening the very existence of both Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

On 19 April, in a telegram to Halifax, Eden clearly laid out the way in which the upcoming Anglo-Soviet Treaty was to be publicised in Great Britain and abroad. The draft telegram had been prepared by Warner in accordance with the main points discussed during the meeting of 10 April. Although Warner had originally intended for a speedy dispatch of the telegram to Washington, due to the interest generated by the issue, the final version was not transmitted until 19 April.⁹²¹

⁹²⁰ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N1972/ 5/ 38, minute by Stevens (FO), 10 April 1942.

⁹²¹ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N2056/ 5/ 38, minute by Warner, 13 April 1942.

It was regarded as essential to ‘prepare and educate’ public opinion in both Great Britain and America as to the reasons for an Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement* prior to the conclusion of the Treaty. His Majesty’s Government should adopt the line of ‘positive justification’ for its actions rather than making ‘apologetic excuse’. There would be no pro-Soviet propaganda. Instead, London would leave any ‘pro-Soviet points’ to the Soviet authorities. Nor would Great Britain attempt to justify the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States.⁹²² Rather than apologizing for the concessions made in order to secure an alliance with the Soviet Union, the British would emphasize the predominant motivation for pursuing *rapprochement* with the Soviets: through collaboration and agreement with Moscow, the recurrence of German domination and aggression would be prevented. Thus, the German menace was used as a propaganda tool and was considered to be sufficient justification for the Anglo-Soviet Treaty. Indeed, it was to be argued that having USSR as the strongest naval power in the Baltic was ‘infinitely better for the Western Powers than the domination of the region by the Germans.’⁹²³

Finally, the telegram addressed the fundamental problem of the ingrained distrust of Soviet Communism within Great Britain. For the critics of any Anglo-Soviet agreement, it was essential to deny any claims that the British had been guilty of ‘selling Eastern Europe to Russia’. The terms of the forthcoming treaty would only refer to the safeguarding of Soviet frontiers; Stalin had not sought territorial aggrandizement and as such his terms did not conflict with the principles of the Atlantic Charter. Stalin’s territorial policy was ‘strictly defensive’ and the terms of

⁹²² Ibid., Eden to Halifax, 19 April 1942.

⁹²³ Indeed, Churchill had remarked in 1940 that any strengthening of Russia’s frontiers in the Baltic ought to be welcomed, in order to prevent German dominance in the region. Salmon, ‘Great Britain, the Soviet Union and Finland’, p. 96.

the treaty would ensure ‘against [Soviet] interference in the internal affairs of other states’ whilst guaranteeing tripartite collaboration in the post-war period.⁹²⁴

Halifax’s response to Eden’s telegram was largely negative. The ambassador expressed his misgivings about the effect of the publication of the impending Anglo-Soviet Treaty in the United States and predicted that the agreement was likely to be very unpopular. In spite of British arguments to the contrary, Stalin’s territorial claims would be viewed as a violation of the Atlantic Charter and a ‘negation of the ideals for which the UN [United Nations] are fighting’.⁹²⁵ Sympathy would not be limited to the Baltic States. There remained a strong pro-Finnish attitude within the United States as a result of the Winter War. Therefore, any attempts to condemn Finland as a result of its cooperation with Germany would prove unsuccessful.⁹²⁶ Halifax believed that Washington was ‘still predominantly Russo-phobe’ and the very fact that Britain sought an agreement that would be highly advantageous to the Soviets would ‘only aggravate the matter’.⁹²⁷ Regretfully, Halifax could not make any useful suggestions on the matter of British publicity for the Treaty. No amount of justification or propaganda would prevent the inevitable American backlash. Thus, in Halifax’s opinion, ‘the longer the news of the agreement could be withheld, the better’.⁹²⁸ Halifax’s predictions proved to be accurate. However, in an interview between Roosevelt and Litvinov, the President informed the ambassador that although he did not approve of the British line, ‘he did not wish to oppose the negotiations’.⁹²⁹

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N1921/ 5/ 38, Halifax to FO, 12 April 1942.

⁹²⁶ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N2056/ 5/ 38, Eden to Halifax, 19 April 1942.

⁹²⁷ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N1921/ 5/ 38, Halifax to FO, 12 April 1942.

⁹²⁸ Ibid.

⁹²⁹ NA, FO371/ 32879/ N1968/ 5/ 38, Halifax to FO, 15 April 1942.

Upon receiving this tacit American approval, instructions were sent to the Dominions Office to relay the contents of the draft treaties of the Anglo-Soviet agreement.⁹³⁰

The Anglo-Soviet Treaty was signed on 26 May 1942. As F.S. Northedge and Audrey Wells have argued, from the Soviet point of view, the Anglo-Soviet alliance was a ‘makeshift arrangement reached with deadly foes and likely to last only so long as Hitler lived’.⁹³¹ However, there was an air of optimism upon Molotov’s departure from London on 13 June. Irrespective of whether British and Soviet statesmen believed at the time of its signature that the agreement was merely a temporary expedient, they had negotiated a treaty that was absolutely essential and which had linked the fates of Great Britain and the USSR for the duration of the war against Hitlerite Germany. In his farewell message following the conclusion of the Treaty, Molotov had stated that he had ‘no doubt’ that it would form a ‘solid basis for the further development of friendly relations between our countries as Allies, and will contribute to the general cause of all freedom-loving peoples in time of war against Hitlerite Germany as well as in the post-war period’.⁹³² Clark Kerr expressed his amazement over the evident change in Molotov’s attitude once the Commissar had returned home. The ambassador informed Eden on 18 June that Molotov was ‘a much changed man’, and was ‘extremely friendly and almost sprightly’.⁹³³

Unfortunately, much like in the immediate aftermath of the July Agreement in 1941, this optimism was short-lived. In a meeting with Clark Kerr on 25 July, Molotov raised the issue of a second front as ‘a matter of greater importance’ for his country. The issue of the second front continued to dominate London’s relations with Moscow following the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, with the Soviets

⁹³⁰ Ibid., Dominions Office to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, 20 April 1942.

⁹³¹ Northedge and Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism*, p. 81.

⁹³² NA, FO371/ 32883/ N3206/ 5/ 38, Maisky to Eden, 13 June 1942.

⁹³³ Ibid.

repeatedly accusing the British that ‘mass protestations of friendship and admiration for Soviet resistance from official and unofficial comrades were no substitute for action’.⁹³⁴

In spite of the difficulties that faced fruitful Anglo-Soviet *rapprochement*, one must not underestimate the significance and importance of the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty. The alliance had been a necessary expedient ever since the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Its signature had marked the culmination of years of effort on the part of the Northern Department. The long-standing mutual distrust between Great Britain and the USSR had evidently been put to one side in order to defeat the common foe. Although the alliance did not survive during the post-war period, Stalin’s cooperation was absolutely essential during the war and had marked for the first time ‘genuine peaceful coexistence’ in Anglo-Soviet relations.⁹³⁵ As Martin Kitchen has noted, the Soviet Union had become ‘a great ally without whose help the war in Europe could never have been won’.⁹³⁶

⁹³⁴ NA, FO371/ 32911/ N3845/ 30/ 38, Clark Kerr to FO, 25 July 1942.

⁹³⁵ Merritt Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 10.

⁹³⁶ Kitchen, ‘Winston Churchill and the Soviet Union’, p. 415.

Conclusion.

On 26 May 1942 Eden and Molotov signed the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of Alliance, an instrument which, as Steven Merritt Miner has noted, ‘marked the culmination of a two-year quest by the British Government to build a closer relationship with the Soviet Union’.⁹³⁷ Although one cannot question this assertion, Miner omits the fact that the treaty also marked the culmination of two years of hard work on the part of the members of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, a body of men who were deeply involved on a daily basis in all significant aspects of Britain’s relationship with the Soviet Union and who thus had the often unfortunate and unenviable task of dealing with the difficult and mercurial Soviets. Their recommendations on policy were informed and at times contrary to the prevailing Foreign Office consensus on issues pertaining to the Soviet Union. However, in and after 1941, with Christopher Warner at the helm, one can appreciate that a greater degree of weight was attached to the advice tendered by Northern Department officials. A statement in February 1943 by Anthony Eden hinted at the influence that Warner in particular exerted on the Foreign Secretary. In a communication to Clark Kerr, Eden expressed his belief that in order to secure Soviet cooperation in the post-war settlement, it was ‘essential that His Majesty’s Government should on all possible occasions treat the Soviet Government as partners, and make a habit of discussing plans and views with them as a matter of course’, very much in keeping with Warner’s advice the year previously.⁹³⁸ Frank Roberts, the chargé d’affaires at the Moscow Embassy also adopted Warner’s suggestion in 1946. Roberts believed that a policy of ‘reciprocity, of patience with firmness’ was crucial when dealing with the

⁹³⁷ Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, p. 253.

⁹³⁸ Eden to Clark Kerr, 4 February 1943, quoted in Graham Ross, *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations 1941-45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 121.

Soviets. This scramble to identify a coherent policy towards the USSR, raised first by Warner in 1942, served as the foundation for the sub-committee of the Cabinet Office that collated information and advised on matters relating to the Soviet Union.⁹³⁹ Hence, the notion that the Northern Department constituted a ‘backwater’ in the Foreign Office is clearly erroneous. The expert advice tendered by the men of the Northern Department during such an uneasy period was both well respected by the Foreign Secretary and formed the basis of future policy towards the USSR. Indeed, as Martin Folly notes, ‘the theme of Warner and others was calm, unexcited consistency, with patience and firmness’⁹⁴⁰ and it was readily agreed to be the best approach in any dealings with the Soviets.

The response to the Anglo-Soviet Treaty within the Northern Department was rather detached and nonchalant, not least as it was widely believed that the hard work was just beginning for Great Britain. Although now officially allied with the Soviet Union, the task of genuine cooperation and collaboration would not be an easy one. As Derek Watson argues, the exclusion of Stalin’s 1941 frontier claims from the terms of the treaty would continue to be a particular and persistent problem in Anglo-Soviet relations.⁹⁴¹ It was during Molotov’s visit to Washington that he finally secured American assurances over the opening of a second front in Europe. Indeed, in a Soviet-American communiqué published on 12 June 1942 it had stated that ‘full agreement was reached on the issues of urgent tasks connected with the establishment of the Second Front in Europe in 1942’.⁹⁴² Although this caused a good deal of

⁹³⁹ Ray Merrick, ‘The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the Cold War, 1946-47’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, 3 (Jul., 1985), 453-468 (p. 454).

⁹⁴⁰ Folly, ‘A Long, Slow and Painful Road’, p. 480.

⁹⁴¹ Derek Watson, ‘Molotov, the Making of the Grand Alliance and the Second Front 1939-1942’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54, 1 (2002), 51-85 (p. 51).

⁹⁴² Cited in Lydia V. Pozdeeva, ‘The Soviet Union: Territorial Diplomacy’, in *Allies at War. The Soviet, American, and British Experience, 1939-1945*, ed. By David Reynolds, Warren F. Kimball and A.O. Chubarian (London: Macmillan, 1994), 355-385 (p. 363).

annoyance in Whitehall due to the lack of prior consultation, the British communiqué of 11 July contained identical wording to its Soviet-American predecessor. It was regarded as essential to maintain a display of Anglo-American unity at that time.⁹⁴³ However, it was not until 1944 that the Allies opened a second front in Europe. This hesitancy and delay understandably caused a good deal of friction between Great Britain, America and the USSR.

Sir Stafford Cripps' response to the Anglo-Soviet Treaty was predictably emphatic and did not match the nonchalance displayed within the Northern Department. In his letter to Archibald Clark Kerr on 12 June 1942 Cripps stated:

I believe now we are just reaping the results of a long and patient endeavour to get back the confidence of the Russians, a confidence which I think was encouraged by the complete frankness with which we dealt with them while I was in Moscow, and which, though they may appear to resent it at the moment, they do really appreciate.⁹⁴⁴

Cripps continued to express his optimism by declaring that in the aftermath of the treaty Clark Kerr's personal relationship with Stalin would be strengthened and that in turn would facilitate and promote continued cooperation between Great Britain and the USSR.⁹⁴⁵ For the most part, Clark Kerr agreed with the sentiments expressed by his predecessor. In the weeks following the conclusion of the treaty, he wrote to Warner and spoke highly of Vyshinsky who had 'done his best to be agreeable and friendly, both officially and unofficially'.⁹⁴⁶ Unfortunately for Clark Kerr, however, Vyshinsky was 'a person of no great importance'. In order to strengthen Anglo-Soviet cooperation during the war, and in preparation for the post-war period, it would be necessary to cultivate the 'football faced Molotov' and his master. Clark

⁹⁴³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, vol. 3 (Washington D.C., 1959), pp. 593-4.

⁹⁴⁴ FO800/300, Cripps to Clark Kerr, 12 June 1942.

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Clark Kerr to Warner, 11 June 1942.

Kerr predicted that to be a mighty task, as he ‘doubted if Molotov could ever be at ease with any foreigner’, and considered it ‘impossible’ to get close to Stalin.⁹⁴⁷

In spite of the inevitable difficulties associated with the successful implementation of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of Alliance, this does not diminish the immense achievement of attaining an agreement with the Soviet Government, a goal that had actively been pursued by the authorities in London since the outbreak of war in September 1939 and which had gained greater significance following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Indeed, following the German invasion of the USSR, the debate within Whitehall over the desirability of *rapprochement* was null and void. Hitler’s most recent act of aggression removed any doubt in the minds of policy-makers. An Anglo-Soviet understanding was absolutely essential for both the London and Moscow. At every level of the Foreign Office one can appreciate that *rapprochement* was actively and sincerely sought – from the clerks in the Northern Department to their Head, the Permanent Under-Secretary and his Deputy, and most importantly, the Foreign Secretary. Following Operation *Barbarossa* there was a Foreign Office consensus on the future course of British foreign policy, one that was difficult to discern prior to June 1941 due to the sheer unpredictability of the international climate.

In response to the arguments put forward by neo-revisionist historians, this thesis has consistently illustrated that British policy during the opening stages of the war was dictated purely by *realpolitik* and not by ideological antipathy towards the Soviets. Although one certainly cannot argue against the existence of prejudice, to state that this barred the way to real collaboration between the two powers is to ignore the many examples to the contrary. As Cadogan himself expressed, he loathed both

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Communism and Nazism in equal measure and believed that both ideological doctrines were abhorrent.⁹⁴⁸ However much Cadogan and his colleagues disliked the Soviets at times, necessity dictated action. As such, during the years 1939-1941, when Laurence Collier was head of department, there was most certainly a degree of disgust within the Northern Department at the recent actions of the USSR, which escalated to even higher degrees during the Winter War. In spite of this, there was always the realisation that a breach with the USSR was simply not an option.

That is not to say that the men of Whitehall advised any undue leniency in Britain's dealings with the Soviet Union, and one most certainly cannot accuse British policy to be one of appeasement as any agreement was to be based on a *quid pro quo*, yet there was always an understanding that relations between London and Moscow had to be maintained. To be sure, the alliance was a temporary expedient, but it was the only option open to His Majesty's Government, unless they were prepared to sanction a German domination of the continent. It was thus the immensity of the German threat that brought these two uncomfortable bedfellows together. There was a vast ideological gulf between Great Britain and the USSR, and Nazi Germany was the bridge that temporarily brought the two unlikely partners together.

On the day of the treaty's signature the Prime Minister spoke jubilantly of Eden's achievement in a War Cabinet meeting, praising the Foreign Secretary's 'skilful handling of the negotiations and ... the satisfactory result which has been achieved'.⁹⁴⁹ Although one cannot deny the centrality of Eden to the eventual successful outcome, the activities and advice of Northern Department officials throughout the entire process must not be overlooked. The men of the Northern Department were highly intelligent and experienced members of the diplomatic

⁹⁴⁸ Dilks, *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan*, p. 133.

⁹⁴⁹ NA, CAB66/30, War Cabinet Conclusions, 26 May 1942.

establishment whose advice and recommendations came as the result of years of experience within both the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service. To reduce their significance in the policy-making process overlooks not merely the centrality of their contributions throughout this period but ignores the very fact that the structure of the Foreign Office was such that men of fairly junior rank could – and did – exert influence on the formulation of British policy towards the USSR.

Throughout this crucial period when British foreign policy was forced to remain fluid and evolve as the military and political situation altered with each fresh act of both German and Soviet aggression, the Northern Department had been at the heart of the debate surrounding Britain's relationship with the Soviet Union. The advice tendered by the Northern Department illustrated the wisdom of its advice as well as its rational approach to diplomacy. Should Britain fail to conclude an agreement with the Soviet Union and thereby earn Stalin's respect, it was plausible that a Nazi-Soviet separate peace might be concluded. That would have disastrous consequences for Great Britain as once again, much like in the period between the fall of France and Operation *Barbarossa*, Great Britain would be fighting alone. Time was most certainly running out for His Majesty's Government. The contributions of the Northern Department men, particularly the contributions of Warner and Dew, represented a rational response to the situation at hand. It was crucial that the war was won as quickly and comprehensively as possible, especially in lieu of American support.

Hence, the input of figures such as Collier and Maclean, Warner and Dew, was essential to the formulation of Britain's policy towards the Soviet Union. Although Anthony Eden undoubtedly deserved all the congratulations and praise heaped upon him following the signature of the Anglo-Soviet treaty, without the

valuable and, in turn, much valued advice tendered by the experienced and knowledgeable experts in Soviet affairs, British diplomacy during the opening stages of the war could have emerged with a wholly different turn. An examination of the activities of the Northern Department provides a unique and insightful account of a vitally important period of the Second World War when the fate of Europe was precariously balanced on a knife-edge with National Socialism threatening the existence of all peace-loving countries. In the endeavour to combat this threat the beleaguered officials of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office played their own hitherto somewhat neglected but undeniably significant part patiently and assiduously in circumstances that were frequently frustrating and difficult. In so doing they made a considerable contribution to the cause of Anglo-Soviet understanding which was itself an important factor in the final defeat of Hitlerism.

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