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ADOLF HITLER'S DECISION TO
INVADE THE SOVIET UNION

THESIS

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This study makes use not only of German documents captured during the Second World War but of personal accounts of major figures of the Third Reich and their testimony at the Nuremberg Trials.

Organized into five chapters, this study surveys Nazi-Soviet relations from 1939 to 1941, from the German viewpoint, with emphasis on Adolf Hitler's assessment of Russian policies and Germany's wartime situation, both of which factors shaped his decision to invade the USSR.

The conclusion is that Hitler saw his attack on the Soviet Union as a preventive war, carried out to destroy a growing threat to the Reich. He interpreted Russian activities during the period 1939-1941 as designed to strengthen the USSR strategically against Germany in preparation for intervention in the ongoing conflict with Britain.

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CHAPTER I

HITLER AND RUSSIA

On June 22, 1941, Adolf Hitler ordered the armed forces of Nazi Germany to attack the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In doing so, he began a campaign that not only failed to defeat Soviet Russia but ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Third Reich. For nearly four years, the eastern front was the scene of an epic struggle between the two greatest totalitarian states in history and the battles fought on the plains of Russia determined the outcome of the Second World War in Europe. The Red Army had so crippled German military power by 1944 that with the Anglo-American landing in June, the defeat of the German Reich had become a certainty. The German invasion of the Soviet Union proved to be Hitler's greatest blunder.

The results of the German-Soviet conflict were highly significant. Hitler's defeat in the east brought Russian military and political power into the very heartland of Europe; by the end of the war, the Soviet Union was in effective control of most of eastern and part of central Europe. In the post-war era, this area became a Russian

sphere of influence while western Europe came under American hegemony. Hitler's invasion of Russia ended in the defeat and ruin of Germany but it was also the beginning of the end of Europe as the center of the world balance of power. It is to explain why the German leader made his fateful decision that this thesis has been written.

Two aspects of this question will be considered. First, the thesis will examine Hitler's goals for Germany and his views on Russia since the Nazi dictator's lifelong desire to conquer and colonize that country provided the ideological basis for his decision. Secondly, the thesis will explain those circumstances which brought about Hitler's determination to destroy the USSR: the status of Nazi-Soviet relations and Germany's wartime situation.

The Fuehrer decided to attack when he did because he believed that Russia was planning to attack the Reich in the near future and he interpreted Soviet actions since 1939 as having been calculated to prepare the USSR for the struggle. Therefore, he wanted to eliminate the Soviet Union as a threat to his eastern borders once and for all and it was necessary to strike before the Russians did, while Germany was still strong and not locked in combat in western Europe. The German leader also realized that he might never again

have the chance to seize territory for Germany in the east; his preventive war, then, was also one of conquest. Because Hitler based his decision on his own understanding of political reality, this thesis will examine the question primarily from the German standpoint. More emphasis will be given to what he believed Germany's situation to be and to how he viewed Russian actions than to the reality of the case.

For nearly two years after the Second World War began, Hitler's Germany and Joseph Stalin's Russia remained at peace and both nations shared a political marriage of convenience which the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939 made official. During that period, the Third Reich extended its control over most of Europe. Only Great Britain remained undefeated and, of the European powers, only Russia was spared the fury of the blitzkrieg.¹

The fact that there was a Nazi-Soviet agreement at all was a supreme irony; National Socialist ideology and Hitler's goals seemingly made such a compact with devil an impossibility. He had made no secret of his hostility toward Soviet Russia

¹The German-Soviet pact was officially designated as the "Treaty of Non-Aggression Between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."

and had once said that he did not want even close relations and certainly not an alliance. But like Stalin, his Communist counterpart, Hitler was an opportunist. Both were capable of temporary compromises with potential enemies and Hitler's bargain with Stalin was a prime example.²

In retrospect, the Nazi-Soviet accord seems to have been the height of political cynicism. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that for Hitler, National Socialist ideology was only a means to power and a cover for his ambitions. Hitler held most of his views so strongly during most of his life that they must be taken seriously, for these beliefs had a direct bearing on German foreign policy and war aims.³

² Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), pp. 659-63; Norman H. Baynes, ed., The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, 2 vols. (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1942), 1:671, hereafter cited as Speeches; ibid., 2:1395. One of Hitler's earlier compromises was one he made with the German military in 1934. To insure the German Army's support for his regime, Hitler agreed to purge the Sturmabteilung or S.A., the Nazi party storm trooper organization. In 1938, however, Hitler took over complete control of the military when he fired the minister of war and the army chief of staff on trumped-up charges. During his rise to power in Russia in the late 1920's, Stalin allied himself with the right faction of the Communist party against its left wing. After he had defeated the left, Stalin turned against his former collaborators and deposed them. These maneuvers gave him total power.

³ Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 56, 370, hereafter cited as Hitler.

The basis for National Socialist ideology was the doctrine of racial inequality. Hitler's racial beliefs centered around the idea that people of Germanic or Nordic (Aryan) descent were superior biologically and culturally to all others. The Aryan was the sole creator of culture and civilization; all of the true civilizations of the past owed their greatness to the influence of this Master Race. The antithesis of Aryan man was the Jew, the corrupter and destroyer of everything of value. The Jews were determined to destroy not only western civilization, but also the Master Race itself. While Hitler hated the Jews, he despised the Slavic peoples as well and considered the Russians to be Untermenschen or sub-humans. Not only was the Fuehrer convinced that these people were inferior, he also feared them.⁴

The German leader saw the vast population of Russia as a potential menace to Europe. Russia was the vanguard of an Asia determined to destroy western civilization. In this regard, he had said,

Asia, what a disquieting reservoir of men! The safety of Europe will not be assured until we have driven Asia back behind the Urals. No organized Russian state must be allowed to exist west of that line. They are

⁴Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 290, 300-1, 654.

brutes, and neither Bolshevism nor Tsarism makes any difference--they are brutes in a state of nature.⁵

The east, inhabited by Slavs and other inferior peoples, looked upon Europe as an "attractive jewel" which they wished to possess and it was Hitler's conviction that these restless masses would never cease their efforts to conquer and dominate Europe.⁶

According to Nazi theory, however, the Slavs were by nature incapable of any kind of large-scale organizational effort; the establishment of a viable Russian state had been no exception. In Hitler's racially-tinged version of history, a foreign minority, chiefly of Germanic origin, had built the Russian state and had held vital positions in Russian society. This elite group was responsible not only for creating the political structure, but had given the Russians what little culture they had.⁷

⁵Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Secret Conversations 1941-1942, trans. Colonel R.H. Stevens (London: Cassel and Company, Ltd., 1961), p. 34, hereafter cited as Conversations. Hitler said this on September 25, 1941, three months after he began his campaign against Russia.

⁶Joseph Goebbels, The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943, ed., trans. Louis P. Lochner (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), p. 358.

⁷Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Secret Book, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 135-8.

It was also Hitler's view that by the time of Otto von Bismarck, the first chancellor of the Second German Empire, wars had diminished the size of this Nordic element to the extent that the more numerous Russian middle class replaced it in Russian government and society. World War I reduced the number of Germans in Russia even more and the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik takeover which followed, destroyed the remainder. Hitler, however, did not believe that the Russians were directly responsible for the elimination of this Aryan remnant. The Jews, who seized control in Russia through the Bolshevik coup d'etat, were responsible and Hitler believed that they took over the positions in society which the select German group once had filled.⁸

In fact, the National Socialist ruler held that the Jews had inspired Bolshevism and led its movement in Russia. Hitler once commented that, "In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews in the twentieth century to achieve world domination The fight against Jewish world Bolshevization requires a clear attitude toward Soviet Russia."⁹ A "clear attitude" meant a Nazi evaluation of the Soviet political system. The "international Jew" now

⁸Ibid.

⁹Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 661-2.

controlled Russia and wanted to do the same in Germany and, although National Socialism had smashed Communism in Germany, Communism in the form of Soviet Russia was still a great danger. This was why Communism was such an anathema to the Nazis.¹⁰

Moreover, Hitler feared that when the Soviet Union became a major industrial nation, it would endanger even Britain and France. Nazi Germany, then, was to be the "bulwark of the West" against Communism and the German leader was convinced that eventually his nation would have to launch a crusade against the USSR before the eastern colossus became too powerful.¹¹

Hitler's interest in the USSR, however, went beyond concern for the defense of Europe against the Jewish-led hordes of Asia; his advocacy of a holy war against Russia was related to his ideas on German territorial expansion.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 654-5, 660; Baynes, Speeches, 1:673. After the Nazis came to power in January 1933, the new regime systematically executed or imprisoned thousands of members of the German Communist Party, thus obliterating that organization. Even the remnant which managed to escape to Russia was not safe. They, like other foreign Communists living in Russia, were subjected to Stalin's purges in the late 1930's.

¹¹ Edouard Calic, Unmasked. Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931, trans. Richard Barry (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), pp. 62, 80; Baynes, Speeches, 1:668.

The German need for more land was the basis of Hitler's foreign policy and he believed that Germany would be secure only when it had sufficient Lebensraum or living space. To protect his Master Race, Hitler wanted to create a "healthy, viable natural relation between the nation's population and growth on the one hand and the quantity and quality of its soil on the other hand."¹²

This meant that Germany had to have enough land to feed its growing population. But the amount of territory which the German leader wanted also depended upon other considerations. For the Reich to be a world power, it would have to occupy a large enough area to defend itself against foreign enemies and to make Germany economically self-sufficient. Hitler was certain that it was his destiny to attain this.¹³

Hitler wanted the direction of future German territorial expansion to differ from that of the Second Reich. Germany before World War I had tended to grow toward the west and south, but the Third Reich was to look to the east for its

¹²Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 642-3. Gerhard L. Weinberg, in The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970, states that the essence of the Fuehrer's policy was "race and space."

¹³Ibid., pp. 643, 654.

"soil policy of the future." For this reason, Hitler believed that the Germans should "primarily have in mind Russia and her vassal border states"¹⁴ and that the drive for Lebensraum must be aimed toward the east.¹⁵

The National Socialist regime planned to colonize and exploit Russia. Germans would settle in the richer agricultural areas, especially the Ukraine, and he proposed that the Reich give these colonists their own land with fully equipped farms. "Thus," said Hitler, "we shall again find in the countryside the blessing of numerous families . . . in the future every peasant's son will be sure of having his patch of ground."¹⁶ One of National Socialism's tasks was to make Germans aware that their goal was not just military glory but the cultivation of their own lands in Russia.¹⁷

The Fuehrer wanted the southern Ukraine and the Crimea to form an exclusively German colony and he advocated driving out the present inhabitants of these areas, a policy which

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Hitler, Conversations, p. 14.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 13-14, 57; Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 654.

might have applied eventually to all of German-held Russia. Referring to Russia as a whole, Hitler said, "As for the natives, we'll have to screen them carefully. The Jew, that destroyer, we shall drive out. There's only one duty: to Germanize this country by immigration of Germans and to look upon the natives as Redskins."¹⁸ The future which Hitler planned for the peoples of the USSR looked bleak indeed.¹⁹

But the German dictator was more interested in Russia's land than in its people, for Russian territory would become a source of raw materials and a market for German products. The Ukraine would furnish much of the food which the Reich would need and the basic economy in Germany's eastern holdings was to remain essentially agricultural. A network of roads with German towns along them would connect this German empire in the east and colonists would settle around these centers.²⁰

¹⁸Hitler, Conversations, p. 57. Hitler made these comments on October 17, 1941, about three months after he began the invasion of Russia. It would be interesting to know whether he thought of the white man's expulsion of the American Indians from their lands as a model for his eastern expansion. There are curious parallels between the settlement of the North American continent and Hitler's plans to settle and exploit Russia. The American white man used Manifest Destiny to justify his actions, while Hitler used the Lebensraum idea. In both situations the natives peoples were regarded as inferior and were treated accordingly.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 13.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 36, 56-7.

Germans would not be the only people allowed to inhabit the Russian lands of the Reich. Racially qualified settlers from Scandinavia, western Europe, even America, could emigrate there. Looking into the future, Hitler said,

I shall no longer be here to see all that, but in twenty years the Ukraine will already be a home for twenty million inhabitants besides natives. In three hundred years, the country will be one of the loveliest gardens in the world.²¹

This was the vision of empire in the east which Hitler foresaw for his Thousand Year Reich.²²

The realization of these dreams necessarily belonged to the future because their fruition could only follow the achievement of more limited aims. After the Nazis gained control of Germany in 1933, the new chancellor directed his efforts toward ridding his nation of the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and creating a greater Germany in central Europe. Therefore, Nazi foreign policy in the 1930's was concerned mainly with the reactions of Great Britain and France, who he considered to be the two major guarantors of Versailles. German rearmament began shortly after Hitler took power and the regime reinstated military conscription in 1935; the remilitarization of the

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

Rhineland followed in 1936; the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938; and the destruction of Czechoslovakia in 1939. These moves fulfilled many of Hitler's desires short of war.²³

By the time Hitler began preparing for a war against Poland, the leaders of Britain and France realized the bankruptcy of the appeasement policy that they had tried with Hitler. A war with the Western Powers, as well as with Poland, became a distinct possibility. If such a situation occurred, the attitude of the Soviet Union would be critical because Russian involvement in a war against Germany would mean disaster for the Nazi dictator. Thus, he moved toward an accommodation with Stalin.

Stalin also had reason to want an understanding between Germany and Russia. It was yet possible that the Western Powers would not oppose Hitler's designs on Poland and Stalin did not want his country to be the next target of German

²³The Versailles Treaty, signed on June 28, 1919, limited the German Army to one hundred thousand men, all volunteers, and restricted the types of armaments it could have. Germany's navy was to be small and capable only of shore defense. Nor could Germany fortify or keep military forces in the Rhineland. Germany also had to promise to respect the independence of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. The Versailles Treaty forced Germany to give up territory to Poland. These lands formerly had been parts of Upper Silesia, Posen, and West Prussia.

aggression. Besides, Russia was in no shape to get involved in a major war with anyone.

In 1939, the Soviet Union was still recovering from the severe social and economic dislocations which forced collectivization and crash industrialization had caused. Stalin's efforts recast the old Russia into a modern industrial state within a decade. The massive purge trials of party, government, and military officials had followed. Moreover, Japan was a constant threat to Russia's eastern borders during the 1930's. With Stalin interested in avoiding a war with the Germans and Hitler wanting peace with Russia, there were genuine grounds for a Russo-German settlement.

The Nazi-Soviet pact, which the German foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, signed with Stalin in Moscow on August 23, 1939, was essentially a non-aggression treaty. Germany and Russia pledged not to carry out any "act of violence, aggressive action, or any attack on each other, either individually or with other powers."²⁴ This section alleviated German and Soviet fears about mutual hostilities. The agreement also stated that if either signatory were the

²⁴U.S. Department of State, Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office, (1948), pp. 76-7, hereafter cited as Nazi-Soviet Relations.

"object of belligerent action" by a third power, neither country would assist that power. Similarly, Germany and Russia promised not to participate in any alliance aimed "directly or indirectly" at its partner.²⁵

Articles three and five of the pact were to prove problematical in future German-Soviet relations. By these arrangements, the two powers agreed to consult and exchange information on "problems affecting common interest" and were to settle their differences only by a "friendly exchange of opinion" or by arbitration. The treaty was supposed to last for ten years, but it would be extended for another five years if neither party renounced it a year before its expiration. The Nazi-Soviet pact had the outward appearance of a long-term agreement.²⁶

Along with the basic accord, the USSR and the Reich concluded a "Secret Additional Protocol." If a "territorial and political rearrangement" occurred in the Baltic states, all but Lithuania would fall within a Soviet sphere of influence. Lithuania would be part of the German sphere. In the event of such a "rearrangement" in Poland, Germany and Russia would partition that country between them. A

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 78.

line formed by the Narew, Vistula, and San rivers was to separate the German and Soviet zones and both parties agreed to leave unanswered the question of whether any kind of independent Polish state was to remain and what shape it would take. However, Germany and the Soviet Union were to settle these issues, like the others, by "friendly agreement."²⁷

Another part of the pact which would cause problems was that section of the Secret Protocol which had to do with southeastern Europe. The Russians claimed interest in Bessarabia, still part of Rumania, while Germany, despite its economic ties with the area, disavowed all interest in southeast Europe. These territorial arrangements added the finishing touches to the German-Soviet accord.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid. The existence of the Secret Protocol only became known to the rest of the world after 1945. Before the Russian revolution, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had been parts of Russia. They had all been independent states since the end of World War I. Also after that war, former Russian and German territory went to make up the state of Poland. Poland gained additional land from Russia as a result of the Treaty of Riga in March 1921, which ended a war between the two states. The Secret Protocol allowed for what would amount to a fourth partition of Poland. Prussia, Austria, and Russia siezed portions of Poland in 1772, Prussia and Russia did so again in 1792, and all three powers divided up the remains in 1795.

²⁸ Ibid. Bessarabia became part of Rumania after World War I.

Besides the political settlement of August 23, with its Secret Protocol, an earlier agreement needs to be mentioned. On August 19, Germany signed a commercial treaty with Russia which should be considered a part of the overall bargain that Hitler made with Stalin. Its impact on later relations was important because the treaty created a close economic partnership between the two countries which ended only when hostilities began in 1941. The commercial agreement of August 19 was the first of several such arrangements which would supplement the Nazi-Soviet pact.

By this treaty, Germany agreed to loan the Soviet Union two hundred million Reichsmarks credit for the Russians to buy German manufactured goods, which would include machinery, entire industrial facilities, and armaments "in the broader sense." In exchange, the Russians were to deliver certain raw materials, chiefly oil and grain, as soon as possible. The German Foreign Office estimated that over the next few years, the exchange of goods would amount to more than one billion Reichsmarks. The economic collaboration which developed between the two regimes sealed their political bargain.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., pp. 83-5. The initial German loan came to around \$80.6 million U.S. (1938), while the expected amount of trade would come to approximately \$403 million. These

For Hitler, the conclusion of the German-Soviet agreement meant that Russia would not go to war with Germany in the coming conflict and also ruled out Soviet military or economic aid to the Reich's enemies. Thus, Germany could avoid having to fight a major war on two fronts, its predicament during the First World War.³⁰

With the Russians essentially neutral, Hitler hoped that Britain and France would not be eager to defend Poland because the Soviet Union would be of no help. Even if the British and French did enter the conflict, the Fuehrer would not have to worry about Russia.³¹

figures in American dollars were derived from currency exchange rates listed in The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1939, ed. E. Eastman Irvine (New York: The New York World Telegram, 1939), p. 189. A large part of the German deliveries was to be made in the form of machine tools. Armaments "in the broader sense" meant such items as optical supplies and armor plate. The Russian deliveries were to include also lumber, cotton, oil cake, phosphate, platinum, and raw furs.

³⁰Walter Laqueur, Russia and Germany, A Century of Conflict (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), p. 253, hereafter cited as Russia and Germany; Bullock, Hitler, pp. 555, 559.

³¹Laqueur, Russia and Germany, p. 253; William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1959, 1960), p. 723, hereafter cited as Third Reich; Joachim von Ribbentrop, The Ribbentrop Memoirs, trans. Oliver Watson (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), p. 127, hereafter cited as Memoirs.

The German-Russian pact helped allay many of Stalin's fears as well, for it might be possible to put off a clash with Nazi Germany indefinitely. The agreement also precluded a German reconciliation with the Western Powers, which would be unable to re-direct Nazi aggressiveness against the USSR.³²

There were other advantages for Stalin. If the Western Powers did decide to go to war with Germany this time, they might destroy or at least weaken, one of Russia's potential enemies. But even if Stalin were unable to avoid a war with Hitler, Russia would have allies already committed to the defeat of Germany. The pact with Hitler also would give the USSR time to prepare its defense establishment if a clash with Germany should come. Also, the Hitler-Stalin accord would allow the Soviets to deal with Japan in the Far East, without fear of German-Japanese collaboration against Russia. Stalin, too, would be spared a possible two-front war.³³

³²Laqueur, Russia and Germany, pp. 253, 256.

³³Joachim C. Fest, Hitler, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), p. 592; Shirer, Third Reich, p. 721; Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Meyer, The Incomparable Allies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 307, hereafter cited as Allies. Hilger was councillor to the German Embassy in Moscow.

The Secret Protocol benefitted both Stalin and Hitler because it assigned spheres of influence to both countries and allowed them to recoup some of the territorial losses incurred after World War I. Stalin could reclaim Russia's former territories, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia. Although it also had been part of Russia before the First World War, Lithuania would remain a German buffer zone separating East Prussia from the USSR.³⁴

The arrangements regarding Poland were also revisionist in nature. The partition of Poland would give back to Germany its pre-1914 borders plus territory that would form part of its eastern Lebensraum. The Russians would get back at least part of Poland, the bulk of which had belonged to them before World War I. The area which the Secret Protocol allotted to Russia also included former Belorussian and Ukrainian lands as well as Bessarabia. Although the Germans claimed no interest in the area, southeast Europe would be another source of problems in German-Russian relations.

In the meantime, however, the Nazi-Soviet détente had other advantages. The territorial "rearrangements" which the two powers contemplated would give Germany and Russia a common border in Poland, thus affording Hitler direct

³⁴Fest, Hitler, p. 584.

access to Soviet territory if he ever had the opportunity to carry out his plans to conquer Russia. Similarly, the Russians would gain additional space if it were necessary to defend themselves against the Germans. The economic treaty also would benefit both countries. The availability of Russian raw materials would help Germany to overcome many of the difficulties which a British wartime blockade would bring. With German help, the Russians would be able to further their industrialization and increase their armaments production. The Nazi-Soviet deal was much more than a simple non-aggression treaty; it was really an alliance, for it entailed cooperation in several different areas.³⁵

After making his pact with Stalin, Hitler directed his attention back to the Polish question and the problem of Britain and France. In public statements, Hitler expressed his pleasure with the Russo-German accord and stated that Germany and Russia had decided to renounce the use of force against each other forever. Only other nations would profit from a German-Soviet clash and the Fuehrer charged that although the capitalist states of the West had been trying to use Nazi Germany against the USSR, this was

³⁵Ibid., pp. 575, 592, 594; Shirer, Third Reich, p. 721; Ribbentrop, Memoirs, p. 128.

no longer possible. He said that the Russo-German non-aggression pact should prove to the world once and for all that his aims were limited and that plans for the domination of Europe as far as the Ural Mountains were non-existent.³⁶

Despite his protestations to the contrary, Hitler had made his objectives clear in 1934 when he stated,

We alone can conquer the great continental space, and it will be done by us singly and alone, not through a pact with Moscow That does not mean that I will refuse to walk part of the road together with the Russians, if that will help us. But it will only be in order to return the more swiftly to our true aims.³⁷

On August 11, 1939, just twelve days before he made his deal with Stalin, Hitler had exclaimed,

Everything I am doing is directed against Russia; if the West is too stupid and too blind to grasp this, I shall be forced to come to an understanding with the Russians, strike at the West, and then after its defeat turn against the Soviet Union with my assembled forces.³⁸

This statement proved to be prophetic. When Hitler found himself at war with the Western Powers, he had to postpone

³⁶Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Words, ed. Gordon W. Prange (Washington D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1944), pp. 266-8. Hitler made public statements on the pact in Berlin on September 1, 1939, in Danzig on September 19, and again in Berlin on October 6.

³⁷Herman Rauschnig, Hitler Speaks (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1939), p. 136. Hitler made these comments during an interview with Rauschnig early in 1934.

³⁸Fest, Hitler, p. 585, quoting Carl Jacob Burckhardt, Meine Danziger Mission 1937-1939 (Zurich and Munich, 1960), p. 348.

his dreams of conquest in the East. After striking his bargain with Stalin, Hitler did indeed "walk part of the road together with the Russians." However, during the intervening two years of peace with the Soviets, Hitler's old fears of Russia would come back to haunt him and the fortunes of war and subsequent relations with Stalin would convince him that he must strike against the USSR before it became too late. Fate, which Hitler so often had declared himself to be the instrument of, would force him to turn on Russia and return to his "true aims."

CHAPTER II

COOPERATION AND SUSPICION

After Hitler made his agreement with Stalin, relations between their two regimes began to thaw. The non-aggression pact with its secret portions and the commercial treaty of August 19 provided the basis for political and economic cooperation between the two states. The Germans could notice even a change in Soviet propaganda; anti-Nazi literature disappeared from Moscow news stands and the Soviet news media, ordinarily hostile toward the Third Reich, overnight became conciliatory. The Russian press not only stopped attacking Hitler's policies and accusing the Germans of aggression, but began extolling the virtues of harmonious relations with the USSR's erstwhile enemy. Détente apparently had become a reality.¹

Although Germany's relations with Russia became closer and collaboration increased, mutual suspicion characterized their relations from the start. While the period from the

¹Hilger, Allies, p. 311; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 6, 1939, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 88. Count Werner von der Schulenberg was German ambassador to Moscow until June 22, 1941.

signing of the pact to the fall of France in June 1940 was one of maximum cooperation, it was during this time that Hitler began to worry about Russian intentions. Although his arrangement with Stalin was supposed to secure his eastern flank, allowing Germany to deal with the Western Powers, Soviet actions between 1939 and 1941 gradually revived the Fuehrer's fears of the Soviet Union. Within a fortnight of signing their accord, Germany and Russia faced the first test of their new relationship.

On September 1, Hitler launched his attack on Poland; two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany. Hitler then became concerned that the Western Powers would assault the Reich's weak western front before he could overrun Poland. As a result, on September 3, the same day Britain and France intervened, the Fuehrer nervously requested that the Russians move into Poland and seize their allotted territory. Stalin, however, hesitated to commit himself but promised to act against his Polish neighbor at the most opportune time. In a show of Soviet good will, V.M. Molotov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, sent Russia's congratulations when the Wehrmacht reached Warsaw.²

²Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 3, 1939, Ibid., p. 86; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 5, 1939, ibid., p. 87; Schulenberg to German

Despite his easy victories over the Poles, Hitler kept insisting on quick Soviet military action. The Russians were still reluctant, however, and told Ambassador Schulenberg in Moscow on September 9, that the Red Army needed more time to prepare. The Soviets also announced that they planned to use the excuse that they were entering Polish territory to protect their former Ukrainian and Belorussian countrymen living there. Hitler's foreign office could only urge that the Red Army speed up its preparations.³

The Red Army was ready to move on September 14, but the Russians wanted to wait until the Wehrmacht took Warsaw before acting. Stalin felt that he could better justify Russian aggression if the country he planned to invade no longer had a seat of government; with no central authority in Poland, the situation would lend more credence to his pretext for intervention.⁴

Foreign Office, Moscow, September 9, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 89; Wilhelm Keitel, The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel, ed. Walter Gorlitz, trans. David Irving (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 98, hereafter cited as Keitel Memoirs. General Wilhelm Keitel was Chief of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) or Armed Forces High Command.

³Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 9, 1939, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 89; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 9, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 90; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 10, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 14, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 92; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 16, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 95.

Stalin's excuse was not a popular one in Berlin. Ribbentrop protested to the Russians that it made their two nations look more like enemies than friends. After all, just who were the Soviets protecting their Slavic brothers from? However, Hitler's top diplomat predicted the imminent fall of Warsaw and expressed his government's pleasure that Russia would soon attack its neighbor to the west. Ribbentrop again demanded a Russian invasion date so that Wehrmacht and the Red Army could coordinate their operations.⁵

The Soviet reply did little to relieve Hitler's anxieties or soothe ruffled German sensibilities. The Russians promised only that they would act soon and asked that Germany not be upset over the crude excuse offered for invading Poland because they had been unable to think of a better one.⁶

Hitler did not have much longer to wait, for on September 17, the Red Army crossed the Polish frontier. The Germans got very short notice of this; Russia informed them only hours before the event. Even so, the next day Germany and Russia issued a joint declaration to the effect that

⁵Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 15, 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

⁶Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 16, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 95.

since the Polish government was "incapacitated," they felt obliged to "restore order" and end "the intolerable political and economic conditions" in Poland. This was a polite, but not very convincing way of announcing their intention to occupy that country.⁷

There would be further cooperation regarding Poland, but Hitler also wanted to establish a common policy toward another country, Rumania. The Germans had learned of British efforts to make the Rumanians side with the Western Powers, which also had offered to send troops to protect Rumania against its greedy neighbors. Since western help most likely would have to come by sea through the Dardanelles, Hitler was concerned about Turkish policy. Thus, early in September, the Germans urged Moscow to try to keep the Turks neutral and, if possible, to persuade them to close the Straits. The Soviets promised to do what they could.⁸

⁷Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 17, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 96; Hilger Memorandum, September 18, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 100. This would not be the last time one of the pact partners would present the other with a fait accompli. Both signatories would make a mockery of their promise to consult and exchange information on problems of common interest.

⁸Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 5, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 87. Rumania had several neighbors who coveted its territory. Russia, of course, wanted Bessarabia; Hungary, Transylvania; and Bulgaria, southern Dobruja.

This brief exchange was significant for future developments in Russo-German relations. Although the German leader had waived all interest in southeast Europe in his deal with Stalin, the Reich had extensive economic ties with the area and Rumania was especially important because it supplied Germany with most of its oil and much of its grain. Naturally, Hitler was anxious to protect a region so vital to his war economy and despite his avowed lack of interest in the area, would become increasingly concerned about the Balkans in subsequent dealings with the Kremlin and, in time, more anxious about Soviet rather than western encroachment.⁹

For the present, however, the German leader seemed satisfied with his bargain with the Russians. Thanks to his pact with Stalin, he had crushed Poland and now could face Britain and France with the eastern frontier of the Reich secure. Stalin, however, wanted to make some changes in their agreement and on September 20, informed Hitler that he wanted Germany and Russia to partition Poland completely and not allow a rump Polish state to exist. The Soviet dictator also wished to alter the demarcation line in Poland

⁹According to Edmond Vermeil's Germany's Three Reichs, trans. E.W. Dickes (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), p. 372, southeastern Europe was vital to Germany for its raw materials and that from 1939 on, the Danubian countries were German "economic colonies."

so as to give all of Lublin and part of Warsaw provinces to the Reich; in exchange, Germany would yield its hegemony over Lithuania to the Russians. Hitler had no objection to these suggestions and promised to send Ribbentrop to Moscow to discuss the issues.¹⁰

In the meantime, the Soviets had been active in the Baltic region. Berlin learned that Russia had demanded bases for its armed forces in Estonia and wanted a military alliance as well, threatening to invade if the Estonians did not comply. Ironically, it was from Estonia that Germany heard of this latter demand. However, since Hitler's compact with Stalin consigned most of the Baltic area to the tender mercies of the Russians, the Wilhelmstrasse could offer little consolation. The other Baltic countries soon would feel the pressure from their powerful neighbor, but despite Germany's friendship with these states, Hitler would do nothing to help. But the Baltic, like the Balkans, would become another source of tension between Hitler and the Soviets.¹¹

¹⁰Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 20, 1939, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 101; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 23, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 102; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 25, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹¹German Foreign Office to German Embassy in Moscow, Berlin, September 27, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 103; German Foreign

For the time being, relations were proceeding well enough for the Fuehrer to send Ribbentrop to Moscow to discuss Stalin's revisions. The Moscow talks resulted in a friendship treaty, signed on September 28, by which Germany and Russia confirmed their adherence to the 1939 non-aggression pact but agreed to rearrange their spheres of influence. Germany transferred its claim to Lithuania, except for a strip of land along the East Prussian border, to Soviet Russia; in return, the Soviets gave Lublin province and part of the Warsaw district to the Reich.¹²

Office to German Embassy in Moscow, Berlin, September 27, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 104. The Soviets wanted a naval base at Baltischport (Paldiski) and an air base on one of Estonia's islands.

¹²"German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty," September 28, 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 105-107. Germany had been negotiating a treaty to defend Lithuania only eight days earlier. The outline of this treaty appears in Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, 1937-1945, 10 vols. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1954), 8:112, hereafter cited as D.G.F.P. Hitler incorporated the western areas of Poland into the Reich. Two new administrative districts or gaus were formed: Wartegau (the pre-1918 German state of Posen) and Danzig-West Prussia. The southwestern section of Poland was included in a previously existing district, Silesia. The rest of German-held Poland made up the Generalgouvernement and was not absorbed into Germany. See Dietrich Orlow's The History of the Nazi Party, 2 vols. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969, 1973), 2:287.

Germany and Russia agreed on other matters dealing with Poland. Both regimes promised to exchange ethnic Germans living in the Russian zone for Ukrainians and Belorussians in German-held Poland. They also agreed to suppress any Polish agitation directed at each other's occupation zone. Hitler and Stalin were determined that neither of them would be able to undermine control in their respective areas by stirring up these minorities. The redefining of zones also would lessen this risk since most of ethnic Poland now would belong to Germany and the areas mainly inhabited by Ukrainians and Belorussians would go to the Soviets.¹³

¹³Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 106-7. By bringing ethnic Germans or Volksdeutsche into the Reich, Hitler was carrying out, in part, his dream of uniting all Germans within one nation. Perhaps anticipating the eventual absorption of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union, he already had ordered the evacuation of Germans from Latvia and Estonia. According to Adam Ulam's Stalin. The Man and His Era (New York: Viking Press, 1937), p. 517, hereafter cited as Stalin, the NKVD or Soviet secret police deported German Communists many of them Jews who were being held in Russian jails. These luckless individuals were handed over to the Gestapo or German secret police.

Actually, the territorial sections of the treaty benefitted Stalin more than Hitler because he had more to fear from agitation among minority groups. No doubt Stalin had noted how effectively Hitler had exploited the self-determination issue to cause trouble in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. He was less concerned, however, about the German minority than with the Poles, Ukrainians, and Belorussians, all of whom had never cared for Great Russian rule. Besides, the Ukraine and Belorussia were areas hardest

In addition to making arrangements concerning spheres of influence and minority groups, Germany and Russia agreed to strengthen their economic ties. Hitler's representatives at Moscow secured a Soviet promise to facilitate German rail traffic to and from Rumania through Russian-held Poland. The Russians also agreed to allow the shipment through the USSR of goods from Iran, Afghanistan, and the Far East, thus enabling Germany to obtain, for example, rubber and tin from southeast Asia. These measures were helpful to Hitler not only because they would give the Reich easier access to Rumanian oil, but because they would also allow Germany to evade the British naval blockade and continue trading with the near east and Japan.¹⁴

Along with their promise to help German trade, the Soviets agreed to supply the Reich with an even greater quantity of oil than required in the August 19 treaty; in exchange, the Germans were to provide hard coal and steel

hit by Stalin's collectivization scheme. This was why the Soviet dictator doubted the loyalty of these groups. He certainly did not want Hitler to use Polish, Ukrainian, or Belorussian national sentiment to foment revolt against Russian rule. Stalin also wanted to have the entire populations of the last two groups under his control.

¹⁴Norman Rich, Hitler's War Aims (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), p. 128; Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 108-9.

pipe. It appears, then, that the economic arrangements concluded at Moscow were to Hitler's advantage since his nation's war economy needed raw materials. Thus, the new treaty was a boon to the German economy as well as to overall relations with Russia.¹⁵

With the signing of the September accord, Nazi-Soviet collaboration increased and, discounting Soviet activities in the Baltic, the alliance seemed to be working well enough. In Moscow, both delegations even signed a joint communique favoring an end to the conflict that Hitler had started.¹⁶

Thus far the war had gone well for Hitler. His forces had smashed Poland and now faced British and French armies which, as yet, had made no effort to move against Germany. Actually, Hitler probably wanted to end the conflict with Britain, but not with France since he could see no possible reconciliation with the French but wanted peace with England. The Nazi chancellor hoped that with the demise of Poland, Britain would no longer have cause to continue fighting and therefore would become more reasonable; after all, Hitler

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. After World War II, Ribbentrop wrote that after he returned from Moscow, Hitler told him of his desire for continued good relations with Russia and even led the German minister to believe that he considered the deal with Stalin to be permanent. See Ribbentrop, Memoirs, p. 129.

wanted Britain for an ally, not an enemy. In his vision of future global affairs, the British could keep their empire and rule the seas while Germany controlled the continent. While such a view overlooked the fact that Britain seldom had favored the predominance of a single power on the European mainland, usually attempting to maintain a balance of power there, Hitler still hoped that the British would work with him and not against him.

It became apparent to Hitler after the Polish campaign, however, that England was not interested in peace. Consequently, the Fuehrer had no choice but to see his conflict with the Western Powers through to its conclusion. For the present at least, his eastern borders were safe enough. Nevertheless, on September 30, two days after Germany signed the friendship treaty with the Soviets Hitler ordered Germany's new demarcation line in Poland to be strengthened to form a "military security belt."¹⁷

It was not Poland, however, but the Baltic that troubled Hitler most in his relations with Stalin during the fall of 1939. In October, Molotov informed the Germans that Russia planned to give the former Polish city of Vilna to Lithuania, in accordance with the August 23 Secret Protocol.

¹⁷Fuehrer Directive, September 30, 1939, D.G.F.P., 8:176.

But what disturbed the Germans was Molotov's next proposal that Russia force Lithuania to give the Reich that slice of territory earmarked for Germany in the September accord. Although taking territory from Lithuania had not bothered Hitler before, he did not want to make Germany appear as an aggressor; instead, the German Foreign Office asked that the Soviets themselves give Germany the strip, but at a later date. Hitler wanted the land, to be sure, but he wanted to preserve appearances.¹⁸

The Lithuanians, unaware of Hitler's duplicity, confided to the Germans in October that Russia had demanded a mutual assistance pact with them and had insisted on stationing Soviet forces in Lithuania. Obviously, Russian moves in the Baltic put Hitler in an embarrassing position. Although Moscow gave in to German squeamishness about Lithuania and promised to leave the strip unoccupied until Hitler wanted it, the fate of the Baltic region lay in Stalin's hands; in fact, Germany had sanctioned Russian encroachment there and had given Stalin permission to do as he wished. While the Baltic countries knew about the

¹⁸Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, October 3, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 1-2; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, October 5, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 112. Hitler had forced Lithuania to cede Memel to the Reich in March 1939.

Nazi-Soviet détente, they probably were ignorant of their own isolation.¹⁹

The Finns also still trusted Germany and wanted to know what assurance the Reich could give them if Russia dealt with their country as it had with Estonia and Lithuania. But even when Finland advised the Germans in October that it planned to resist Soviet demands by force, the Wilhelmstrasse could tell the Finns only that the Third Reich would not interfere.²⁰

As Hitler watched Stalin's moves in the Baltic, the Soviet dictator's actions elsewhere also became known to him. Hitler had information that Russia might sign a mutual assistance pact with Turkey. Therefore, the Germans insisted that if Russia did so, the pact must not require the Soviets to aid Turkey against the Reich; unless the Russians eliminated such a requirement and made this exception public, their actions would violate the Nazi-Soviet pact. Ribbentrop also added that Russia should

¹⁹Molotov to Schulenberg, Moscow, October 8, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁰Weizsaecker Memorandum, Berlin, October 9, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 121; Weizsaecker to Bluecher, Berlin, October 9, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 122. Ernst von Weizsaecker was state secretary in the German Foreign Office from 1938 to 1943. Wipert von Bluecher was German minister to Finland at the time of these deliberations.

continue its efforts to prevent Turkey from making a treaty with the Western Powers or to try, at least, to make Turkey remain neutral.²¹

The Soviets tried to calm the Germans about their dealings with Turkey. Molotov denied the likelihood of a compact with the Turks and promised to uphold German interests in Soviet foreign policy.²²

Although Molotov tried to allay German suspicions about Russian policy in Turkey, within days Hitler learned that Russia had offered a similar agreement to Bulgaria. The Bulgarians apprised Berlin that they had rejected the proposal because they did not want such a treaty with Russia if they had none with Germany. No doubt, news of two separate Soviet efforts to get mutual assistance pacts with these two states lying along the underbelly of southeast Europe did not increase Hitler's confidence in the durability of his compact with Stalin.²³

²¹Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, October 7, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 117.

²²Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, October 9, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 120.

²³Weizsaecker Memorandum, Berlin, October 12, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 124.

There were other problems with the Russians in the fall of 1939. Various high German officials complained about unreasonable Soviet demands for inspecting and purchasing war material, and Russian trade representatives in Berlin were insisting on being shown highly sophisticated or secret weaponry. The matter was important enough for Hitler to intervene personally and he ordered that only standard military goods be shown to the Russians and that the Germans, not the Russians, determine what would be sold. Equipment undergoing research and development or which was secret would not be revealed.²⁴

This was not the last of the difficulties that the Germans had with Russia over trade in late 1939. In December, General Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the Armed Forces High Command (OKW), reported that the Soviets not only had increased the number of items that the Germans had to deliver but were asking now for machine tools suitable for armaments production as well as aviation and naval hardware. With the Reich still engaged in a major war, the Germans believed that this was unfair. Consequently, Ribbentrop told the

²⁴Weizsaecker Memorandum, Berlin, November 1, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 127. Among those protesting were Herman Goering, Reich Minister for Air, but also in charge of the Four-Year Plan, Admiral Helmut Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, and General Keitel.

Russians that Germany was doing all it could to fulfill its obligations and that because of the war, some items would be unavailable.²⁵

The war that the German minister referred to occupied most of Hitler's attention during the last months of 1939. However, the conflict went on only at sea and in the air while the armies of both sides stayed in their positions along the western front. Since the British and French did not appear eager to go over to the offensive, the initiative lay with the Germans. It was during this phase that Hitler had time to evaluate his nation's overall situation before the inevitable clash of arms in the west.

While Germany was preoccupied with preparing its forces along its western frontier, Stalin was active in areas adjacent to the USSR's borders. He not only had added Lithuania to the Russian sphere but was pressuring that state to allow Soviet armed forces to be stationed there. Estonia and Latvia already had given in to similar demands. With Red Army units in Lithuania, the Soviets would have a military presence along Germany's East Prussian frontier.

Another Baltic state that Soviet Russia tried to coerce was Finland, but unlike their neighbors, the Finns were

²⁵Ribbentrop Memorandum, Berlin, December 11, 1939, *ibid.*, p. 130.

determined to fight if necessary. War came in November, when the Red Army attacked, and lasted until March 1940. Hitler remained true to his pact, however, although he was sympathetic to Finland, and did nothing to assist the Finns. Despite Germany's close ties with Finland, the Reich's controlled press followed a pro-Russian line.²⁶

The Russo-Finnish war was frustrating to Hitler, not only because he had to stand aside while Russia attacked a friendly state, but also because Stalin's moves in the Baltic seemed to be aimed ultimately at the Third Reich. Why else would the Russians place military units there? Following Russia's demands on Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, Hitler told the chiefs of his armed forces on October 10,

By no treaty or pact can a lasting neutrality of Soviet Russia be insured with safety. At present all reasons speak against Russia's departure from this state of neutrality. In eight months, one year, or several years this may be altered.²⁷

His suspicions were compounded when Russia attacked Finland in November. He gave his assessment of Nazi-Soviet relations at a military conference on November 23 when he said,

²⁶Hilger, Allies, p. 319. According to Hilger, in December Russian coastal batteries fired on German ships near Finland and a Soviet submarine sank a German freighter.

²⁷Quoted in Bullock, Hitler, p. 564.

At the present time Russia presents no danger. She is now weakened through a number of internal events. But treaties are kept only as long as they are expedient. Russia too will stick to them as long as she herself believes that this is to her advantage.²⁸

Despite his misgivings about the stability of his bargain with Russia, he acquiesced in Stalin's encroachment in the Baltic. The reason for this was apparent; with a military confrontation in the west imminent, he still needed the advantages that his deal with Russia afforded him.²⁹

One of these advantages was access to the Soviet Union's vast material resources. Since October, Germany and Russia had been negotiating another trade agreement and, after months of hard bargaining, they signed a commercial treaty on February 11, 1940. By this new compact, Russia not only increased the amount of raw materials flowing into the Reich, but also gave the Germans more time to make their deliveries to the USSR.³⁰

²⁸Quoted in Hilger, Allies, p. 314. The same could have been said about Nazi Germany, whose record for double-dealing was second to none. Hitler's belief in Russian weakness probably stemmed from the Red Army's poor showing against the Finns. He attributed this to Stalin's purges, which decimated the Red Army's officer corps, thus reducing Russian military potential.

²⁹Bullock, Hitler, p. 573.

³⁰"Foreign Office Memorandum on the German-Soviet Commercial agreement signed on February 11, 1940," Berlin, February 26, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 131. By this

This highly favorable arrangement guaranteed that Germany would receive feed grain, mineral oil, cotton, phosphorus, chromium ores, iron ore, scrap and pig iron, manganese ore, other metals, and lumber. The Third Reich also gained reduced freight rates for rail shipments to and from Rumania, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Far East. German deliveries were to consist of manufactured goods, industrial facilities and processes, as well as war material. To produce these goods, Germany would receive copper, nickel, tin, molybdenum, wolfram, and cobalt from Russia. Thus, German industry would use Russian resources to manufacture goods, including armaments, for the Soviet Union.³¹

The negotiating of this treaty was hard, the Wilhelmstrasse believed, because the Russians agreed to deliver far more than was economical for them, partially at the

treaty, the Germans got Russia to make its shipments within a year and a half while the Reich did not have to make its deliveries for two and a quarter years. This meant that Germany would get Soviet raw materials until August 1941 without having to complete its part of the bargain until May 1942. Since war broke out between Germany and the USSR in June 1941, the Germans evidently got the better part of the deal.

³¹Ibid., pp. 132-3. The German Foreign Office estimated that by February 1941, Russia would have supplied 800 million Reichsmarks worth of materials, and that the amount for the second year would be even greater.

expense of their own stockpiles. The Germans estimated that the agreement would benefit the Reich if the amount of incoming raw materials was enough to offset the effect of the British blockade.³²

In the meantime, the German Foreign Office was interested in another topic of Nazi-Soviet concern, the Russo-Finnish war, which ended in early March. The Fuehrer could scarcely overlook the results of that conflict. Hitler's diplomats concluded that Russia now dominated the Gulf of Finland and the central Baltic. The Soviets also had gained a better strategic position against Finland, by taking the Karelian Isthmus, and against neutral Sweden, by annexing Hango. Surprisingly, the Germans admitted to themselves that they had been poor friends to Finland.³³

For the present, though, it was expedient for Hitler to abide, more or less by his agreement with Stalin. On April 7, two days before the German attack on Norway, Ribbentrop informed Molotov of the need for such an invasion, explaining that if the Reich did not act quickly, the Western Powers would seize Norway themselves. The German minister

³²Ibid., p. 134.

³³Minister in Finland to German Foreign Office, Helsinki, March 13, 1940, D.G.F.P., 8:914.

held that his country's move would benefit Russia also, because an Anglo-French landing there would turn Scandinavia into a theater of war and re-open the Finnish question. It is unknown whether this argument convinced the Soviets, but Molotov wished the Germans well.³⁴

In truth, Stalin probably hoped that his rapacious German partner would meet with disaster, for he could never be sure that one day Hitler's terrible swift sword would not be raised against the USSR. Détente was advantageous but irksome to both dictators. To the Germans, Russian policy toward them must have seemed to vary from the cooperative to the intractable. On April 11, Schulenberg reported to his superiors that "for some time" he had noticed a deterioration in relations; not only had the Soviets created difficulties for the Moscow embassy, but they had also stopped shipping oil and grain to the Reich.³⁵

³⁴Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, April 7, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 137; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, April 9, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 138.

³⁵Schulenberg Memorandum, Moscow, April 11, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 138-9. Schulenberg wrote that the Soviets had caused troubles about visas, slowed the emigration of Volksdeutsche, and halted the extradition of German citizens in Russian jails. Schulenberg stated that his talks with Anastas Miloyan, People's Commissar for Foreign Trade (also Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars), about the cessation of oil and grain shipments had been "very negative." The Russians also had reneged on a promise to let Germany have a naval base.

Considering Hitler's innate distrust of the Russians, this situation might have brought on a crisis. However, when Schulenberg complained to Molotov about these troubles on April 9, the Russian promised to resolve the difficulties, which he blamed on "excessive zeal of subordinate agencies." The German ambassador was astounded by this about-face, but ascribed it to Soviet relief that Scandinavia was now safe from Britain and France, who had considered sending troops to support the Finns in the Russo-Finnish war. The German official believed that Stalin may have been trying to placate the Western Powers by a display of coolness toward the Nazis. But with German control over that area, Russia had been spared from having to go to war with Britain and France over Finland.³⁶

How the Russians could have been pleased about further Nazi aggression must remain a mystery. Yet, it never seemed to dawn on the Germans that their warlike policies might frighten Russia. The Soviets must have been more alarmed than delighted about Hitler's Scandinavian adventure, because they expressed their concern to Schulenberg that the Reich might also conquer Sweden. The German reassured the Soviets that Sweden would be left alone.³⁷

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, April 13, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

But neither Russia nor the Western Powers could be sure who was safe from Hitler's Machtpolitik. The Nazi dictator was full of surprises, even for his friends and allies. Although Stalin probably knew in advance of Hitler's plans to strike in the west, the Germans deliberately delayed informing the Soviets until May 10, one day after the attack began. As before, Molotov dutifully offered Soviet best wishes for a German victory.³⁸

To the world's, and probably Russia's, consternation the German offensive in the west was a tremendous success. But Stalin could hardly have been relieved at the news that Nazi Germany had overrun France and had driven the British back to their home islands, for now Hitler controlled most of western Europe. As after the German triumph in Poland, the Russians began efforts to increase military preparedness and insure the security of their border areas. Even before the French officially capitulated, Stalin initiated further activities in the Baltic and in southeastern Europe. These areas, already troublesome for Russo-German relations, would become more so in subsequent months and Stalin's actions

³⁸Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, May 7, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 142; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, May 10, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 142. Why the Germans delayed informing the Russians until May 10 is unknown.

there and along the German-Soviet demarcation line in Poland would arouse Hitler's fears of a growing Russian threat to the Reich's eastern flank. Hitler's interpretation of Stalin's deeds and his assessment of Germany's wartime situation would shape his decision to launch a surprise attack against the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER III

THE TROUBLED FRIENDSHIP

By early June 1940, it was evident that Hitler's armies were triumphant in western Europe. Yet, even before the Wehrmacht could consolidate its victory, Stalin renewed his pressure on the Baltic states and, that same month, began coercing Rumania. As a result of these and other Soviet activities in eastern Europe, the Fuehrer would become increasingly suspicious of the Russians and begin to view the USSR as an immediate threat to the Reich, a menace that might have to be dealt with by force. Thus, the events following the fall of France were critical in shaping his decision to strike at the Soviet Union.

On June 14, the day German troops marched into Paris, the Soviets sent Lithuania an ultimatum demanding the immediate dissolution of the existing government in Kaunas and the creation of one acceptable to Moscow. Despite the fact that the beleaguered Lithuanians yielded to these demands, as well as one requiring Soviet military occupation, Russia invaded. Similar demands went to Latvia and Estonia on June 16. As with Lithuania, the Red Army moved

into these countries while their governments hurriedly reconstituted themselves to suit Moscow.¹

After these states had disappeared, the Wilhelmstrasse evaluated the situation. Not only did the USSR now have a common border with Germany, but the Reich had lost a source of cheap food and raw materials. Even though it was still possible to obtain imports from the Baltic area, the Russians probably would make them more costly.²

Another, but far more important German trade area was Rumania, and it was against that country that Stalin made his next move. On June 23, the day after France capitulated, Molotov told Schulenberg in Moscow that the time was ripe for Russia to annex Bessarabia; by force if the Rumanians proved refractory. The Soviets also desired Bukovina, still another part of Rumania unmentioned in previous

¹Minister in Lithuania to Foreign Ministry, Kaunas, June 15, 1940, D.C.F.P., 9:572; Memorandum, June 15, 1940, ibid., 9:574; Memorandum, June 16, 1940, ibid., 9:581; Minister in Estonia to Foreign Ministry, Tallinn, June 17, 1940, ibid., 9:589; Pravda article June 16, 1940, Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, ed. Jane Degras (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 45-355, hereafter cited as S.D.F.P. The Germans gave some Lithuanian officials political asylum.

²Memorandum to Ribbentrop, June 17, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 152-3. Germany had secret agreements with the three states whereby seventy per cent of their total exports went to the Reich. These exports consisted of grain, hogs, butter, eggs, flax, lumber, seeds, and petroleum.

discussions, but which had a Ukrainian population that Russia wanted within its borders. This news startled Schulenberg, who voiced concern that opening the Rumanian question might lead to the disruption of German trade with Rumania and he was sufficiently disturbed to ask the Russians not to act until he had notified Berlin. Molotov agreed, but added that he expected German support for Soviet claims. The Russian also promised that the USSR would protect German interests.³

Hitler assented to Stalin's designs on Rumania, although he insisted that those areas where Germany had commercial interests not become embroiled in a conflict and that Germany be allowed to move the Volksdeutsche from Bessarabia and Bukovina to the Reich. Although the claim to Bukovina was a questionable one, Hitler promised to tell Bucharest to give it up as well as Bessarabia. The Russians were delighted at the Fuehrer's response and agreed to his requests.⁴

³Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 23, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 155.

⁴Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, June 25, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 158-9; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 26, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 159-60. The Germans were surprised by the claim to Bukovina because it had never belonged to Russia.

On June 26, Molotov informed Berlin that Russia soon would press its demands on Rumania and wanted the Germans "urgently to advise" Bucharest to submit; otherwise, war was inevitable. To placate the Germans, Russia had reduced its claim for Bukovina to only its northern part. Later that day, the Wilhelmstrasse got word that Russia had delivered an ultimatum to the Rumanians and, as promised, Berlin urged Rumania to comply. The Rumanians had no alternative but to give in on June 28 and to open their borders to the Red Army.⁵

Thus, while the Fuehrer was concluding his conquest of western Europe, Stalin was busy absorbing parts of eastern Europe into the USSR. Although the Nazi dictator's compact with the Kremlin allowed Russian encroachment in certain areas, it was the timing of the Soviet actions that disturbed the Germans. It seemed to them that Stalin was reacting to Hitler's overwhelming and unexpected success in the west. Also, the USSR had established a powerful military presence in the east: along the Reich's East Prussian border and against Rumania, the German war machine's

⁵Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 27, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 163; Ribbentrop to German Foreign Office, Berlin, June 27, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 163; S.D.F.P., pp. 458-61.

main oil source. German intelligence discovered that the Red Army had stationed twenty divisions in Lithuania and thirty in Bessarabia. And this ominous development had occurred while the bulk of German forces was concentrated in the west; the Wehrmacht's strength in the east during this period had fluctuated between five and ten divisions. Of course, Hitler had gambled that all would go well in his western campaign and that his eastern flank would remain secure. The Soviet moves, however, occurring when the Reich was distracted by events elsewhere, worried Hitler; they seemed calculated to enhance Russia's strategic position against Germany and they served to remind the Fuehrer of the reality of Soviet power in eastern Europe.⁶

This reality became even more apparent on July 13, when Stalin advised his German counterpart that he wanted to retain the part of Lithuania that was supposed to go to the Reich. A month later, Berlin complained that the request

⁶Schulenberg to Weizsaecker, Moscow, July 11, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 164-5; Ribbentrop testimony, Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, 42 vols. (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947), 10:289-90, hereafter cited as IMT; Keitel testimony, IMT, 10:525; Jodl testimony, IMT, 15:388-89; Ribbentrop, Memoirs, p. 146; Hilger, Allies, pp. 319-20. In late May, the Germans had intelligence that Russia had massed thirty divisions along its border with Rumania.

was a "rather considerable" alteration of the Nazi-Soviet accord and a disadvantage to the Reich. The Germans had no further objections, but they did ask for compensation, the nature of which they avoided specifying during the remainder of 1940. Although this issue was minor, it made relations more difficult.⁷

Problems with his Soviet partner continued to plague Hitler and to increase his distrust of Russia. At the end of July, Stalin formally incorporated the three former Baltic states into the USSR as "Soviet Republics." Although this area was lost for good, most of southeast Europe, minus a part of Rumania, remained intact. The entire region, however, was something of a political vacuum, for not even Germany, with its economic predominance, could insure stability in the area. Now that Russia had opened the Rumanian question, Hungary and Bulgaria, encouraged by the Soviet precedent and approval, began threatening their unfortunate neighbor. This situation posed a difficult problem for Hitler: if war broke out in southeast Europe, could he be certain that Stalin would not take advantage of

⁷ Ibid.; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, July 13, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 166; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, August 2, 1940, ibid., p. 174; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 6, 1940, ibid., p. 186.

the resulting chaos and sieze still more of Rumania, perhaps even the oilfields?⁸

Horried at this prospect, the Fuehrer intervined in the dispute and ordered Bucharest to give up land to Bulgaria and Hungary. Rumania's talks with the Bulgarians went more smoothly than those with the Hungarians, however, and after negotiations with the latter broke down, Hitler directed Ribbentrop to work with the Italians to "arbitrate" the matter. Thus, as the result of a conference in Vienna on August 29 and 30, Hungary got half of Transylvania and Rumania received an Axis guarantee of protection for its remaining territory. After these concessions, the German chancellor hoped that in the future, southeast Europe would remain quiet.⁹

Hitler took one more step to protect Rumania from complete dismemberment: on September 20, he sent army and

⁸Memorandum, July 21, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 168; Memorandum, July 22, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 171-2; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 26, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 160-1; Jodl testimony, *IMT*, 15:390; Memorandum, July 27, 1940, *D.G.F.P.*, 10:337, 340-1.

⁹Documents on the Second Vienna Award, *ibid.*, 10:571, 581; Weizsaecker to Schulenberg, Berlin, July 30, 1940, *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, p. 173; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, August 31, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 179; Dr. Paul Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, ed. R.H.C. Steed (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), pp. 188-9; Hilger, *Allies*, p. 320.

air force missions there for the "ostensible" purpose of advising the Rumanian armed forces, although their real job was to defend the oilfields. The German missions also were to align Bucharest's military policy with that of the Reich and "in case a war with Soviet Russia is forced upon us, to prepare for the commitment of German and Rumanian forces from the direction of Rumania."¹⁰ Clearly, the Nazi leader was preparing his vulnerable southern flank against any contingency.¹¹

Naturally, Hitler's activities in southeast Europe had not gone unnoticed and, by late July, the Kremlin had become aware of Germany's diplomatic initiatives and wanted to know what they meant. Berlin explained only that it had advised Rumania to accede to Hungarian and Bulgarian demands. There the matter rested until August 31, when the Wilhelmstrasse informed Moscow of the Vienna award. Because Hungary and Rumania had asked for arbitration and since Germany had wanted the area to remain stable, the Reich had settled the issue. The Germans also held that they had

¹⁰Hitler directive to OKW, September 20, 1940, D.G.F.P., 11:144.

¹¹Ibid.

acted quickly to prevent a conflict and, to avoid future problems, had guaranteed what was left of Rumania.¹²

The German notification, though surprisingly candid, irked the Soviets and provoked an angry exchange of recriminations between Moscow and Berlin during September. Molotov charged that by meddling in an area of Russian interest without consulting Moscow, Germany had violated the Nazi-Soviet pact. Whereupon Ribbentrop denied that Russia had any further interest in southeast Europe after taking Bessarabia, and that Germany had warned the Soviets repeatedly of the Reich's involvement there. Such being the case, there had been no German obligation to notify the Kremlin. Furthermore, the German official continued, Russia had not bothered to consult about taking the Baltic states and had given Berlin very short notice before occupying parts of Rumania. Ribbentrop then warned Molotov "once and for all" that his country had "predominant" interests in Rumania.¹³

¹²Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, July 29, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 173; Weizsaecker to Schulenberg, Berlin, July 30, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 173; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, August 31, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 178-9.

¹³Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 1, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 180-1; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 3, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 182-3; Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 6, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 185-6.

Molotov refused to let the matter drop. He accused the Germans of having acted "not entirely in good faith" at Vienna. If they had consulted beforehand, Russia would have assured them of Rumania's safety; as it was, Berlin's guarantee appeared to be aimed at the USSR. The Soviet official also brushed aside Ribbentrop's contention that Germany had exclusive interests in Rumania. Concerning the Vienna award, he added that Germany had had plenty of time to discuss the Rumanian problem with Russia. As for the German accusation regarding the Baltic states, Moscow had given advance notice, which Berlin had acknowledged. Molotov concluded with the comment that if article three of the non-aggression pact caused the Germans "certain inconveniences and restrictions," it could be changed or even omitted. With this last remark, the acrimonious German-Soviet debate died down for the time being.¹⁴

Meanwhile, another conflict in Nazi-Soviet relations had arisen. Between August 24 and September 12, at Soviet insistence, German and Russian officials met to discuss trade difficulties. Since the signing of the February 11

¹⁴Soviet Memorandum to German Ambassador to Moscow, Moscow, September 21, 1940, S.D.F.P., pp. 470-4; Schulenberg Memorandum, September 21, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 189-94.

commercial treaty, the Germans had failed to complete their scheduled deliveries and, as a consequence, the Russians now were demanding shorter deadlines for German shipments and were threatening to stop sending goods to the Reich unless something was done to remedy the situation.¹⁵

The Russian warning alarmed the Wilhelmstrasse. The importation of raw materials from the Soviet Union was "a very substantial prop to the German war economy" and, since February, had amounted to more than three hundred million Reichsmarks, including one hundred million worth of grain. Moreover, the route across Russia was the Reich's only trade link with Japan and the continent of Asia. Thus, in its eagerness to become the dominant military and industrial power in Europe, Nazi Germany had developed an unhealthy dependence upon Soviet Russia.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Germans had benefitted much more from these arrangements than had the Russians. Thus far, the Germans had delivered only one hundred fifty million Reichsmarks worth of goods, one-half of the value of what the Soviets had sent. This happy arrangement was now in jeopardy,

¹⁵Memorandum, September 28, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 199-201.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

for if Hitler carried out his latest armaments program, the Reich would fall so far behind schedule in its shipments to Russia that it could never catch up. There was another difficulty: Germany had stopped sending items that would help Russia's war potential, the very type that the Soviets wanted most. These factors increased the likelihood that Moscow would halt trade, a situation that would strain relations severely; Hitler soon would have to decide what to do to prevent such an eventuality.¹⁷

Finland was another source of troubles with the Russians. On September 16, Ribbentrop sent word to the Kremlin that Germany planned to send an anti-aircraft battalion through Finland to northern Norway, allegedly to safeguard the Reich's Finnish nickel mines at Petsamo from the British. A justly suspicious Molotov demanded the text of whatever agreement the Germans had made with the Finns. Berlin assured him that the Finnish deal was only military and technical, not political, and that Germany would withdraw its troops from the area after the war. The Soviet commissar then renewed his perennial complaint about the Reich's

¹⁷Ibid.

failure to consult, especially when the issue was as important as Finland, part of the Russian sphere of interest.¹⁸

Moscow then did something which the Germans could only have interpreted as a Russian attempt to intimidate them. The Soviets began pressuring Finland to give them a nickel concession at Petsamo that belonged to Canada. As a result, German leaders became worried that Russian encroachment in the Petsamo region might lead to the loss of Germany's nickel mines to the USSR, an intolerable prospect to the resource-minded Nazis.¹⁹

In response to these Soviet encroachments, especially in the Baltic area and Rumania, Hitler began strengthening his hand in dealing with Stalin. On July 2, four days after Russia occupied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, he ordered the German High Command (OKH) to conduct a study of how the Wehrmacht might carry out an attack on Russia. It was also during the summer of 1940 that the Fuehrer learned of the Red Army's deployment of over one hundred

¹⁸German Foreign Minister to Schulenberg, Berlin, September 16, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 188; Tippleskirch to German Foreign Office, Moscow, September 27, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 198-9; Foreign Minister to German Embassy in Moscow, Berlin, October 2, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁹Unsigned Memorandum, October 8, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 205.

divisions against Germany's eastern flank. At a conference at Berchtesgaden on July 29, he told General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Wehrmacht Operation Staff, of his anxiety that Russia might take the remainder of Rumania before winter, depriving Germany of its oil. Hitler even had considered attacking Russia that fall to preclude such a possibility, but Keitel had dissuaded him because bad weather was likely and because the timely transfer of enough troops from the west would be impossible.²⁰

Thus, on July 29 and 31, the Fuehrer told the OKW to make plans for an assault on the USSR in the spring of 1941. By this time, the Nazi leader suspected that Stalin was methodically preparing to intervene against the Reich at an opportune time. On August 4, Hitler told his generals that a war with Russia was coming and he cited as evidence the existence of huge Soviet troop concentrations in the area of the three former Baltic states and along Rumania's frontier, the latter situation a danger to Germany's fuel supply. On August 9, the OKW produced Aufbau Ost or Build-up East, a plan ordering the transfer of forces to the east.

²⁰Barton Whaley, Codeword Barbarossa (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1973), p. 14; Jodl testimony, IMT, 15:390, 393; Shirer, Third Reich, p. 797.

By another directive on August 27, the Wehrmacht dispatched twelve divisions to occupied Poland to be ready in case the Fuehrer had to act quickly to save the Rumanian oil-fields from the Russians. Hitler's apprehension about Russia had grown as he watched the Red Army massing in eastern Europe, but he had not made a final decision, as yet, to carry out the plans being developed to invade the USSR. That decision would come later when he became positive that future collaboration with the Soviets was impossible because they were planning to intervene militarily against the Reich.²¹

The main reason for Hitler's apparent restraint at this time was his uncertainty over what to do about Britain, which had not sued for peace as anticipated. Although beaten on the continent, the British had retreated to their home island, where they had begun preparing for a German invasion. Curiously, the Fuehrer's dilemma was related to his misgivings about Russia's continued adherence to German-Soviet collaboration. When London sent Sir Stafford Cripps to Moscow as its new ambassador in late May, Hitler suspected

²¹Keitel testimony, IMT, 10:524; Whaley, Codeword Barbarossa, p. 15; Hilger, Allies, p. 320.

that Stalin might make a deal with Britain to enter the war against Germany.²²

The British actually did try to pry the Soviets loose from their alliance with the Germans and to coax them into intervening in Britain's conflict with the Reich. Stalin, anticipating Hitler's suspicion about Anglo-Russian collusion, apprised him on July 13 of London's efforts and assured the German tyrant of Russia's good faith. Cripps, he said, had proposed a joint Anglo-Soviet defense effort against Nazi Germany and had advocated the restoration of the European balance of power which Hitler had destroyed. The British had even offered to recognize Soviet hegemony over the Balkans and the Straits. Stalin informed the Fuehrer that he had rejected these overtures, except the one favoring Russian control of the Straits, and that he had told Cripps that the old balance of power had been just as onerous to Russia as it had been to Germany.²³

The power balance which Hitler had in mind was not one between nation-states, as the British conceived it, but rather among empires and continents. A German-dominated

²²Ribbentrop, Memoirs, p. 15.

²³Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, May 29, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 142; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, July 13, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

Europe, allied with the British empire, would offset the growing strength of the United States, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. Now, with most of western Europe under his control, the Fuehrer hoped that the British would abandon their belligerence and cooperate with him. Consequently, on July 19, Hitler made an offer of peace to England in a speech before the Reichstag. Although this gesture was genuine, it was too arrogant and indefinite for the British to accept even if they had been so inclined:

In this hour I feel I owe it to my conscience to make another appeal to reason in England. I believe I may do so because I do not speak up for reason as one who has been conquered and then pleads, but as a victor. I see no reason that makes the continuation of this struggle necessary.²⁴

Evidently the Nazi chancellor understood the British as little as had his Wilhelminian predecessors.²⁵

When London rebuffed his peace offer, the Fuehrer had no choice but to continue the war. Thus, he belatedly

²⁴Quoted from Schmidt, Interpreter, p. 186.

²⁵Ibid.; Adolf Hitler, The Testament of Adolf Hitler. The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-April 1945, ed. Francois Genoud, trans. Col. R.H. Stevens (London: Cassel and Company, Ltd., 1961), February 1-4, 1945, p. 30, hereafter cited as Testament. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, ed. and trans. Anthony G. Powell (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), p. 156; Count Galeazzo Ciano, The Ciano Diaries, ed. Hugh Gibson (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1946), p. 277.

ordered preparations for an invasion of the British Isles, although planning for an attack on Russia went on simultaneously. There was a good reason for this paradox: Hitler had not made any plans for dealing specifically with England, even when the collapse of France was imminent, because he had expected the British to see the light and join him in creating his "New World Order." Also, Britain's stubbornness made German strategic planning especially difficult because not only was the war in the west not really won, but Soviet Russia was rapidly becoming a military threat in the east.²⁶

Britain's strong navy and air force, plus its unique geographical position, made a German invasion highly problematical and undesirable. Not only would Hitler need air or naval superiority (preferably both) before the Wehrmacht could try a seaborne landing, but considerable land forces would be necessary to carry out an operation which, even under the best of conditions, had no guarantee of success. And what would the Soviets do if German forces

²⁶Ribbentrop testimony, IMT, 10:286-7; Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 154. According to Ribbentrop, Hitler wanted England to keep its prestige and its empire and to make a permanent alliance with Germany "for life and death." All Britain had to do was recognize German predominance on the continent and return one or two of Germany's former African colonies.

were committed heavily in such an endeavor, not to mention Russia's reaction if Germany failed? Nevertheless, Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to attack England. The German attempt to destroy the Royal Air Force began in August but by mid-September it had become clear to Hitler that Goering's air force had failed to gain mastery of the skies, the Fuehrer's prerequisite for a landing on the English coast. This reality forced the German leader to postpone and later to abandon Operation Sealion, the plan for invading Britain.²⁷

After Hitler concluded that Sealion could not be carried out in 1940, he tried another stratagem against the British: the creation of a world-wide coalition of powers, to include Stalin's Russia. The Fuehrer also hoped that he could reduce tensions with the Soviet Union by involving the Russians in his grand design. Although he never had given up his dreams of conquering Russia, he was realistic enough to believe that collaboration with Stalin was the best policy until the war was over. His orders concerning an attack on Russia were meant as contingency plans in case the Soviets continued on what Hitler took to be a collision course with the Reich. The next chapter will illustrate how he decided that he no longer could work with

²⁷Bullock, Hitler, pp. 595-6.

Stalin and that an attack on the USSR was the Reich's only way to avoid disaster at the hands of the Russians.

CHAPTER IV

MOLOTOV VISITS BERLIN

One factor which helped convince the Fuehrer that further collaboration with the USSR was impossible was Molotov's visit to Berlin for talks in November 1940. As a result of this conference and its aftermath, Hitler concluded that the Soviets were unwilling to agree to conditions which he deemed necessary for cooperation between Germany and Russia to continue or, if possible, to be enhanced. Also, Stalin's reluctance to come to acceptable terms was interpreted as an indication not only that Russo-German collusion had outlived its usefulness but that the Soviets were planning to turn against the Reich.

The Nazi-Soviet alliance had been advantageous for both Hitler and Stalin during its first year; it permitted the Fuehrer to conquer most of Europe while it allowed the Soviet dictator to strengthen his nation. Stalin used this period to expand Soviet territory further to the west and deploy the Red Army along the new frontiers. Although he still hoped to avoid a clash with the Nazis as long as possible, the Soviet leader had little reason to trust in

the continued good faith of his German ally and had acted accordingly.¹

Naturally, Stalin's moves aroused considerable concern in Berlin and forced Hitler to take the Soviets into account in his overall strategy, for it appeared that Russia was rapidly becoming a great danger to the security of his eastern flank. His conviction that the USSR constituted a potential, if not immediate, menace to the Reich prompted him to order preliminary planning for a surprise attack against Soviet Russia, the most effective means of dealing with the massive Red Army. For the present, however, Hitler believed that even with the bulk of his forces still concentrated in the west, their immense power would be enough of a deterrent to preclude any serious Soviet moves against the Reich.

Besides having to take the Soviet Union into account, Hitler still had to decide what to do about Britain. The British had withstood the German air attack and, in doing so, had thwarted the Fuehrer's plans to invade England. Although the British were too weak to reconquer mainland Europe, they someday would be a great danger to the Reich, especially since the United States was sending them increasing

¹Ulam, Stalin, pp. 524-5.

amounts of military aid. It was also quite possible that the Americans would intervene in this war as they had done in the last one, with the same disastrous results for Germany. With this in mind, the Fuehrer began a diplomatic offensive which he hoped would isolate Britain and prevent her from finding allies.

Hitler's efforts to accomplish this resulted in the forging of the Tripartite Pact by Germany, Italy, and Japan. In addition to recognizing the right of each to establish empires in their respective parts of the globe, the treaty threatened trilateral military, economic, and political retaliation against any power that attacked a signatory nation. The agreement was aimed at the United States, which the Germans hoped would be less eager to risk war with the Reich if to do so meant having to fight Japan as well. If the pact had worked as expected, then Britain, finding herself stranded with no prospect of American entry in the conflict and facing an invincible front of Axis powers, might have sued for peace.²

The Tripartite Pact also made special reference to the Soviet Union. Anticipating the probable Russian charge

²Ernst L. Presseisen, Germany and Japan. A Study in Totalitarian Diplomacy 1933-1941 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), pp. 329-30, hereafter cited as Germany and Japan.

that the accord was directed at the USSR, the pact stipulated that this was not the case. To make sure that Moscow understood the nature of the treaty, the German Embassy in Moscow informed Molotov as to its objectives shortly before it was signed. Although the Soviet minister admitted already knowing of the agreement, he insisted on having copies of the treaty documents, including the expected secret portions. The Russians remained unconvinced, however, when Berlin assured them that the pact had no secret protocols and was not directed at them.³

It was not surprising that the Kremlin viewed the new Axis accord with misgivings, considering the controversy over mutual consultations that raged throughout September. The three-power pact only added fuel to the fire, because Germany had informed Moscow too late for the Soviets to enter into the discussions. Another reason for Molotov's distrust was the recent stationing of German military personnel in Rumania, which the Wilhelmstrasse explained had been done to maintain "quiet and order" in the Balkans

³Ribbentrop to German Embassy in Moscow, Berlin, September 25, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 195; Foreign Minister to German Embassy in Moscow, Berlin, October 2, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 202; German Charge d'affaires Tippleskirch to German Foreign Office, Moscow, October 4, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 204; Presseisen, Germany and Japan, p. 329-30.

and to safeguard German interests against the British. The Russians accepted this explanation without comment; obviously, relations with Berlin were at a new low in the fall of 1940.⁴

It was at this time that Hitler invited the USSR to join the Tripartite members in a four-way coalition. Although the idea had been Ribbentrop's, the German dictator was willing to try it in hopes that he could divert Russian expansion southward, rather than into eastern Europe, and thereby reduce tensions between Germany and Russia. Also, such a grouping of powers would put even greater pressure on the British to come to terms because they no longer would have Russia as a potential ally. Yet, as he mentioned to Mussolini on October 4, the Fuehrer doubted that the Soviets would go along with his four-power scheme. He would make the effort, however, because he wanted to postpone a war with Russia until the war with Britain was over.⁵

Therefore, on October 13, Ribbentrop wrote to Stalin, reaffirming Germany's friendship with Moscow and inviting

⁴ German Foreign Minister to German Embassy in Moscow, Berlin, October 9, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

⁵ Memorandum by Schmidt on Hitler-Mussolini conversation, October 4, 1940, D.G.F.P., 11:248-9; Ulam, Stalin, p. 526.

Molotov to the German capital to talk over prospects for Axis-Soviet collaboration. Stalin responded favorably to the idea and promised to send his foreign affairs commissar to Berlin in November. Consequently, the obedient Molotov, accompanied by over sixty persons, including sixteen NKVD men, a physician, and three personal servants, traveled by rail across Poland and into the Reich to meet Adolf Hitler.⁶

Despite his desire to continue collaborating with the Soviets, on November 12, the first day of talks, the Fuehrer directed his generals to go ahead with planning already underway for an attack on Russia, regardless of the results of the negotiations. Even if Stalin went along with Hitler's grand design, the German leader would at least have a powerful military presence in eastern Europe and a battle

⁶Ribbentrop to Stalin, Berlin, October 13, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 210-15; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, October 22, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 216; Hilger, Allies, p. 321. According to Walter Schellenberg, Gestapo counter-espionage chief, the Soviets insisted on maximum security arrangements along the entire route through German-held Poland. Thus, the Germans set up double guard posts at one hundred fifty yard intervals and had squads of men patrolling the tracks. They also tightened control of the Reich's frontiers and checked transportation and hotels in Germany. See Walter Schellenberg, The Labyrinth: Memoirs of Walter Schellenberg, trans., Louis Hagen (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1956), p. 137.

plan to use against the Russians if worse came to worst. As of yet, however, the Nazi dictator had not made up his mind to carry out such a blitzkrieg; he first wanted to see how the discussions with Molotov would go.⁷

Ribbentrop met with Molotov during the morning of November 12 and began by delivering a lengthy discourse on the Reich's wartime situation. For all practical purposes, he said, Britain was finished, but if it refused to give in, Germany would keep up military pressure. As for American intervention in the conflict, he was not worried because Germany would never allow an "Anglo-Saxon" invasion of the European mainland. Furthermore, such help as the United States now provided was undependable and limited solely to war materials. Hitler, the German minister went on, only wanted to end a war that was already won, and to do so had signed the Tripartite Pact to confine the conflict to its present belligerents. The treaty also would stabilize Axis relations with the USSR and, with German help, even provide a favorable climate for Russo-Japanese reconciliation. In addition, Hitler now wanted Russia and the Axis powers

⁷ Directive 18, "Preparatory Measures of High Command for Conduct of the War in the Near Future," November 12, 1940, Adolf Hitler, Hitler's War Directives 1939-1945, ed. H.R. Trevor-Roper (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964), p. 43, hereafter cited as Directives.

to decide on suitable spheres in influence. Ribbentrop stated that since Germany and Russia had agreed already on their present spheres, the Reich would content itself by creating a "New Order" in western Europe and by taking territory in southeast Europe and central Africa; Italy would expand in northern and northeastern Africa; Japan could push southward, the ideal direction for Soviet growth as well, since the area could provide Russia with an outlet to the "open sea." Molotov abruptly halted Ribbentrop's monologue and asked which sea the German meant. The interruption startled the Nazi minister but he quickly regained his composure and explained that after the war, Britain would have to give up its colonies; therefore, Russia would be free to expand toward the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and other areas at British expense. Ribbentrop then continued his lecture as Molotov looked on with "an impenetrable expression."⁸ The German began discussing Turkey, which he said, had become almost neutral, a course that Germany and Russia should encourage. Moreover, the Reich wished to discard the Montreux Convention and make another settlement concerning the Straits. Also, the four-power coalition he advocated would permit Soviet hegemony

⁸Quoted from Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, p. 212.

in the Black Sea and easier access to the Mediterranean, both of which goals could be achieved through a common policy on Turkey.⁹

Molotov responded favorably to these remarks but wanted to know more about the Tripartite Pact itself. What, for instance, did the Axis powers mean by the vague term "Greater East Asian Sphere," which appeared in the treaty? The Russian added that before his country could join in a larger grouping involving Italy and Japan, Germany and Russia would have to agree beforehand on the matter of spheres and his government would have to know the "significance, the nature, and the aim" of the three-power accord. Ribbentrop admitted that the term Molotov referred to was obscure to him as well, but he assured the Russian that it would not affect Soviet interests and that during the pact negotiations, the Axis countries had not contemplated anything harmful to the Soviet Union. Molotov answered that there needed to be more discussion about spheres of influence, especially those of concern to Germany and Russia. So far, the

⁹Schmidt memorandum on Ribbentrop-Molotov talks on November 12, 1940, November 13, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 218-23; Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, pp. 211-12. On July 20, 1936, an international conference at Montreux, Switzerland approved a Turkish request for permission to refortify the Straits. Thus, the Straits reverted to Turkish control.

Hitler-Stalin accord had proven to be only a partial solution to this problem because recent developments had made this part of the agreement "obsolete and meaningless." Germany and Russia would have to come to an understanding before Moscow participated in talks involving Italy and Japan. The USSR also would have to find out more about the Tripartite Pact. The conference then adjourned until the afternoon.¹⁰

Hitler joined in the discussions during the afternoon session. He was anxious to make a good impression on Molotov and wanted the Russian emissary to share his views. The Fuehrer began with a long-winded speech, as his foreign minister had done that morning. He expressed optimism about future Russo-German collaboration and emphasized the need for planning in order to avoid contention between the two regimes. He explained that Germany's wartime situation had dictated many of his actions but that relations had been mutually beneficial thus far and would continue to be. Molotov voiced his agreement with the chancellor's statements.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 213; Ribbentrop-Molotov talks, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 224-5.

¹¹ Hitler-Molotov talks, ibid., pp. 226-7; Hilger, Allies, p. 323.

Hitler turned next to the problem of Britain. He noted England's lack of remaining allies on the continent and the failure of the British to retaliate effectively against Germany, despite the fact that the latter's military efforts had been hampered by bad weather. Nevertheless, when conditions improved, the Reich would administer the coup de grace to Britain. In the meantime, however, he wanted to clarify some important issues and advise the Soviets of the following: first, Germany wanted no military aid from Russia; secondly, the war had forced the Reich to intervene in areas where it had little political or economic interest; thirdly, the ongoing conflict had created a great need for essential raw materials. Also, despite there having been deviation from the agreed-upon spheres of influence, he had been willing to compromise, as in the case of Lithuania. The Fuehrer added that although Germany's conquests had satisfied much of its need for living space, he wanted to colonize part of central Africa. The Reich also had to have certain important raw materials and insure their steady supply. Therefore, the Soviets had to understand that he could not tolerate enemy bases in certain areas; however, Moscow's interests would be respected and the "Russian Empire" could grow without harming German interests. Molotov

agreed. Thus, Hitler went on, their two states could work together and avoid difficulties despite their "irreconcilable differences."¹²

The Fuehrer next referred to some geographical factors having a bearing on relations. Because Germany and Russia, as well as Italy, were interested in outlets to the "open sea," they had to avoid disputes on this issue. The Balkan area was another potential source of trouble, not for any political reason, but because Germany needed the region's raw materials--especially those of Rumania, a state which was also of military interest to the Reich. Moreover, he wanted to forestall any British moves from Greece against the Balkans. The Nazi leader then paused to express disappointment that the war with England still continued. After all, he said, Germany had tried to end the conflict after the fall of Poland but the Western Powers had wanted to prolong it. The Reich would have been better off if the

¹²Ibid., pp. 226-8. In mentioning central Africa, Hitler apparently had more in mind than the recovery of former colonies, since Germany had never had holdings in that particular area. Since he was always concerned about raw materials, he presumably referred to the Belgian Congo, by far the richest part of central Africa in terms of mineral resources. Although Belgium was at Hitler's mercy, the acquisition of its colony was necessarily a post-war project, thanks to British power.

war had ended; then it could have proceeded with its economic development. Molotov, no doubt hoping to encourage even the faintest glimmering of a German desire to turn swords into plowshares, interrupted Hitler to comment that it was indeed more costly to obtain one's goals by military means. However, Hitler continued, Germany and Russia had not gained all they had wanted; for example, the eastern portions of the Reich (probably occupied Poland) were economic liabilities. He suddenly reverted to the problem of the Balkans and repeated his promise to keep the British from getting a foothold in Greece at Salonika. The Soviet official again interrupted. How was Salonika any threat to Germany? Because it was near Rumania's oil fields, replied Hitler. Anticipating Soviet concern about the German troops stationed in Rumania, he added that he would recall them after the end of the war.¹³

The German dictator then questioned Molotov as to how Russia planned to secure the Black Sea and the Straits. The Russian sidestepped Hitler's query and launched into a speech of his own concerning Russo-German relations. He could go along with some of the Fuehrer's ideas and agreed that cooperation was better than conflict; Stalin himself

¹³Ibid., pp. 228-32.

believed that their arrangements had been mutually beneficial, except for those concerning Finland. Did Hitler still consider that part of the Nazi-Soviet accord dealing with Finland to be in effect? Also, Moscow saw the Russo-German agreement as only a partial solution to problems affecting relations because additional difficulties had arisen since the autumn of 1939. In this regard, he cited the Tripartite Pact, about which he wanted to know the significance of the "New Order" in Europe and Asia and the role that the USSR was to play in it. These things needed more consideration, as well as matters involving Soviet interests in the Balkan and Black Sea regions; specifically in regard to Bulgaria, Rumania, and Turkey. The Russian minister returned to his question about the Tripartite Pact and wanted to know when the "New Order" in Europe would be established and what the boundaries of the "Greater East Asian Sphere" would be. Hitler answered ambiguously that the Tripartite Pact allowed for European nations to manage European affairs in accordance with their own interests. For that reason, he had sought Moscow's views on areas of Soviet interest and wished to include Russia in any arrangements relating to Europe and Asia. Molotov replied that if the USSR united with the Tripartite members it would have to join as an equal partner

and not as their victim. On that note, the Fuehrer ended the day's talks because of a possible air raid but promised to go into matters more fully the next morning.¹⁴

In the German chancellor's introductory remarks on November 13, he alluded to Molotov's assertion of the previous day that, except for the Finnish issue, the Nazi-Soviet pact's obligations had been fulfilled. Molotov replied that his observation had pertained not only to the non-aggression pact, but to its secret protocols as well. Hitler dismissed the Russian's statement by acknowledging that the protocols indeed covered the sphere of influence question; however, when it came to taking over their assigned areas, Germany had been more scrupulous in complying with the terms of their agreement than Russia. After all, it was the USSR that had insisted on making revisions after the destruction of Poland and, although the Reich had gained more Polish territory as a result of these changes, this was hardly adequate repayment for the loss of Lithuania. The Fuehrer felt much the same way about Bukovina, for by the August 1939 agreement, Germany had expressed disinterest only in Bessarabia. Yet, with Bukovina, as with Lithuania, he had yielded to Soviet wishes, knowing that Russia would benefit

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 232-4; Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, pp. 214-216.

more than Germany. The Reich also had gone along with Moscow during the Russo-Finnish conflict. Molotov assured Hitler that there were no complaints about Berlin's policy then. Hitler disregarded him and continued: not only had he denied weapons to the Finns but he had stirred up international ill-will against the Reich in the process. While granting that Russia had a legitimate interest there, the Fuehrer was concerned about the possible disruption of nickel and lumber imports from Finland and wanted to prevent a war in the Baltic region. A new clash there would disrupt trade with one of the few areas still open to German merchant shipping.¹⁵

Hitler next brought up the matter of German troops in Finland. Yes, he had sent them through the country to the Kirkenes section of Norway but none were occupying Finnish territory and he did not anticipate sending any more. But, the Fuehrer cautioned, he did not want to see another Russo-Finnish war and, for the duration of the present conflict, he would consider Germany's interests in Finland as important as those in Rumania. Nevertheless, the Reich still recognized Finland as a sphere of Soviet influence.¹⁶

¹⁵Schmidt memorandum on Hitler-Molotov talks on November 13, 1940, November 15, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 234-5; Ribbentrop testimony, *IMT*, 10:290.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 235-6.

The Russian responded to Hitler's statements. Referring to the exchange of Lithuania for Polish territory, Molotov held that Russia would not have forced the issue if Germany had objected, although the trade had been advantageous to both. Hitler denied that the trade had been an equal one, especially in terms of economics. The Soviet minister ignored the Fuehrer's objection and referred next to the question of the Lithuanian strip, about which he stated, he was still expecting a reply from Berlin. Concerning Bukovina, although the secret protocols had not mentioned the area, Soviet Russia had confined its claim to the northern part. The USSR had wanted the southern portion too, but the Germans had never responded about the matter; in fact, Hitler's government ignored Soviet wishes and guaranteed the rest of Rumania, including southern Bukovina. Hitler retorted that neither the August nor the September, 1939 treaties even mentioned Bukovina and he remarked that it had been quite a compromise for Germany to allow Russia to occupy any part of that province. Molotov disagreed; neither the Lithuanian strip issue nor that involving Bukovina was very important. The Fuehrer replied that for collaboration to continue, the Kremlin would have to realize that his nation was fighting for survival and that if the Soviet Union

were in the same situation, he would be considerate of Russia's wishes. His interest in preventing another war in the Baltic area was no violation of the Nazi-Soviet accord nor was his guarantee of Rumania. For there to be larger scale cooperation, however, Germany and Russia needed to consider more important matters than these, because it would be more beneficial if the two powers fought on the same side; then no power could overcome them.¹⁷

Molotov assured Hitler that although his government wanted closer ties with the Reich, there were problems which still had to be solved. For example, if Germany and Russia could agree about Finland, there would not be another conflict in the Baltic region; but there must be no German soldiers on Finnish soil and no collusion between Berlin and Helsinki at Russia's expense. Concerning the latter condition, the Fuehrer reminded Molotov that he had instructed Finland, as well as Rumania, to give in to Russian demands. As for the German troops on Finnish territory, he promised to send no more there. Hitler then returned to his question about a renewed Russo-Finnish war, which he feared would disrupt the flow of raw materials from Finland to the Reich. There would be no trouble, said Molotov, if Helsinki abandoned

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 236-8.

its "ambiguous attitude" and quit stirring up its people against the Soviet Union. Thereupon, the German leader expressed concern that Sweden might intervene in Finland's behalf if war erupted in the area, a situation in which the two countries probably would give air bases to Britain and the US. If this happened, Germany would be compelled to get involved. Molotov argued that if Russia and Germany could resolve their differences concerning Finland, this would insure peace, in which case the USSR would have no reason to delay the "realization of her wishes." When Hitler warned the Soviet leader that another war might have "far reaching repercussions," Molotov responded with the judgement that "a new factor had been introduced into the discussion by this position."¹⁸ Hitler then expanded on his previous statement concerning the possibility of enemy bases in Scandinavia in the event of another Russo-Finnish war, referring to Sweden's "uncertain attitude" and cautioning Molotov that a renewed clash would have "unforeseeable consequences" for German-Soviet relations. The Soviet official stated that he could see no possibility of such a war. Wearying of this verbal exercise in futility, Hitler declared that if this were true, there was nothing more

¹⁸Ibid., p. 240.

to say about the matter and he suggested a change of topic.¹⁹

The Fuehrer returned to his original theme for the conference--the four power proposal. Russia, he held, could obtain an ice-free port as a result of post-war Axis-Soviet talks covering the dismemberment of the British Empire. Molotov expressed agreement but added that it was more important to discuss Russo-German cooperation before including Japan and Italy in a larger settlement. Hitler amplified his previous remark by stating that the world-wide coalition he advocated would divide up the former British Empire. Of course, there were problems between Germany and Russia which still needed solving.²⁰

Seizing the opportunity to get back to issues important to him, Molotov recommended that they discuss Turkey and Rumania. Russia, he said, was disappointed that Rumania had accepted an Axis guarantee without first talking things over with Moscow. Moreover, it was his government's opinion that the German pledge was directed at the USSR and that Hitler should revoke it. The Fuehrer then pointed out that

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 238-42; Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, p. 216.

²⁰Hitler-Molotov talks, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 242-3; Hilger, Allies, pp. 323-24.

his promise to Bucharest was aimed at any power, including Russia, and he insisted that the treaty was necessary and would not be rescinded.²¹

Frustrated on one issue, the Soviet commissar turned to another. If the British gained a foothold in Greece, they would endanger Russia and the Straits; therefore, he asked, what would Hitler say to a Russian guarantee to Bulgaria like the one the Axis had given to Rumania? The Fuehrer avoided answering directly, but voiced willingness to alter the Montreux agreement in Russia's favor. Undaunted, Molotov repeated his query and promised the German leader that Russia would not meddle with Bulgaria's political system (as it had done to the Baltic states prior to their absorption into the USSR). The Fuehrer replied that if the treaty which Moscow had in mind was like the Rumanian treaty, he would have to know whether the Bulgarians had requested it. Hitler then asked Molotov if the USSR would feel safer about the Black Sea area if the Montreux accord was revised. The Russian replied that his country wanted security against attack via the Straits and would work out a solution with Turkey to achieve this. A deal with Bulgaria also would be helpful. The Nazi chancellor again asked

²¹Ibid., pp. 244-5; Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, p. 216.

about Bulgaria's position but stated that he would have to talk this matter over with Mussolini before committing himself. Molotov answered that he only wanted an opinion, not a decision. Hitler refused to budge; he would say nothing more about Bulgaria and he warned the Russian that if he (the Fuehrer) were looking for problems in German-Soviet relations--as it seemed Molotov was intent upon--the Straits question was a minor one. The Fuehrer then tried to steer the conversation back to its main topic.²²

The German leader spoke again of the need for a multi-lateral decision on the British Empire and suggested that the foreign ministers of Germany, Italy, Japan, and Russia confer at a later date in Moscow. He then proposed that they end the afternoon's talks because it was late and a British air raid was possible. Hitler concluded with the opinion that more discussion was needed on Russia's position in the Black Sea area and its future as a world power. It was Molotov, however, who got in the last word and he remarked that their meeting had raised new questions for his government. No doubt, the day's harrowing talks had done the same for the German dictator.²³

²² Ibid., p. 218; Hitler-Molotov talks, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 245-6; Ribbentrop testimony, IMT, 10:291.

²³ Hitler-Molotov talks, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 246.

That night, after supper at the Russian Embassy, Ribbentrop had another opportunity to converse with Molotov about Hitler's proposals when an air raid forced them to retreat to the safety of the Nazi minister's private shelter. There, he urged that Molotov and Stalin confer about the issues considered in Berlin and that they try to work out a new agreement with the Reich based on interests their two countries held in common; if this could be done, Germany would invite Italy and Japan to join them in a larger alliance. Ribbentrop had with him the draft of such an Axis-Soviet accord. In it, Russia promised to adhere to the Tripartite Pact by working to keep the present hostilities with Britain from becoming a world war and by cooperating with the Axis to achieve world peace. The four countries would respect each member's sphere of influence and confer cordially if disputes arose. None of the signatories was to ally itself with another grouping that was directed against a coalition partner. The treaty was to last ten years and, except for its secret portions, would be made public. One of its secret protocols concerned the partition of the Eastern Hemisphere by the four regimes: Germany claimed territory in Europe and central Africa; Italy would get northern and northeastern Africa, in addition to its

holdings in Europe; Japan's goals were unknown, but, Ribbentrop assured Molotov, there was no problem in this respect; Russia would expand southward toward the Indian Ocean. In a second protocol, the four promised to cooperate in making Turkey a satellite and to sign a new treaty regarding the Straits--one beneficial to the USSR. Such was the grand design Hitler proposed.²⁴

After revealing the Fuehrer's blueprint for Axis-Soviet harmony, Ribbentrop inquired about the USSR's dealings with Japan, which, he said, wanted to make a non-aggression pact with Moscow and he offered to mediate in creating such an agreement. Molotov said that he was interested in an accord with Tokyo but was still awaiting a response to inquiries he had made to the Japanese. He then changed the subject to other countries more important to Nazi-Soviet relations and mentioned Turkey, with which, he said, Russia would have to come to terms. Also, his government was concerned about Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary and he wanted to know what Germany and Italy planned to do about Yugoslavia, Greece, and Poland. In the case of the latter, Molotov wished to confer on that country's future status and he

²⁴Hilger memorandum on Ribbentrop-Molotov conversation on November 13, 1940, November 18, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 247-50.

asked whether Ribbentrop believed the Nazi-Soviet protocol on Poland to be still in effect. The Russian also wanted to know whether Hitler considered the preservation of Sweden's neutrality to be in the best interests of Germany and Russia and wished to discuss the Baltic Sea passages, such as Store Belt, Lille Belt, Oeresund, Kattegat, and Skagerrak, all of which lay between Sweden and Denmark. The Finnish question, he said, already had been covered in his talk with the Fuehrer. Molotov then asked for Ribbentrop's reply to his questions.²⁵

The German minister had nothing to add about Bulgaria but what Hitler had stated earlier and he chastised Molotov for having pressed the Fuehrer too hard on this issue. As for Sweden, Germany wanted its neutrality preserved as much as did the Soviet Union. However, Ribbentrop was equally vague and non-committal about the Baltic Sea passages and he declined to discuss Poland's fate at that time. Turning to the Balkan area, the Nazi official held that it was Berlin's policy to prevent the British from disrupting German commercial interests and he added that the Soviets had misinterpreted the guarantee to Rumania. This arrangement had come about because the Fuehrer wanted to forestall

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 251-3; Ribbentrop testimony, IMT, 10:291.

hostilities between Hungary and Rumania and to expedite Bucharest's compliance with Russia's demands. Ribbentrop then abruptly declared that there was nothing more to discuss about spheres of influence and inquired whether the USSR wanted an outlet to the Indian Ocean.²⁶

Molotov retorted that the Germans took for granted that they already had beaten the British and he commented sarcastically that if Germany and England were locked in a "life and death" struggle (as Hitler had said) then it appeared to him that the Reich was fighting for "life" and England for "death." While he approved of Nazi-Soviet cooperation, there had to be greater agreement on spheres of influence and he concluded with the condition that he would have to talk to Stalin before making any commitments. Thus the Molotov visit came to an end.²⁷

The sequel to this story came on November 26 in Moscow when Molotov apprised the German ambassador of Stalin's decision. The Soviets were willing to go along with the four-power treaty that Ribbentrop had outlined but they wanted to make some revisions; for example, they wished to

²⁶Ribbentrop-Molotov conversation, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 253-4.

²⁷Ibid.

direct Russian expansion southward from Batum and Baku toward the Persian Gulf. Stalin also requested a secret protocol between Germany and Russia dealing with Finland: Russia would promise to remain at peace with Finland and respect German economic interests; however, German troops had to leave Finnish territory immediately. The Kremlin wanted another protocol: Germany, Italy, and Russia were to recognize Bulgaria as lying within the USSR's security zone and permit Moscow to make a non-aggression pact with that state; such a pact would have no effect on Bulgaria's political system, sovereignty, or independence. In addition, the Russians desired bases for land and naval forces in Turkey near the Straits. If Ankara cooperated with the four-power coalition, that grouping should guarantee Turkey's independence and territorial integrity; but if the Turks refused, then Germany, Italy, and Russia should force them to make a separate accord. The Soviets wanted yet another protocol by which Japan would give up its claim to coal and oil concessions in northern Sakhalin in exchange for compensation. These were the conditions Stalin wanted fulfilled before aligning himself with the Axis powers.²⁸

²⁸Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, November 26, 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 258-9.

Whether the Soviet dictator actually would have gone through with such an arrangement is a matter of conjecture. From Hitler's viewpoint, however, a coalition of the world's major totalitarian states would confront Great Britain and the United States with a situation in which resistance would be futile. Fortunately for civilization, this unholy alliance never came about, mainly because the Berlin talks and Stalin's response to his overtures changed the Fuehrer's mind.

The conference with Molotov had gone badly; Hitler wanted an overall agreement with Russia that would precede the world grouping he envisioned, but Molotov insisted on dealing with specific problems affecting Russo-German relations. As a result, the talks decided nothing, despite Soviet professions of interest in a large-scale settlement. Molotov's demands, put into concrete terms in Moscow in late November, convinced the Fuehrer that the creation of an Axis-Soviet bloc was impossible and they only served to strengthen his belief that Soviet Russia was a great danger to the Reich and would have to be dealt with as soon as possible. Hitler concluded that Stalin was determined to expand Soviet power at German expense, thwart the building of his new order in Europe, and intervene militarily against the Reich. To accept the conditions that Moscow required

for joining with the Axis meant acquiescing to the further erosion of Germany's eastern strategic position. Therefore, he abandoned his four-power scheme and never responded to the Russian counterproposal.²⁹

After convincing himself that the USSR was bent upon the destruction of the Reich, the Nazi dictator decided to go ahead with preparations he had already set in motion for a surprise attack on Russia and, on December 18, directed his armed forces to ready themselves for an invasion in the spring of 1941. Although he did not fix a date for the execution of Operation Barbarossa (codename for the German offensive), the events of the spring only served to harden his decision and make its realization a certainty. The Fuehrer's evaluation of Germany's untenable wartime situation, coupled with his belief in Russia's duplicity, made him conclude that a preventive war against the USSR was the only means he had to avert disaster for his Thousand Year Reich.³⁰

²⁹Ulam, Stalin, p. 528; Bullock, Hitler, p. 622; General Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1952), p. 141; Hilger, Allies, p. 323; Hitler, Testament, p. 65; Ernst von Weizsaecker, Memoirs of Ernst von Weizsaecker, trans. John Andrews (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), pp. 245-6; Goering testimony, IMT, 9:342-3. In the meantime, Hitler had failed to gain the adherence of Spain and Vichy France to the Tripartite Pact.

³⁰Directive 21, Operation Barbarossa, December 18, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 260-63.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL RECKONING

Hitler issued the directive ordering Operation Barbarossa shortly after receiving Stalin's response to the German proposal for an Axis-Soviet alliance. The Fuehrer had been quite disappointed with the poor results of the conference with Molotov but Russia's present demands were even more discouraging. Why had the Soviet dictator's conditions convinced Hitler that further efforts to seek accommodation with the USSR would be fruitless? To the Nazi leader, acquiescence to Stalin's wishes regarding Finland would mean that Russia most likely would resume its conflict with that state and if successful, enhance Moscow's strategic position against Germany in the Baltic area by seizing more territory and deploying more forces. Soviet conditions concerning southeast Europe also irritated Hitler. The suggestion about a non-aggression pact with Bulgaria was especially unsettling because such an arrangement probably would lead to Russian military predominance there as in the case of the late Baltic states. Such a situation would endanger the rest of the Balkans, particularly

Rumania, and the German dictator saw in this demand a covert Russian attempt to increase its military strength against the Reich by moving troops into southeast Europe. Even worse, the Soviets might take over the Rumanian oil fields, thereby making Germany dependent on the Russians for its petroleum. These dread prospects only compounded his anxieties about Soviet Russia.¹

A major source of Hitler's concern was the large-scale deployment of the Red Army from the Baltic coast to the Black Sea. If the unresolved war with Britain should again be fought on the European mainland, Stalin might act against the Reich. Would the Soviets stand idly by if the Wehrmacht were forced to defend against an Anglo-American invasion? Certainly by now, Stalin could have had few illusions about the possibility that some day Hitler might unleash the furor teutonicus on Soviet Russia. Whatever the Soviet dictator's real intentions, Hitler believed Germany to be in perilous circumstances and that his chief menace now was the USSR.²

¹Keitel testimony, IMT, 10:528; Goering testimony, ibid., 9:342-3; Ribbentrop testimony, ibid., 10:314-15; Ribbentrop, Memoirs, p. 150.

²Ibid., p. 153; Ribbentrop testimony, IMT, 10:290, 294, 315, 429; Manstein testimony, ibid., 20:608. General August Winter, first general staff officer to Field Marshal Gerd

In the west, also, time appeared to be on the side of Germany's enemies. Great Britain was receiving increasing amounts of material aid from the United States and growing stronger day by day. With Britain still holding out on its island, a long war seemed a likely prospect; and such a war, he felt, would not be to Germany's advantage. As he had told his military chiefs in November 1937, the Reich's industrial capacity would reach a peak around 1943-45, by which time other powers would have reduced Germany's lead or surpassed it. In 1940-41, Hitler saw not just Britain, but the Soviet Union as well in this light.³

von Rundstedt's army group in the opening phase of Operation Barbarossa, stated after the war that Russian military preparations were offensive and not defensive. Not only were Soviet troop strengths sizeable but these units were deployed close to the frontier along with especially numerous armored units. Winter added that during the first week of the Russian campaign, the Germans found Red Army staff maps covering large areas of German or former Hapsburg territory, hardly to be expected for defensive planning. See Winter testimony, *ibid.*, 15:602-3. On the other hand, Rundstedt himself stated that he found no proof of Soviet offensive preparations in forward areas, "though there were some further back" and concluded that the "Russian command had not been intending to launch an offensive at an early date." See B.H. Lidell-Hart, The German Generals Talk (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1945), pp. 171-2. Whether Stalin was, in fact, planning any kind of offensive is unknown.

³Hossbach memorandum, Berlin, November 10, 1937, D.G.F.P., 1:34-5.

It was natural too, for him to suspect Russia of having made a deal with England at Germany's expense. In fact, the Nazi leader knew, from Stalin no less, that London had gone to some lengths to lure Moscow away from the Nazi-Soviet pact and draw Russia into the war. Stalin's talks with Cripps, however, had not resulted in an Anglo-Soviet alliance, although the British ambassador had done his utmost to convince the Russians that cooperation with England was in Soviet interests. The Communist dictator had declined on the grounds that his nation was too weak to risk war. Also, he had told the British that he preferred a future conflict with Germany to certain defeat now, even if Britain were defeated and Russia had to face Hitler alone. Thus, Stalin had reduced relations with the British to a low level by the winter of 1940-41 in order not to provoke Germany. For Hitler, though, the events of late 1940, capped by Stalin's conditions for adherence to an Axis-Soviet accord, convinced him that Stalin was merely biding his time before moving against Germany; therefore, the Fuehrer proceeded with plans to attack the Soviet Union first.⁴

⁴Thurston, Charge in Soviet Union to Secretary of State, Moscow, August 27, 1940, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, vol. 1, General,

Nevertheless, several months would elapse before he would have the opportunity to carry out Barbarossa and during this period, events in southeast Europe would remove his last remaining doubts about the correctness of his decision. Since Mussolini's attack on Greece in October 1940, the campaign had gone badly for the Duce's army and the Greeks had managed even to force the Italians back into Albania, the invasion's starting point. Things had gotten so out of hand by December that on the thirteenth of that month, Hitler ordered the concentration of German forces in southern Rumania and Bulgaria to prepare for the occupation of Greece. Operation Marita, he stated, would be used if the British tried to take advantage of the Italian debacle by seizing a foothold in the Balkans. Thus, beginning in early January, strong units of the Wehrmacht moved into Rumania from Hungary and massed along the Bulgarian border.⁵

the Soviet Union, 1940, p. 610; Ambassador to Secretary of State, Moscow, January 2, 1941, *ibid.*, 1941, p. 155; Ambassador to Secretary of State, Moscow, January 9, 1941, *ibid.*, 1941, p. 155. U.S. Ambassador to Moscow was Laurence A. Steinhardt, U.S. Secretary of State was Cordell Hull.

⁵Directive 20, Operation Marita, December 13, 1940, Hitler, Directives, pp. 46-8; Ribbentrop to German embassies in Russia, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, January 7, 1941, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 265.

Needless to say, the Soviets objected strongly. On January 17, Molotov warned Schulenberg that the USSR considered Bulgaria to be within its "security zone" and that if German troops entered the country, such a move would violate Russian interests. He also reminded the German ambassador that Russia still awaited a response to Stalin's proposals about the four-power pact. Schulenberg replied that the delay came from the need to consult with Italy and Japan but that Moscow would receive an answer as soon as possible.⁶

Berlin's reply would never arrive; it was too late for the Fuehrer to consider an Axis-Soviet agreement now. However, relations between the two regimes went on in their usual rough and tumble manner throughout the spring and, despite German troop movements in southeast Europe, never reached a crisis. The Germans even tried to justify their actions when, on January 21, they informed Molotov of their intention to send troops into Bulgaria. They were concerned

⁶Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, January 17, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 270. Germany and Russia meanwhile had settled some of their differences when, on January 10, by a secret protocol, the Reich renounced its claim to the Lithuanian strip and both countries agreed to sign another economic treaty to be signed on February 11. See Secret Protocol, Schulenberg and Molotov, Moscow, January 10, 1941, *ibid.*, pp. 267-68.

that Britain might get a foothold in Greece, a situation that the Reich wanted to prevent; no affront to Soviet security interests was intended, however. The Russians disapproved. Stationing the Wehrmacht in Bulgaria would, indeed be an infringement of Soviet prerogatives unless Britain began operations in Greece.⁷

Hitler evidently cared little for Russian feelings at this point, for on February 28, his foreign office advised Molotov that Bulgaria was joining the Tripartite Pact on March 1. Adding insult to injury, the Germans also informed Molotov that their troops would be moving into Bulgaria to prevent an expected British move involving Greece. This news naturally upset the Russian, who berated the Germans for violating Russian interests after all; however he let the matter drop without further objection.⁸

But southeast Europe was the cause of further tension between the two dictatorships. On March 25, Yugoslavia also signed the Tripartite Pact, joining Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria as Axis satellites. During the night of

⁷Ribbentrop to Weizsaecker, Berlin, January 21, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 271; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, January 23, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 274.

⁸Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, March 1, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 277; Molotov Memorandum to German Ambassador, Moscow, March 1, 1941, S.D.F.P., p. 483.

March 26-27, however, Yugoslav military officers overthrew their government in protest. Their action precipitated Hitler's decision to destroy Yugoslavia at the same time his armies overran Greece. During the period leading up to Operation Attila (code name for the invasion of Yugoslavia) and Operation Marita, Soviet diplomatic maneuverings removed the Fuehrer's last misgivings about the necessity for a preventive war against Russia.⁹

As the Wehrmacht prepared its Balkan offensive (to begin April 6), Molotov surprised the Germans on April 4 with the information that his government and Yugoslavia's would sign a treaty of friendship and nonaggression that day or the following one. Compounding his folly, he voiced confidence that Germany would be pleased with such an accord since it was intended to preserve peace in the area, would help limit the present conflict, and was not aimed at any particular power. The Russian's tactful listener, Schulenberg, tried in vain to dissuade him from making such a treaty since it was poorly timed and was bound to create a bad impression in Berlin.¹⁰

⁹Bullock, Hitler, pp. 634-5.

¹⁰Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, April 4, 1941, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 317-18.

The reaction in Berlin was unfavorable indeed, for Hitler was now convinced that Stalin was trying to double-cross him. The Moscow-Belgrade treaty was point of no return for the Fuehrer, who had already suspected Russian involvement in the Yugoslav coup d'etat. According to Goering, testifying at the Nuremberg Trials after the war,

Before this Simovic incident it is probable that although preparations had been undertaken, doubts as to the inevitable necessity of an attack against the Soviet Union might have been pushed into the background. These clear relations between Moscow and Belgrade, however, dispelled the Fuehrer's very last doubts.¹¹

Although Hitler would not reverse his fateful decision, Russo-German relations continued with no outward indications that a final break was coming. The two states kept up their trade on a firmer, if not always reliable basis, after the signing of a new commercial agreement in February. The Wilhelmstrasse noted in April that Russia had been sluggish in its deliveries, a situation which the Germans attributed to the overall cooling of relations between the two states. Raw materials imports to the Reich diminished

¹¹Goering testimony, IMT, 9:334; Ribbentrop testimony, ibid., 10:293; Jodl testimony, 15:394; Hilger, Allies, p. 326. As diverse characters within the German government as Ribbentrop, Jodl, and Hilger were in basic agreement with Goering. Simovic was the Yugoslav leader who headed the coup.

slightly in early spring but rose later in that season. German deliveries were, of course, behind schedule, but with Operation Barbarossa in the offing, the issue of making up the difference became a moot point.¹²

The vast resources of Russia, by now so important to German industry, would continue to flow into the Reich even up until June 22, the day Hitler launched his attack. Shipments, especially of petroleum and grain, had made Germany's supercharged war economy dependent on the Soviet Union. An invasion of that nation would not only rid Germany of a potential enemy but also secure forever vital natural resources from Russian territory. Naturally, this was well-suited to Hitler's dreams of conquest in the east.¹³

Armageddon in Russia would come soon enough, although the Fuehrer had to postpone Barbarossa long enough for the Wehrmacht to smash Yugoslavia and Greece. The occupation of these two countries, done as much to thwart Russian as

¹² Foreign Office Memorandum, Schnurre, Berlin, April 5, 1941, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 318.

¹³ Rich, Aims, pp. 206-8. Rich holds that Hitler ordered the attack on Russia to conquer and secure Germany's source of raw materials in Russia so that the Reich could devote its total energies to the defeat of Britain, free of fear of economic strangulation.

well as British designs, placed all southeast Europe, the Reich's Achilles heel, under Axis control.

Of course, Hitler's operations in the Balkans were a mere prelude to his plans for the Soviet Union. The Fuehrer's Directive 21, outlining Operation Barbarossa, although it was modified later, deserves mention here because it illustrates not only the objectives of the offensive but also the magnitude of the undertaking. The Wehrmacht was to deploy most of its units in eastern Europe while leaving sufficient forces to occupy all captured territories. The preservation of Hitler's conquered lands also was entrusted to the navy and air force which not only had a role in Barbarossa but were to carry on the war against Britain as well.¹⁴

The bulk of the Fuehrer's war machine naturally would be concentrated in the east for the coming offensive, the objective of which was to create a defense line in Russia running from Archangel in the north to the mouth of the Volga River in the south, giving Germany the Promised Land prophesied in Mein Kampf. Finland and Rumania also would take part in the invasion, the main front of which would extend from the Baltic to the Black Sea. One German Army

¹⁴Directive 21, Operation Barbarossa, December 18, 1940, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 260.

group was to strike to the north of the Pripet Marshes and a second to the south. The southern group, the front's center, was to penetrate Belorussia; the northern one, assigned to make the main thrust, was directed toward Leningrad and the Baltic. In the meanwhile, the army was to protect the Petsamo region of Finland, with its ore mines, and advance with the Finns against the Murmansk railway. In addition, the Finns and Germans would attack on both sides of Lake Ladoga. German and Rumanian forces were to protect Rumania while the attack progressed in the north and move forward when the offensive turned eastward toward Moscow.¹⁵

As the invasion front drove deeper into Russia, the Germans would implement other plans being made in Berlin for the enslavement of the Russian people and the systematic exploitation of their homeland. The history of the atrocious policies that the Nazis planned and carried out with such a vengeance in German-held Russia is adequate proof that

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 261-3. The final plan for Barbarossa involved three army groups, north, center, and south, (excluding forces in Hungary and Rumania) corresponding to three objectives, Leningrad, Moscow, and the Ukraine. See Alan Clark, Barbarossa (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1965), p. 67.

Hitler had been deadly serious about his designs on the Soviet Union.¹⁶

By late spring, speculation about an impending German attack on Russia was circulating widely, no doubt as a result of Hitler's ominous build-up of military forces in eastern Europe. Both Berlin and Moscow denied that there was any substance to these rumors. Although he must have realized that some kind of storm was brewing, Stalin, in his dealings with the Reich, proceeded as if he had no reason to suspect trouble. The only complaints that the Kremlin registered with Berlin concerned the Luftwaffe's numerous violations of Russian air space, which the Soviets estimated at one hundred eighty such incidents from April 19 to June 19. The Germans dutifully promised to look into the matter and put a stop to these incidents, which must have seemed awfully suspicious to the Kremlin. Thus Germany, too, continued the charade of outwardly correct relations until June 21, when Ribbentrop sent Schulenberg his final instructions as ambassador to Moscow.¹⁷

¹⁶An excellent account of the misery which Nazi Germany inflicted on Russia is Alexander Dallin's German Rule in Russia 1941-1945 (London: Macmillan and Company, 1957).

¹⁷Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, May 2, 1941, Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 334; German Foreign Office to Schulenberg, Berlin, May 4, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 335;

Upon receipt of the message from Berlin, Schulenberg was to destroy the embassy's de-coding materials and radio transmitter and give Molotov the grim news that his country was being invaded. In his visit to the Russian official, the ambassador read an official memorandum accusing the Soviets of having violated the August 23 and September 28, 1939 accords by expanding their borders westward and "Bolshevizing" the areas involved, such as had occurred in the Baltic states, parts of Finland and Rumania. Moreover, these developments had coincided with a huge build-up of the Red Army along Russia's western borders and Soviet negotiations with Britain which were threatening to the Reich. Therefore, the memorandum concluded, Germany was at war with the Soviet Union.¹⁸

Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 14, 1941, *ibid.*, pp. 345-6; Weizsaecker Memorandum, Berlin, June 21, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 353; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, June 22, 1941, *ibid.*, 355; Tippelskirch to German Foreign Office, Moscow, April 22, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 328; German Foreign Office to Schulenberg, Berlin, May 15, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 341; Schulenberg to German Foreign Office, Moscow, May 17, 1941, *ibid.*, p. 343. These overflights were probably reconnoissance missions. See Paul Carell's Hitler Moves East 1941-1943, trans. Ewald Osers (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1964), pp. 59-60.

¹⁸Ribbentrop to Schulenberg, Berlin, June 21, 1941, Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 347-8. The German ambassador in Moscow was deliberately kept in the dark about Barbarossa because he was known to favor close relations with Russia. Schulenberg found out about the impending invasion anyway,

The Fuehrer's own explanation of the hostilities that he had unleashed, given to the German people on June 22, is more revealing. For despite some distortion of the truth and his usual bombastic rhetoric, the motives for his decision came through. He began by cataloging his Soviet partner's sins against Russo-German friendship: during the period of détente, Russia had made several "extortions" from the Reich, the first of which had been when Germany transferred its hegemony over Lithuania to the USSR. Also, after Britain had refused to make peace following the Polish campaign, London had tried to obtain Russian support. The first evidence that the British had succeeded in their endeavor had been the Soviet efforts to seize Finland and the Baltic states, moves obviously aimed at Germany. And, the Nazi chancellor continued, when he had withdrawn forces from Poland in preparation for the campaign in western Europe, Russia had increased its forces in eastern Europe, another act directed at the Reich. As a result, after August 1940, the Fuehrer had decided that he could no longer let his eastern flank remain exposed to the Soviet Union, which by

and even warned the Soviet ambassador in Berlin. The Russian stupidly refused to relay this information on to Moscow because he suspected a trick. See Hilger, Allies, p. 331.

now was cooperating with England in an effort to draw German troops to the east so that a "radical conclusion" to the conflict in the west could be reached.¹⁹

Hoping to resolve difficulties in relations, Hitler went on, and because of the increasing size of the Red Army, he had asked Molotov to come to Berlin. The Russian emissary's statements revealed not only unwillingness to work out their problems but provided evidence of Soviet duplicity. Events in Yugoslavia, he explained, had verified this judgment because the coup d'etat in Belgrade had been instigated chiefly by Russia, with British support. When Germany did not react immediately to the situation, Moscow had signed a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia. Moreover, the Italo-German conquest of Yugoslavia and Greece had foiled a plan to embroil the Reich in a conflict in the Balkans while Russia prepared for war, allied with Britain and aided by the US.²⁰

While some of the Nazi leader's statements bordered on the absurd, his theme was consistent: Russia had become a great danger to the Reich and had to be destroyed. He concluded,

¹⁹ Adolf Hitler, My New Order, ed. Raoul Roussy de Sales (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), pp. 980-2.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 985.

German people! At this moment a march is taking place that, as regards extent, compares with the greatest the world hitherto has seen The task of this front, therefore, no longer is the protection of single countries but the safeguarding of Europe and thereby the salvation of all.

I therefore decided today again to lay the fate and future of the German Reich and our own people in the hands of our soldiers.

May God help us especially in this fight!²¹

With this blasphemy, the Nazi high priest proclaimed his holy war against Soviet Russia. Fate again had given him a sign and what had become a necessity, he would make a virtue: preventive war against Russia would rid Germany of its main enemy and fulfill his destiny.

²¹Ibid., pp. 986-7.

CONCLUSION

Hitler called his crusade against the Soviet Union a preventive war and he repeated this view to his subordinates before and after June 22. Of those officials testifying at Nuremberg, who knew of the Fuehrer's decision firsthand, most agreed that Hitler saw his attack on Russia as a means of averting disaster for Germany at the hands of the Soviets. The consistency of the Nazi leader's remarks on the subject to those who served him leads one to surmise that he actually believed what he was saying. It must be remembered that besides being able to convince others, he was especially adept at persuading himself and the dictates of his intuition, which had not failed him yet, gave him all the reason he needed for his decision. Considering Hitler's hatred and fear of almost everything about Russia except its land and resources, it was hardly surprising that he would interpret Soviet actions as he did. It is pointless to ask whether the Fuehrer's fears were justified; it is enough to know that he believed Russia to be an immediate threat to Germany.

Operation Barbarossa was Hitler's answer to Stalin's policies, which were made even more menacing by the ominous

build-up of the Red Army along the Reich's borders. With every gain in territory at the expense of its neighbors (Poland, the Baltic states, Finland, and Rumania), the USSR had positioned powerful military forces in these areas. It has been maintained by some that Hitler attacked Russia in order to eliminate a potential British ally and he believed that the destruction of the Soviet Union would insure the defeat of Britain. Such a conclusion, however, is based upon the assumption that Hitler's major concern in 1941 was victory over England, even if it meant war with the Soviet colossus. To be sure, Britain was a thorn in his side, but by the winter of 1940-41, it was the USSR, not England, that constituted the greatest danger to Germany. Russia was the only serious and direct military threat to the Reich and had to be dealt with while England was still weak and the US not yet at war.

While the Nazi leader's desire to conquer and colonize Russia west of the Urals formed the ideological basis for Operation Barbarossa, it was his appraisal of Soviet actions from 1939 to 1941 and what they meant for the future of the Reich that ultimately shaped his decision to invade the USSR. Hitler was faced with the prospect of a long war, with the present enemy, Britain, and future enemies, Russia and the

US, growing stronger. Although Germany was in control of virtually all of Europe, the Fuehrer knew that there were limits to that power. Militarily and economically, a prolonged conflict would work against the Reich, over-extended in its conquests and dependent on Russian raw materials for its war machine. Moreover, with the Soviets making what the Fuehrer took to be threatening moves throughout the Baltic and eastern Europe and strengthening their forces, he concluded that the USSR had to be dealt with militarily before it was too late. Thus, he decided to invade Russia and in doing so, brought on his own as well as Nazi Germany's destruction.

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