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**"The Orchestration of the Second World War.
Who started the war and when."**

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«Concert of Great Powers» on the Eve of Key Events

Part I

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As the pivotal point of the XX century history World War II is the traditional theme of heated debates among historians and political scientists. Having spread beyond the academic confines over the recent years the polemic in its current shape warrants not only historians' efforts aimed at unearthing facts and analyzing documents, but also broader criticism of the intellectual paradigms and philosophy underlying the Western interpretations of the 1930ies-1940ies events and data.

In today's Europe, for whose freedom, dignity, and right to peace Russians and the Red Army once cheered in the liberated European cities payed a tremendous price, the Soviet Union is unabashedly portrayed as a totalitarian monster perhaps more immoral than the Nazi Reich. Breaching the international law and the UN Charter, the European Parliament referred to the Kuril Islands as a territory occupied by Russia. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called for condemning "the crimes committed by communist totalitarian regimes", and, in June 2009 the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution equating "Stalin's totalitarianism" and Hitler's racist regime. Upholding the campaign of rewriting the past, the media are disseminating the ahistorical thesis that Nazism and communism are indistinguishable. The view would have been inconceivable even in the Cold War epoch when, quite reasonably, the Western academic community and po-

litical establishment equally used to regard the two phenomena as opposites.

In the latest round of revisionism, the August 23, 1939 Soviet-German Pact is - contrary to the historical logic - widely criticized as nearly the main cause of World War II. We are witnessing a massive falsification of history based on deliberate misinterpretation of documents and distortion of facts. Extrapolating the current trend one should expect that in a decade or two Western history textbooks will teach that World War II was a conflict between two democracies – the US and Great Britain – and two totalitarian monsters. The concept is floated by the media and persistently promoted in the European parliamentary circles that the Soviet Union was a criminal state and must finally face trial. While the Western media mounted a vociferous campaign of allegations of the Soviet Union's responsibility for World War II on the 70th anniversary of the Soviet-German Pact, the 70th anniversary of the notorious Munich Agreement somehow attracted practically no attention in the West.

Yet, it was the Munich Agreement that set in motion the process of redefining borders in Europe, and, logically, its signing should be regarded as the starting point of the German expansion. It is also a serious question why the occupation of Albania by Italy, the fighting in North Africa, and Japan's

aggression against China, where the death toll had reached millions by the time of the German invasion of Poland conventionally counted as the first episode of World War II, are not bracketed with it.

The signing of the Munich Treaty between the Western democracies and Nazi Germany allowed Hitler to give Czechoslovakia, a sovereign European country, an ultimatum, to annex a part of its territory, and eventually to partition it. At the time, the European powers were secretly discussing the ongoing overhaul of borders in Europe, Germany's anticipated military escapades and territorial gains, and the joint response options in the cases of Germany's attacks against various countries. Importantly, for the most part the talks revolved around Germany's eastward expansion, which shows that from the outset the Munich Agreement had the primary objective to channel Hitler's aggression in the corresponding direction. The process which began with ultimatums and subsequent deployment of troops in Europe could not but escalate into fighting as it did in September, 1939. There is a profound reason why the West avoids interpreting the occupation and partition of Czechoslovakia by Germany as the beginning of World War II. Recognizing the fact would highlight the responsibility of the countries which sanctioned Germany's steps. This is also the explanation behind the paradox that Czechoslovakia,

abandoned by its allies and overrun by Fascist Germany as the result of the Munich Agreement, is not regarded as a victim of fascist aggression to the same extent as Poland.

The role that Poland – the country now posing as an innocent victim of predatory partition perpetrated by Hitler and Stalin - had played in the whole Munich Agreement story certainly deserves a sober reassessment. A year before being partitioned by its more powerful neighbors, Poland had acted as a minor accomplice in the partition of another sovereign country. Documentary evidence suggests that Warsaw was deeply upset about not being invited to join the Munich Agreement as the fifth signatory. Facing the “discrimination”, it promptly put a claim to Cieszyn Silesia and thus became Berlin's accomplice in carving up Czechoslovakia, the first victim of Hitler expansion.

Poland's ambitions neither were rejected by Western powers in 1938 nor have been condemned ever since. As for Warsaw, the general impression is that even nowadays it sees no reasons to feel embarrassed at how it acted. In 2005, Pawel Wieczorkiewicz, a renown Polish historian, openly expressed regrets that Poland's serious attempts to reach an agreement with Hitler met with no success and it did not rout the hated Russia jointly with Germany. The author's belief that Poland's contribution to the fascist cause could affect the outcome of

World War II to such an extent can only be attributed to grotesque national self-esteem: he fantasizes that Poland could play a role in Germany's plans nearly as important as Italy did, and that German and Polish troops could eventually parade together through the defeated Moscow with A. Hitler and E. Rydz-Śmigły at the helm¹.

Some 20 years ago the publication of a text of the sort in a Polish official media outlet would have shocked the West no less than than Ahmadinejad's recent statement concerning Israel. These days, Europe's desire to avoid crediting Russia for its sacrifices and admitting its own treacherousness seems to outweigh any other considerations. To these end, any sins can be pardoned, be it sorrow at the missed chance to ally Hitler or dreams about a Poland spanning from one sea to another to which – as many dreamed in the country – Hitler could dish out Ukraine, Lithuania, and Slovakia. Wiczorkiewicz is sincerely convinced that carving West Belarus and a part of Ukraine out of the USSR, tearing Vilnius out of Lithuania, and amputating Cieszyn Silesia from Czechoslovakia were acts of historical justice.

Historical documents convincingly demonstrate that Hitler's aggression against Poland, carefully planned by the German command already in March 1939, when the USSR was negotiating not with Berlin, but with London and Paris, grew out of the

Munich Agreement. It de facto programmed the developments in Europe, Hitler's eastward expansion, and the isolation of the Soviet Union. Memories of the details are suppressed in the West, but the deal between the European powers and Hitler cynically prescribed the victim of the aggression non-resistance and even forbade it to withdraw assets and industrial capacities from the territories passed under German control. The Munich Agreement not only ruined the post-Versailles system of international relations but also became a prologue to conquests and a total territorial overhaul in Europe which could not but get practically all countries drawn into ferocious fighting. Long before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact the Western signatories to the Munich Agreement dismantled the system of France's alliances in East Europe, the treaties between the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia, and the alliance between France and Poland, as well as scrapped the Little Entente. The League of Nations was rendered practically non-existent, and the main result was the geopolitical cornering and immobilization of the USSR. Obviously, this must have been the key objective pursued by Great Britain.

After the death of J. Pilsudski's, Poland's foreign politics was directed by J. Beck who did a lot for the country's rapprochement with Germany. The equal distancing from the USSR

and Germany, which was proclaimed as Poland's official position, turned out to be illusory. Angered by not being allowed to join the Munich Treaty, Poland gave the desperate Prague an ultimatum and demanded Cieszyn Silesia, into which the Polish army gloriously marched on October 2. After that, Hungary chose to act in a similar manner and put claims to most of Slovakia and to Transcarpathia. Poland's ambition to reorganize "the third Europe" automatically lured it into complicity with Hitler.

Moreover, immediately following the Anschluss Poland quite predictably exerted pressure on Lithuania which, like large parts of Belarus and Ukraine, it used to regard as its own backyard since the the Union of Lublin. The ultimatum issued following the March 11, 1938 incident at the border between Poland and Lithuania included an open threat to use force in case Warsaw's demands were not fulfilled. Lithuania was central to Poland's plan for "the third Europe" and "the Baltic Entente", which were supposed to materialize via a "voluntary" unification. Berlin clearly intended to get Warsaw involved in the realization of its own agenda, but letting Poland gain control over Lithuania independently was not part of the German plan. Lithuania was used as a bait in Berlin's game with Poland – it was promised to Warsaw as a compensation for ceding the Polish Corridor to Germany.

While Berlin was bracing for the seizure of Prague, London attempted to save face and, jointly with Paris, demanded from Germany guarantees for the post-Munich Czechoslovakia. The request was turned down. London saw that – in full accord with its plans - the epicenter of the global drama was drifting to East Europe. Hitler was deceiving Poland, as for him temporarily encouraging Warsaw's ambitions was a way of making the allies more active in dealing with Czechoslovakia and attracting new players to its the partition. Broader international involvement served to legitimize Hitler's own gains and to show to the international community that any opposition to the partition was useless.

What could Poland hope for? It is almost unbelievable that there could be any illusions concerning Germany's real intentions. Berlin would have never confirmed Poland's wider western frontiers, and in any case Poland should have been alarmed by the fact that regaining Danzig was one of Germany's priorities. In the long run, there was no chance of Germany's recognizing Polish interests in Lithuania. Nevertheless, Poland remained blinded by the foreign-politics doctrine of J. Pilsudski, who was crowned with the Stephen Bathory wreath for a military offensive targeting Moscow, and motivated by hatred towards Russia. As a result, it clearly lacked political realism. Warsaw was too unwilling to face the truth that Berlin's interest in a part-

nership with it was cynical and short-living, even though Hitler openly spoke about Poles as canon fodder – he said every Polish division would save a German division in the conflict with the USSR.

Deeply discontent with the Munich Agreement, Moscow was warned about the far-reaching dire consequences of the implementation of Chamberlain's concept and of Poland's steps that had actually made it more vulnerable to the German aggression. Documents show that Moscow made no secret of its search for the options of emergency response, and, moreover, attempted to alert its Western counterparts. Italian Ambassador to Moscow was reminded on September 22, 1939 that Poland, the country claiming a relatively small peace of Czechoslovakia where several dozen thousands of Poles resided, seemed oblivious to the fact that millions of Ukrainians, Germans, Belorussians, Jews, and others inhabited its borderlands. Moreover, its Danzig corridor was regarded by Hitler as a territory that had to belong to Germany. The questions were: could Warsaw hope that, just out of affinity for Beck, Germany, inspired by its success in Czechoslovakia, would bypass Poland in its quest for global dominance and was Poland prepared to face future threats alone?

Poland's foreign-politics thinking was dominated by radical nationalist legacy and downright Russophobia

since the epoch of J. Pilsudski. Having taken advantage of the chaos into which Russia was plunged as the result of the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War, Poland seized West Belarus and West Ukraine, the territories of the Russian Empire it continues referring to as “East Poland” even nowadays. Somehow, the West never regarded the partition of Belarus and Ukraine as a crime. Pilsudski dreamed of Poland with the 1794 borders and, quite possibly, of a deeper incursion into Russia akin to that of 1612. He was openly upset about the configuration of Poland's eastern border, which had been charted so as to coincide with the Curzon line. Though Great Britain and France traditionally sought to rely on a powerful anti-Russian Poland in the relations with Russia, in 1919 Poland's excessive ambitions and its euphoria caused by the difficulties confronting Russia even cast a shadow over Warsaw's partnership with the Entente. Critics of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact typically ignore the fact that not only in the epoch of the Revolution and the Civil War in Russia, but throughout the entire post-Versailles period between the two World Wars Poland invariably took a markedly anti-Russian position.

Polish Foreign Minister J. Beck, a follower of J. Pilsudski, was markedly pro-German. His attempts to convince Hitler that Poland would be instrumental in Germany's expanding eastwards and especially in conquering

Ukraine continued until his own country came under German attack. Judging by what can be found in archives, no later than by the spring of 1939 even the British authors of the Munich Agreement were fully aware that Poland would be among the targets of Hitler's eastward aggression. Nevertheless, till the very last moment Warsaw resisted any multilateral deals that did not a priori exclude Moscow. It remained under the illusion that Berlin would reward it for loyalty and readiness to cooperate by allowing it to keep Danzig, if not by letting it seize Ukraine and gain access to the Black Sea.

Even a sketchy but sufficiently broad survey of the 1930-1939 global developments convincingly demonstrates that a World War – a conflict unprecedented in terms of aspirations, fatalities, and the territorial scope - was underway in the epoch. What was the position of the great “democracies” over the situation, given that the War and the redistribution of the world on the scale unseen before clearly commenced before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact? Listed below are the milestones of the process to which, for some reason, the Western democracies did not chose to react by intervening or at least and condemning and isolating the aggressors.

The redistribution of the world in the Far East took over 35 mln lives, mostly of the Chinese nationals who

had been fighting the Kwantung Army since 1931. At that time Japan occupied a territory comparable in size to that of France. Japan also took the Rehe province and invaded Chahar and Hebei with the connivance of the international community.

In 1935 Italy launched an aggression in North Africa and attacked Ethiopia, where it used chemical warfare against civilian population. While the League of Nations proposed sanctions, Great Britain and France limited their reactions to symbolic gestures and even turned down the option of imposing an oil embargo which could make Italy face serious problems. The British Cabinet cynically chose to appease the aggressor to prevent what it termed a tilt of the balance of forces in Europe. Though Mussolini's aggression undermined the Kellogg–Briand Pact which served as the basis of the European security system, US President Roosevelt hurriedly declared neutrality and thus gave carte blanche not only to Italy and Japan, but also to Germany. Germany made a military demarche in the Rhineland and withdrew from the Locarno Treaties, thus indicating that it regarded the signing of the treaty between France and the Soviet Union as a hostile step. V.M. Falin's interpretation of Berlin's message is that Germany showed it would not allow to maintain the status quo in Europe in case the West extended guarantees to Moscow. The message was heard – undisguised efforts ensued to encour-

age Germany's expansion east. Declassifying the archives of the Soviet intelligence service and Foreign Ministry we could suggest that the West also declassify, for example, the secret documents pertaining to the Four-Power Pact signed by Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy in July, 1933. Though France did not ratify the Pact due to widespread public opposition to it, the signing gave Hitler the status of a legitimate partner in European politics and introduced him to the circle of "the recognized". This was a step towards the Munich Treaty.

The Anschluss, sanctioned by Western democracies, as well as the partition and occupation of Czechoslovakia, were direct consequences of the strategy explained by Lloyd George: its point was to divert Japan and Germany from Great Britain and to keep the USSR under permanent pressure. Lloyd George's plan was to give Japan full freedom to act against the USSR at its own discretion, to let it prolong the border between Korea and Manchuria all the way to the Arctic Ocean and even to annex the eastern part of Siberia. As for Germany, the idea was to greenlight its advancement to the east and thus to provide it with a potential for the much-needed expansion³.

Japan also had reasons to believe that the US, Great Britain, and France would not intervene. After Germany and Italy pledged to support it in case the USSR sided with China, Japan

started putting into practice the Tanaka Memorandum. The document was accessed by the Soviet leadership already in 1928. Japanese forces killed 200,000 people – roughly 50% of the population - in Nanjin, and on the whole China lost 35 mln lives as the result of the Japanese aggression. Nevertheless, the conventional view in the West is that the World War began only in 1939 when Poland came under attack and Great Britain stepped in.

Thus, Europe persistently "appeased" Hitler and made no efforts to stop Italy which invaded Albania in April, 1939 and incorporated it on April 7, coming closer to the realization of the mare nostre concept of encircling the Mediterranean Sea.

British Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon secretly met with Hitler in Berlin on March 25-26, 1935. A record of the talks was obtained by the Soviet intelligence service. It was published for the first time in 1997. Hitler made it clear that any cooperation with the Bolshevik regime which he called "a vessel of plague bacilli" was out of question for Germany and said that Germans were afraid of help from Russians more than of a French attack. He also stated that of all European countries Russia was the one most likely to launch an aggression. The departure from the Treaty of Rapallo and the absence of continuity between it and the future 1939 Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union are obvious. It was Simon who suggested

treating the USSR exclusively as a geopolitical phenomenon and said that the threat posed by communism had to be perceived as an internal rather than international issue.

Yet, the key message delivered to Hitler by Simon dealt with a different issue – the West blessed the Anschluss. When Ribbentrop asked Simon about the British position over Austria, the latter replied directly that the British government could not feel as concerned over Austria as, for example, over Belgium, the country which was much closer to Great Britain. Delighted, Hitler thanked the British cabinet for its loyal position on the Saar plebiscite and other pertinent issues. He meant the 1935 conference in Stresa (Italy) at which Germany's military build-up in breach of the Treaty of Versailles was discussed and Great Britain turned down the option of imposing sanctions in the case of new violations⁴.

What were the objectives of the US, the country now presented as the greatest contributor to the liberation of Europe and an unselfish champion of the universal values of freedom and democracy?

The US acted in exactly the same way as in 1914-1917. Generally, its plan for the war on the horizon was to remain expectant either till Germany and the USSR got exhausted or till structural geopolitical transformations commenced. The report of the Soviet

intelligence service describing the US position was accompanied by a complete record of Roosevelt's September 29, 1937 talk to his Administration. Prior to the presentation it had been discussed with S. Baldwin's envoy Runciman. The discussion mainly revolved around the possible US neutrality in the coming war. Eventually, Roosevelt formulated his position as follows: the US would do what it must in case a conflict erupts between democracies and fascism, but would remain neutral if a war is triggered by Germany or the USSR. European countries and the US would intervene only in case the USSR faced a threat of territorial character from Germany⁵. The approach almost replicates the strategy behind the US neutrality during World War I: the US intended to intervene only when one of the conflicting sides achieved dominance over most of Eurasia. In the light of the thesis, one can easily imagine how upset Washington had to be about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which temporarily shifted Hitler's priorities. Anglo-Saxons clearly hoped that Germany and the USSR would bleed each other and planned to intervene only in case Germany started to prevail and came close to controlling the entire Eurasia.

It might seem that Hitler's plans to conquer Lebensraum in the east and the Anglo-Saxon doctrine of creating a stratum of dependent East-European countries in the space between Ger-

many and Russia – from the Baltic to the Black Sea – were conflicting geopolitical visions. Nevertheless, it is well-known that Great Britain and the US implicitly but actively encouraged Hitler in his eastbound expansionist aspirations. It is still widely held that Great Britain meant to appease Hitler, but the view is entirely at odds with reality. The scenario most unfavorable from the Anglo-Saxon perspective would have been Germany's sufficing with the Munich deal and the Anschluss which had been endorsed by “the democratic community”.

First, members of this community had already inflicted disgrace on themselves by sacrificing Czechoslovakia. Secondly, the result would have been the concentration of the German potential within a unified statehood. Such revision of the Versailles arrangement would have been hard to contest as the territories were not conquered by Germany in 1914-1918 but used to be parts of Germany and Austria-Hungary before World War I.

What London sought was by no means to appease Hitler but to encourage his eastbound aspirations and thus to delay the war between Germany and Great Britain. The Anglo-Saxon expectations that Hitler would be overtaken by his unchecked ambitions was quite reasonable. The fascist aggression directed eastwards provided a pretext for intervention which, under an appropriate combination of circumstances, could make it possible to

complete geopolitical projects involving not only the countries attacked but a much wider area as well. British media and political circles discussed Hitler's claims to Ukraine as his next step.

In fact, Poland's politics on the eve of the war was profoundly self-defeating. Based on historical documents, those of the pro-Polish authors whose academic integrity can be trusted admit that Poland's tendency towards rapprochement with Germany undercut the system of international relations in Europe and that the Polish leadership, hypnotized by the prospects for territorial gains at the expense of its neighbor, openly cooperated with Nazi Germany⁶. Already in January, 1939 Polish Foreign Minister J. Beck stated following the talks with Berlin that full unity of interests with respect to the Soviet Union had been achieved. Later the Soviet intelligence service reported that negotiations between Ribbentrop and Polish envoys took place during which Poland indicated it was ready to join the Anti-Comintern Pact in case Hitler supported its claims to Ukraine and to the access to the Black Sea⁷. Obviously, the cost of the issue was what Poland would get for scrapping its proclaimed politics of maintaining equal distances from Germany and the USSR. According to the information available to Litvinov, Poland denied that such possibility existed during the talks with Italian foreign minister and Mussolini's

son-in-law Gian Galeazzo Ciano who failed to offer Warsaw a commensurate bonus⁸.

However, the Anglo-Saxon strategy became more than obvious, and this was enough to put it in serious jeopardy. Aware of the situation, Great Britain was – just several days earlier than the USSR – ready to seal its own deal with Hitler. For the purpose, H. Goring was to meet Halifax and other proponents of the Munich-style appeasement politics of the Chamberlain variety who became active again in the summer of 1939.

The Munich Agreement and the conduct of the “democratic countries” left the USSR convinced that synchronizing its politics with that of the Anglo-Saxon world made absolutely no sense. The fact was recognized in a report even by Litvinov, a Soviet politician often and not groundlessly associated with the Anglo-Saxon lobby in the USSR. Under Litvinov, the Soviet foreign politics more than just drifted from the Treaty of Rapallo to the positions of the anti-German camp, which was a natural evolution given Hitler's ascension to power. The USSR joined the League of Nations and demonstrated with utmost clarity the will to reach a collective security agreement with the West. Litvinov's report was issued at the time of the Munich Agreement, and the coincidence did not remain unnoticed in the West. Italian Ambassador A. Rossi said in the fall of 1938 that Litvinov's

speech contained a recognition of the failure of the collective security policy pursued over the recent years and showed that in the future the USSR would not feel responsible for the developments in Europe and would steer a course based on its particular interests and ideals.

Well-known historical facts and new analysis of the epoch's political context altogether lead to the inescapable conclusion: the West's practice of protracted negotiations and its delaying tactic were meant, among other things, to divert the attention of the USSR from autonomous solutions and to preclude its coexistence with Germany. The talks concerning a joint declaration to be issued by Great Britain, France, the USSR, and Poland went on for months! Poland was the slowest player in the process, and Great Britain's position kept fluctuating from instilling hopes to reneging on its pledges. London persistently avoided including in the text any references to its own commitments or guarantees.

An account of Soviet envoy I.M. Maisky's conversation with British Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs A. Cadogan vividly illustrates the situation. Cadogan started convincing Maisky that London was about to adopt a declaration condemning the coming German aggression. Maisky listened mistrustfully, knowing Great Britain's tendency to avoid clear commitments, especially those concerning Europe, as well as its tradi-

tion of benefiting from conflicts between other countries. Moreover, Maisky was aware of the British government's aversion to the very idea of guaranteeing borders in Central and East Europe, and was not inclined to believe that Chamberlain would consent to real obligations. When Cadogan asked what made Maisky grin, he replied that the new plan - in case it really existed - would be tantamount to a revolution in the British foreign politics. Cadogan shrugged his shoulders in response and said it would indeed be a revolution and that was the reason why it was taking so long to make the decision⁹. Then he looked at his watch and told Maisky that the British government was in the process of deciding at that very moment. As many times before, no decision actually materialized.

The Soviet Union invariably included in the text the statement that Great Britain, France, and the USSR would provide all types of assistance, including military assistance, to East European countries situated between the Baltic and the Black Seas and bordering the USSR in case they face aggression¹⁰, but no British draft contained any guarantees to the Baltic countries located along the Soviet Union's western frontier. All pertinent historical documents - both previously published and made available recently - prove the above. In response to the Soviet offer as of April 17 Halifax told Maisky again that Great Britain would

insist on the Soviet Union's unilateral guarantees to Poland and Romania. As before, he invoked the opinions of Poland and Romania. Speaking of the British and French guarantees to the Baltic republics, Halifax alleged that, first, they did not want them for fear that Germany could be provoked, and, secondly, that offering the British and French guarantees to the Baltic countries would provide additional arguments to the Nazi propaganda which was fostering among the German population phobias about being encircled by enemies.

The Soviet envoy's reply was that the British formula lacked mutual character: the USSR was supposed to help Great Britain and France in case they got involved in a war over Poland and Romania, but they were not burdened with symmetric obligations. While the verbal exchanges continued, The Times launched a new campaign in support of resuming the attempts to reach an agreement with Germany and Italy. Maisky reported that the British government was clearly reverting to the Munich policy and proponents of appeasing Germany were growing increasingly active¹¹.

Eventually, all the endeavors to exact anything serious from Western partners produced no result, and the USSR was compelled to sign the notorious August 21, 1939 Soviet-German Pact.

Were the developments and the outcome as unexpected for the Western

powers as currently described? Definitely, not. Already in September, 1938, Italian Ambassador to the USSR reported to Italy's Foreign Ministry following a conversation with Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs V. Potemkin that the Soviet leadership was deeply disappointed at the situation, anticipated Hitler's attack on Poland following the partition of Czechoslovakia, and deemed a change of course inevitable. He opined that the USSR would have to abandon attempts to cooperate with Western democracies and switch to defensive politics of relative isolation¹². Attention should be paid to the fact that the coming shift from the search for a form of agreement with Great Britain and France to a neutrality pact with Germany was characterized by the Western diplomat as the transition to "defensive politics".

On a number of occasions, both Litvinov and Molotov registered their displeasure at London's politics with the British Ambassador to Moscow. After the Munich Agreement, the USSR had all the reasons to feel free from any obligations¹³ and the West had to know that the Soviet Union was left with limited options. Keeping alive the Soviet leadership's illusory hope that a collective security agreement could be reached was Great Britain's strategic objective which it pursued relying on Poland in the process.

The tradition of falsifying the historical meaning of World War II begins

with German historian E. Nolte whose views sparked controversy and protests in the ranks of the Western academic community in the 1970ies. Nolte's anti-liberal views which led him to an indirect justification of the rise of fascism in Europe and of the German expansion continue to make him a politically incorrect figure. Nevertheless, his concept alleviating the West's sense of guilt for the sin of fascism became the cornerstone of historical revisionism in the studies of World War II.

The revisionism culminated in his treatise *The European Civil War, 1917–1945*, where he argued that the international relations in the period of time between the two World Wars should be interpreted as a clash of two ideologies challenging civilization and World War II – as a European civil war allegedly started by the Soviets rather than as a consequence of the quest for territorial domination and redistribution of the post-Versailles world. Though Nolte readily ignores generally acknowledged facts or re-arranges them to fit into his scheme, it is a historical fact that the decision to attack Poland was made by Berlin on September 1, 1939. There is no doubt that the Soviet leadership knew about it. Moreover, upon the signing of the Munich Agreement few people in the West were oblivious to the total isolation of the USSR. Therefore, the idea that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact caused the aggression against Poland

is absolutely ahistorical.

Nolte calls the “Hitler-Stalin Pact” a “European prelude” to World War II. Analyzing the text of the secret protocol on the spheres of influence, Nolte heavily criticizes its section stating that only future political developments will show whether the existence of an independent Poland is desirable for the USSR and Germany and in what borders. It is noteworthy that the phrase is almost identical to that from the 1890 notes of German Chancellor von Bulow concerning Germany's plans in a future war against the Russian Empire. The impression is that the plans were fully reproduced by Hitler, and even the current NATO expansion seems to follow the Kaiser-epoch blueprint: efforts are envisaged to push Russia away from the Baltic and Black Seas and thus to undermine its positions in global politics. Bismarck left a remark on the note saying such eccentric sketches should be expressed in writing¹⁴.

The above plan for Poland reflected the continuity of Berlin's thinking. Von Bulow also believed that the decision about restoring Poland in any form and incorporating the Baltic provinces had to be suspended as Russia, routed and pushed to the east, would be a more comfortable neighbor than the reincarnated Poland. Its pro-German politicians who schemed so eagerly against Russia on the eve of World War I and against the USSR on the eve of World War II should have known

Germany's actual perspective on their country.

Poland, a country at the interface between two rival geopolitical giants, largely owed its historical drama to its own perpetual hostility towards Russia. The materials in the present book confirm what has been known from previously published archive documents: “Poland remained opposed to multilateral combinations against Germany”¹⁵. Information was leaked to the press after an Anglo-French meeting attended by Bonnet, Chamberlain, and Halifax that “any projects of countering Germany are mainly obstructed by Poland. Poland is afraid to abandon the politics of balancing between the Soviet Union and Germany which Colonel Beck has been implementing so far. Fearing Germany, Poland does not dare to join the declaration against aggression”¹⁶.

Archive materials which have been made available to researchers recently leave no doubts concerning Poland's position: it not only deliberately and persistently avoided integration into any fronts involving the USSR, but also eyed Ukrainian and Lithuanian territories. The latter circumstance made it seek partnership with Germany to jointly seize Ukraine¹⁷.

Thus, the general political tendency in the 1930ies was the emergence of the following camps with conflicting interests: the Western powers led by Great Britain, Germany and other

counties with fascist regimes, and the USSR. An overhaul of Europe was imminent, and all countries, especially those of East Europe, hurriedly sought solutions, probed into opportunities to capitalize on existing rivalries, and hoped to put into practice their historical aspirations.

The seizure of Prague by Hitler and the declaration of independence by the puppet Slovakia, as well as the prewar March 14-15, 1939 political crisis seemed to force Great Britain to promise some kind of guarantees, and the one given to Poland later evolved into a mutual aid agreement. The development was explainable considering the overall strategy to gain control over the Baltic Sea – Black Sea line. If a sequence of achievements in the east incrementally diverted Hitler's aggression from the West and motivated him to attack the USSR (the Baltic countries would have been readily sacrificed), the guarantees given to Poland could provide Great Britain with a pretext for an intervention in East Europe (for the sake of its “protection”) and for tearing it out of the spheres of influence of both Germany and the USSR, the two countries that would have been exhausted in a conflict of unprecedented proportions.

The Soviet offer to sign a multilateral agreement involving the Baltic republics was turned down by the West. These republics - with semi-fascist regimes, practically non-existent parliamentarism, and reputations in Eu-

rope not much better than that of Hitler's Germany – vehemently opposed the idea. In April, 1939 Germany started developing Fall Weiss, a plan for a military aggression against Poland. Its details including the deadline – September 1 – were known in Moscow.

Informed about all the secret negotiations, the Soviet leadership gradually came to the conclusion that waiting any longer would make Germany's eastward advancement fast and irreversible. At the moment it would have taken a close-knit international coalition that would have given guarantees to the countries along Germany's borders and to Europe's strategic centers to arrest Berlin's expansionism. However, Moscow's offer to create such a coalition was rejected, and a German aggression during which the West was going to watch the annihilation of Russia “till structural geopolitical transformations commenced” was looming on the horizon. This approach was outlined by Roosevelt in a talk to his Administration presenting the US position over a potential war between Germany and the USSR without the involvement of the West. What were the structural transformations that awaited the USSR in case Germany chose it as the first target?

Under the hypothetical scenario Germany would have quickly bled the Red Army, which was unprepared and severely weakened by Stalin's political repressions, and forced the USSR to

retreat to the territories east of the Volga River and the Urals, leaving the oil-rich Caucasus and the Black Sea. In line with its geopolitical tradition, Great Britain would probably have locked the Mediterranean Straits and helped Poland in the regions of the Baltic and the Northern Seas. Having lured Hitler into a deep incursion into the Soviet territory during the initial phase of the process and in no way helping Russians, the Anglo-Saxons would have never allowed Germany to dominate Eurasia. They would have attacked him on Russia's territory from the West while also making sure that Russia was forever expelled from East Europe, as well as from the Baltic and the Black Sea regions. A major conflict would have also erupted in the Far East attacked by Japan. The Japanese aggression would probably have met with the US resistance, as prescribed by the US school of geopolitical thought. Similarly, US forces landed in Vladivostok in 1919 - during the Civil War in Russia - to debar Japan from the Trans-Baikal region. Great Britain and the US would have taken advantage of Russia's tragic circumstances to leave it irreversibly landlocked. As a result, the USSR as the country sacrificed to debilitate Hitler's Germany would have ended up localized in the tundra and would have seen its history forever fall into decline.

Quite obviously, contours of the same geopolitical strategy aimed at exerting

pressure on Russia - though in completely different forms – can be discerned in the late XX – early XXI centuries. Currently we are witnessing a new attempt to lock Russia inland, deep in north-eastern Eurasia.

Moscow knew that Hitler also planned an aggression against the West. His detailed plans for not only conquering but also fully subduing both the East and the West were in fact an open secret. The question was – where would Hitler's first strike be directed?

The choice confronting Warsaw, which had maneuvered itself into a hopeless situation, was limited to two options: to do nothing at all or to try to achieve limited gains by selling its loyalty to one of the sides. Since, as throughout many centuries in the past, it dreamed of the territories belonging to Ukraine and Lithuania, bargaining with Germany had to be Poland's choice, which determined its future.

What can be said of Stalin's readiness to buy time on the eve of the coming war against his own country at the price of not opposing Hitler's plans concerning Poland, the country which volunteered to help Germany seize Ukraine? Did he intend to seize the opportunity to regain the territories of the Russian Empire lost because of the 1917 Revolution? In terms of its pragmatism – or, perhaps, cynicism – his position in no way differed from that of Lord Simon who confided to Hitler that Great Britain would not be con-

cerned over Austria to the same extent as over Belgium. How was Moscow to react to the West's reluctance to guarantee in the framework of a collective security pact not only the borders of Poland, but also those of the Baltic countries, thus practically providing Hitler with an avenue for an aggression against the USSR?

As for the Baltic states, they were eager to avoid integration into anti-German coalitions and, as the US envoy to Lithuania wrote to the US Department of State, “were very anxious not to be mentioned as guaranteed states in agreements between groups of other powers and that they were, therefore, not pleased by the suggestion made recently by the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs to the effect that Great Britain guarantee the boundaries of those states on the Baltic bordering on the Soviet Union”. The representative of Lithuania expressed hope that “the Western Powers and the Soviet Union would arrive at some formula covering the situation in Eastern Europe without mentioning by name any of the states in this region”. He also indicated to the US diplomat how Great Britain's already extended guarantee to Poland could be interpreted so as to include Lithuania: “...since under the agreement with Great Britain, Poland has the right to determine when Polish independence is threatened...The Poles must...regard an attack by Germany on Lithuania as a move to encircle Poland” 18.

With E. Nolte's blessing, the West is calling the Soviet-German Pact “a pact of war and partition” allegedly unparalleled in the XIX-XX century European history¹⁹. The idea is laughable from a historian's perspective. From the Peace of Westphalia to Dayton, in the epochs of empires and – no less – “democracies” countries used bilateral or multilateral treaties to prescribe borders to others, and a vast majority of secret diplomatic transactions revolve around this theme.

In Tilsit, Napoleon unsuccessfully attempted to convince Alexander I to annihilate Prussia. The Congress of Vienna appended to Switzerland a number of strategic mountain passes to preclude the strengthening of a number of countries. V.I. Lenin described the Berlin Congress laconically: “Robbing Turkey”. In 1908, Austria – with the consent of other powers – annexed Bosnia. In a secret 1905 agreement between US President Roosevelt and Japanese Prime Minister T. Katsura, Japan renounced aggressive intentions concerning the Phillipines, which became the US backyard, and got the right to occupy Korea as the reward. In Versailles, the victorious Anglo-Saxon part of the Entente upholding Wilson's concepts of self-determination and “democracy”, partitioned Austria-Hungary, prescribed borders to several European nations, and ruled which of them were entitled to statehood and which – like the Macedonians – were not. It forced

some nations to change sovereigns (Galicia) and bracketed others – Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians – without asking them how they felt about the arrangement. In the 1993 foreword to the 1913 Carnegie Foundation report, G. Kennan called for arranging and enforcing a new territorial status quo across the Balkans tailored to the West's needs. The plan actually materialized as the result of the Dayton Agreement.

Hitler's geopolitical agenda was identical to that pan-Germanists formulated on the eve of World War I. Germany's eastern frontier along the Volga River was the dream of Berlin intellectuals in 1914, and at that time they challenged not a country with a communist ideology allegedly spreading a civil war across Europe, but the Christian Russia.

The 1939 Soviet-German Pact did alter the priorities and timetable of Hitler's attacks in a way less acceptable to the West. What is more important, having “only” changed the timetable, it also affected fundamentally the post-war configuration and debarred the Anglo-Saxon world from entering East Europe both during the early phase of the war and after it. Thus, the West's hope to withdraw East Europe from the orbit of the USSR was dashed.

This is the reason why the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact constitutes the worst failure of the British strategy in

the XX century, and will always be lambasted by the West.

For Great Britain, the least costly option was to get involved in the war after Hitler would have attacked the Soviet Union's Ukraine via the Baltic region. For the West, the Baltic republics were less important than the “anti-Soviet” Poland, which was central to Entente's plans since the signing of the Versailles Treaty. Great Britain planned to come to the rescue of Poland, as it actually did in 1939. London, however, expected Germany's attack against Poland to be a part of a broader eastward aggression and projected that in the process Germany would get bogged down in a hopeless war with the USSR. The developments would have provided to Great Britain an opportunity to preserve West Europe at a lower cost and to intervene in East Europe under the pretext of protecting it.

In his Diplomacy, a fundamental treatise, in which a historian with highly individual perceptions and a scrupulous and erudite scholar collided, H. Kissinger does allege that Russia played a key role in unleashing both wars. Nevertheless, the chapter dedicated to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact appears to disprove his own statement and displays the author's mixture of ire and admiration. Kissinger cites Hitler who said on August 11, 1939 that everything he was doing targeted Russia, and if the West lacked the intelligence to realize the fact he would have

to strike a deal with Russia and rout the West, and then use all the resources thus accumulated against the Soviet Union. Kissinger contends that the statement reflected Hitler's actual priorities: what he wanted from Great Britain was non-intervention, while he dreamed to carve Lebensraum out of the USSR. Thus, the Soviet diplomacy should be credited with serious success achieved under extremely pressing circumstances: it compelled Hitler to subject his priorities to a temporary overhaul. This is exactly how Kissinger assesses the Pact, describing it as diplomatic artwork²⁰.

Kissinger regrets Great Britain's failure, suggesting as the explanation that in the framework of the order set by Versailles it had to abide by strict legal and moral regards. However, the obvious truth is that neither the talk about adherence to the Versailles principles after the aforementioned Stresse conference, nor references to Great Britain's morality after the Anschluss and the Munich Agreement make any sense. Kissinger recognizes that Great Britain's restraint in what concerned the Baltic republics was interpreted by the Soviet Union as an invitation to attack it bypassing Poland.

In fact, in the epoch even British politicians regarded Stalin's course as a natural outgrowth of Russia's historical rights and as an equally natural reaction to the circumstances confronting the Soviet Union. On October 4, 1939 Halifax commented on

the events of the fall of 1939 and the deployment of the Red Army forces in West Belarus by saying that, his reluctance to advocate the Soviet policy notwithstanding, the USSR would have never taken the step if Germany had not invaded Poland without declaring war. Moreover, he admitted that the Soviet Union no more than just shifted its frontier to the location recommended by Curzon at the Versailles Conference²¹. On October 10, the same view was expressed by Churchill.

The pervert expansionist ambitions justified by the semi-pagan Nazism were largely rooted in the Versailles humiliation and the partition of Germany by the Anglo-Saxons, a politics to which the USSR in no way contributed. As for the phenomenon of the economic recovery in Hitler's Germany, British authors should admit that – fully in accord with the Anglo-Saxon strategy - their country played the key role in absolving Berlin of the economic constraints of Versailles and the post-war reparations. This was why Churchill castigated the British politics in the period between the two wars.

What London feared most was the forming of a stable German-Soviet *modus vivendi*, especially since - mostly on the cultural level - a certain brand of Russophilia was widespread in the German society in the 1920ies. A ghost of the 1922 Rapallo Treaty between the Weimar Republic and the

Soviet Russia never stopped disturbing British geopolitical strategists. The truth is that the Soviet Union's relations with Ratenau, who looked for opportunities to evade the international isolation regardless of the ideological differences with potential partners, have nothing to do with the mythical “kinship” between Stalin to Hitler invented by biased Western authors of deeply ahistorical writings. The unfounded concept of the identity of communism and fascism draws the criticism from serious Western scholars as well²².

When the war was already raging on three continents in the summer of 1939, the USSR – like any self-sufficient power – was implementing a multi-vector international politics fo-

cused on its own security in the ominous and rapidly evolving political atmosphere. The Soviet leadership and diplomacy additionally won two years to prepare their country for the imminent war. Moreover, Moscow expected that the intensification of its contacts with Germany in August, 1939 would revitalize its negotiations with the democratic countries. Paradoxically Moscow's August, 1939 deals with Berlin actually forced Great Britain, France, and the US to take the position of the Soviet Union into account in their international-politics decision-making and, in the longer run, led to the formation of the anti-Hitler coalition after the involvement of the USSR in the war.

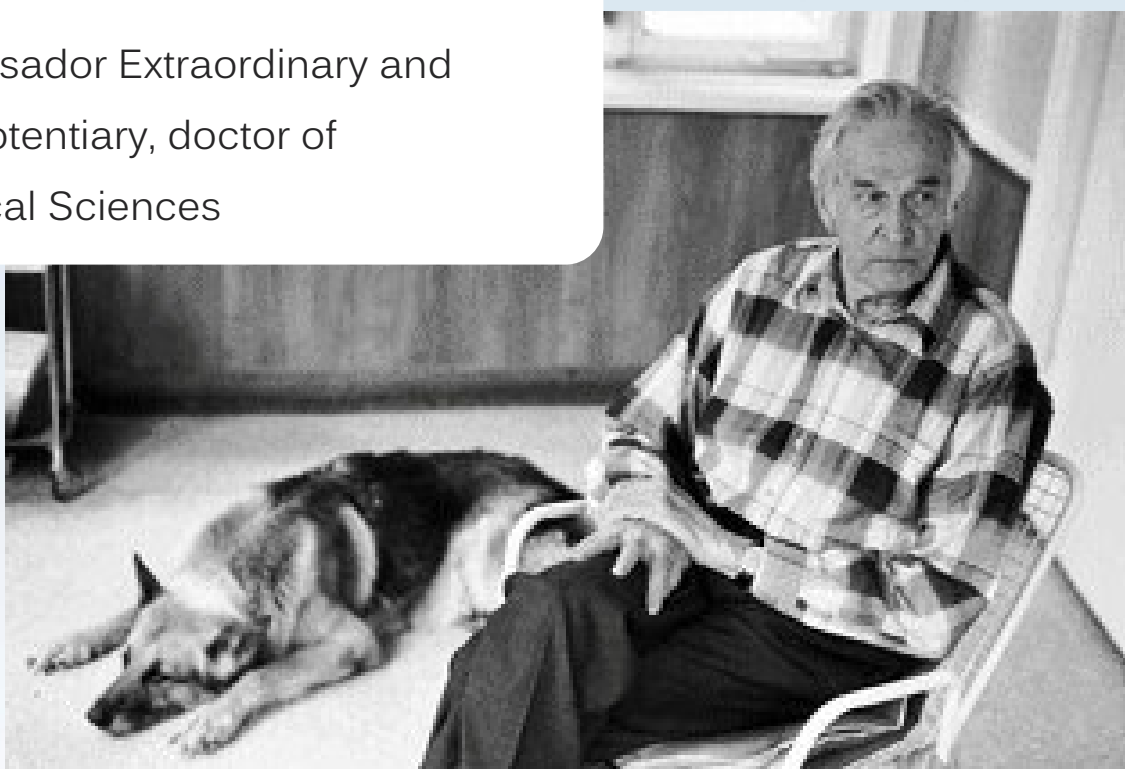
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Runup to the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact

Part II

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The official London recanted an old sin in October, 1998 — it was admitted that on the eve of the capitulation of Nazi Germany the British government's military planners instructed by W. Churchill prepared an offensive against the Soviet Union. The objective of the operation which was given the name Unthinkable was "to impose upon Russia the will of the United States and the British Empire". It had to be accomplished via a defeat of Russia in a total war. The aggression was to be launched on July 1, 1945 jointly by the forces of the US, Great Britain, the British dominions, the Polish expeditions corps, and 10 Wehrmacht divisions. Subsequently the number of German divisions could have increased to 40.

Great Britain was bracing for a serious campaign: Churchill was convinced that the situation made it possible to put into practice his country's centuries-old intention to strangle the country of "Russian barbarians". The British Prime Minister hoped that the USSR, exhausted by the war with Germany, would not be able to repel the new and unprecedentedly powerful attack.

I will not dwell on the reasons due to which «the fathers of democracy» and «the proponents of human rights» failed to immediately transform World War II into World War III. A more important aspect of the theme is whether London's intention to step over all existing moral barriers was a sponta-

neous reaction to the European developments' evading its control or a manifestation of the fundamental nature of a spook having no eternal friends or enemies and knowing no commandments - Christian or any other — but its own selfishness.

Let us examine the British strategy and tactics at the pivotal points of the XX century history. As for the Eastern Hemisphere, the British connection — either on the scenario level or at the phase of its execution - could be discerned nearly in every crisis. Unfortunately, the era of undosed openness about the past political transactions has not yet dawned in London. Otherwise, countless revelations — about London's fraternizing with Tokyo in 1900-1933, Great Britain's Balkan involvement that sparked World War I, and the fostering of extremism in Germany and Italy to which we owe World War II - could await us in addition to the story about Unthinkable. But silence is not necessarily a virtue, especially since the seeds of war have a tendency to retain vitality throughout epochs.

Those prepared to analyze the course of World War II on the systemic level would hardly find the story of Unthinkable surprising. In 1941-1945, Churchill considered betraying Russia, formally an ally of Great Britain, more than once. During the initial phase of Russia's involvement in World War II, it was widely believed that Russia was hopeless and Great Britain was eager

to partake in the process of redistributing its possessions. Later Churchill became keenly interested in prolonging the war with the goal of bleeding Russia to the extent that it would not be able to secure a place for itself among the winners.

It is noteworthy how Churchill interpreted the July 12, 1941 Soviet-British agreement. A couple of months after its signing, the British Prime Minister left his government colleagues puzzled by saying that a separate peace was an open option. At the pivotal moment of the war when the battle over Moscow was raging, Churchill chose to elaborate further: he said the public statements that negotiations with Hitler were out of question did not mean the same applied to Germany taken under control by its army, and the form of governance in Germany by the time it would be too weak to resist and would want to negotiate was impossible to predict. In October, 1942, three weeks before the Red Army launched a counter-attack at Stalingrad, the British leader said the Russian barbarians should be stopped as far east as possible. Obviously, the mission was left to the German army.

London adhered to the strategy till the very Nazi capitulation and — not without success — made efforts in 1941-1944 to convince the US to act accordingly. The cost of the Anglo-Saxon world's «flexible» approach to its obligations and of the gap between its proclamations and workings was at

least a 2-2.5 years prolongation of the war in Europe and the loss of millions of lives. Unthinkable stemmed naturally from the perfidy of the world's «democracies».

Let us depart from the chronological order of events. Evidently due to the lack of supervision, a fragment of the protocol on the military aspects of the relations with Russia, which summarized the talks held by the US and British leaders and the countries' high-ranking military officers in Quebec, became widely known. As it follows from the text, On August 20, 1943 the admirals and generals discussed whether Germany would help the US and British forces to land in its territory to repel the Russians. In Quebec US President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill approved the Rankin plan — that of an alliance between the Western democracies and the Wehrmacht — aimed at arresting the Soviet Union's advancement towards East Europe somewhere at its remote outskirts. The long-awaited second front was thus to become double-edged. It should be noted for clarity that the Battle of Kursk — the bloodiest campaign over the entire history which undermined the Nazi Germany's ability to put up further resistance — ended on August 23.

Why was July 1 set as the key date in Unthinkable? Judging by documentary evidence, in the spring of 1945 the US and British projection-makers expected the Wehrmacht to sustain re-

sistance against the Red Army for at least another six months. The plan was to stage a coup in Germany during the period and thus to ensure the materialization of the Rankin plan. According to the scheme, the US and Great Britain were to gain control over not only Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece, but also Bulgaria, Romania, the Baltic republics, and Poland, and thus to establish a barrier between the “Russian barbarians” and the “shining heights of democracy”.

One might ask: what is the point of unearthing the stories of the British treacherousness and mischief? A view of the tragic past that lacks coherence and breadth would make it impossible to grasp the continuity of political doctrines and historical developments. London and Washington are explainably reluctant to open unlimited access to their archives. Constantly pledging allegiance to their virtual democracy, they do have a lot to hide. Yet, the truth about the actual roles played by various countries in the XX century — as well as those played currently - is impossible to conceal.

A bold comparison would be appropriate in the context. An attempt can be made to identify conceptual parallels between World War I and World War II, as well as between the respective Cold Wars that followed them.

Great Britain's political course might appear to hopelessly lack logic — to

the point of absurdity - to some, or pragmatic — to the point of downright immorality — to others. The impression is, however, false in both cases. The fundamentals of the British strategy which used to exert a definitive influence over the European and partially the global affairs until the middle of the XX century originated from a single center, and in many cases were authored by just one individual. War Secretary W. Churchill jointly with Foreign Secretary E. Grey schemed to arrange for an armed conflict between Germany and Austria on one side and Russia and Serbia on the other, which later evolved into a World War. Churchill also masterminded the Dardanelles Campaign (February, 1915 — January, 1916) which was aimed at blocking the Black Sea straits, while promising to Russian Tsar Nicholas II that the decisions concerning the straits would be left to Russia. Moreover, Great Britain and — following the lead - France never stopped seeking out opportunities to infringe upon Russia's security in the regions adjacent to its borders. Germany was an enemy of Russia, and its flirting with the separatist movements in Georgia and the anti-Russian forces in the Baltic region, Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine was explainable. However, the truth is that the «democracies» were no less active making inroads into the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Another example is the fall of monar-

chy in Russia. The abdication of Nicholas II from power was not regarded as an alarming event by the West. What really mattered to it was that Russian soldiers continued to sacrifice their lives to the allied cause at the Western front. For the West, the political transformation in Russia was perfectly acceptable — gone with the Russian Tsar were the allies' obligations to St. Petersburg. Russia's sinking into chaos opened opportunities to accomplish the Crimean War-era objectives in Europe and Asia. The October, 1917 Revolution in Russia, from this standpoint, provided a timely pretext for recasting the West's ordinary imperial aspirations into a disguised form of a protective mission undertaken in the name of saving the European civilization from communism.

French President G. Clemenceau and British War Secretary W. Churchill were the first to anathematize the post-imperial communist Russia. The latter demanded to tame the revolution by war and to insulate West Europe from Soviet Russia with a barrier of countries vehemently hating Bolshevism. The Entente Supreme Council decided to launch an intervention in Russia, and a convention on dividing the country into spheres of influence was confirmed on December 23. Great Britain was to exercise control over the Caucasus, the Cossack provinces in the Kuban and the Don regions, and the Caspian zone. France was to supervise Belarus, Ukraine, and the

Crimea. The US, formally not a party to the deal, did get a license for Siberia and the Far East.

Also in December, the Anglo-Saxons got in touch with Austria over creating a bloc comprising the Entente and the Quadruple Union (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey) at the expense of Russia and against it. This must have been the “democracies” response to Russia's November, 21, 1917 call for peace. In the meantime, Soviet attempts to convince neutral countries to act as mediators produced no result.

St. Petersburg warned that in case the Entente's de facto boycott made it impossible to reach an agreement on the post-war configuration, Russia would have to act independently. The Soviets had no intention to hurt the interests of Russia's former allies, though. At the Brest-Litovsk negotiations between Germany and Russia, which opened on December 3, Soviet delegates established as one of the truce conditions that German forced disengaged at the Eastern front would not be dispatched to the Western one.

Having endured all the hardships of the XX century, we realize that reliance on decency and common sense at the final phases of both World Wars was a tribute to illusory hopes. Neither the lengthy odes to peace contained in the Charter of the League of Nations and that of the UN nor the legacy of various dreamers (post-Versailles

Briand and post-Yalta Roosevelt were groundlessly counted as such) defined the world's subsequent trajectory. A May 19, 1945 US Department of State memo said that if there was anything truly inevitable, it was a war between the US and Russia, which thus had to be started as soon as possible. In 1946, the Truman Administration decided irreversibly — for itself and others alike — that the very existence of the Soviet Union was incompatible with the US security regardless of the contours of Russia's current politics, and headed for new rounds of hellish adventurism.

Why was the imperialist establishment so outraged by the change of the socioeconomic system in a particular country? The Soviets called for a fair peace without annexations and contributions, for curbing militarism, and for recognizing the right of all nations — large and small alike — to self-determination and free cooperation with others. The decrees on the nationalization of internationally held assets and on the state monopoly in international trade were passed much later. The social transition in Russia did not yet degenerate into fratricide. The election of a new Patriarch by the church two centuries since the elimination of patriarchy as an institution by Peter I seemed to promise harmonization of the secular and religious sides of life in the country. Due to obvious resource limitations, Russia's foreign politics could not be expected to take an aggressive turn. Its army was dis-

banded, and workers and peasants were returning to their fields and factories.

Lloyd George and W. Wilson must be credited with attempting to cool the ardor of G. Clemenceau, F. Foch, R. Lansing, and W. Churchill. The British Prime Minister told his partners that, however upsetting the fact might appear to them, the Bolsheviks evidently led the majority of the population, and the truth could no be ignored. The US President expressed doubts that the US and British troops would be successful in Russia, citing the population's fears to see the intervention reinstate the hated old order of things, which only strengthened the positions of the Bolsheviks.

In late January, 1919 Wilson suggested that the alliance open negotiations with V.I. Lenin, but the idea met with Clemenceau's resistance. Nevertheless, the US President addressed all the warring factions in Russia with a call to delegate their representatives to a conference charged with the task of pacifying the country. The Soviet of People's Commissars said it was ready to open talks with the Entente and representatives of the White Movement immediately, but the Whites refused to participate. The conference which was to convene at the Princes' Islands never took place as the result.

In March, 1919, member of the US delegation to the Paris Peace Conference William Bullitt arrived at

Moscow with the blessing of Wilson and Lloyd George. His talks with V.I. Lenin and G.V. Chicherin produced a settlement plan which — along with complete freeze of armed hostilities across the country — called for a peace discussion based on the following principles: all de facto governments on the territory of the Russian Empire and Finland were to be preserved and had to recognize the financial obligations of the former Empire to other countries and their nationals; the economic blockade of Russia was to be lifted; the Soviet Republic and other countries were to exchange envoys; and amnesty was to be granted to all political prisoners. The Soviet side insisted on two additional provisions: one requiring an immediate withdrawal of foreign forces from Russia and another — the termination of financial assistance to anti-Soviet movements. Bullitt's mission was disavowed by Paris. Wilson imposed a ban on publishing the text of the agreement reached, and Lloyd George denied having anything to do with the talks.

Were the maneuvers of Wilson and Lloyd George attributable to the much-touted idealism and realism that did prevail to a limited extent over staunch conservatism or to the hope to sense an alternative way of partitioning Russia, this time by temporarily charging various «field commanders» with running parts of its territory? Chances are we will never know as

some thoughts were never recorded on paper.

The 1917 Revolution's program of stopping violence, liberating nations, and making social and inter-ethnic justice the basis of the coexistence of peoples was perceived by the West as a «barbarian challenge» capable of spreading like a pandemic. Discussions over the reaction of the “democracies” invariably ended with the same demand to extinguish the heresy, preferably along with its carrier, that is, Russia. Clemenceau wanted «a sanitary cordon» to curb the «disease». Enemies of the enemy were readily embraced as friends — a pattern which re-emerged in 1941-1945.

In 1917-1919, the policies of the Entente and Germany with respect to Russia complemented each other. Former antagonists were equally interested in the disintegration of Russia. In any case, “the democracies” voiced no concerns over the territorial integrity of their nominal ally when — during the run-up to the October, 1917 Revolution — Germany involved Poland and the Baltic countries in carving pieces out of Russia. Stepping over Russia's national interests became the norm after the 1917 Revolution in St. Petersburg. The oversized German ambitions, the British arrogance, and the French eagerness to avenge the 1870-1871 defeat led the otherwise diverging forces to act in concert. There is an obvious analogy between the situation and «the democ-

racies»' failed attempts to secure a deal with «the better brand of Germans» during World War II1.

Berlin's claims to territories it had no right to are reflected in the records of the Brest talks. The sketches left by the “proponents of a better future for Russia” are not so well-known. The peace program (known as the Fourteen Points) submitted by W. Wilson to the US Congress on January 8, 1918 recognized Russia's right to independent politics and original forms of development (point 6). The comments made by Colonel E.M. House, a co-author of the program, leave no doubts as to how the realization of the right was actually perceived by the US Administration. The partition of the former Empire and the creation of a number of dependent countries was seen as the optimal solution to the Russian problem, a patronage over “the democratic forces” — clearly, not the Soviets — being the way to promote it.

The US Department of State supplied to its Paris Conference delegation a map showing Russia in its «tailored» borders. Moscow was entitled to retain Central Russian Upland but was to lose the Baltic region, Belarus, Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia. Wilson, House, and Lansing thus authored the first (unfortunately, not the last) US guidelines clearly indicating that Washington wanted Russia proper to shrink in the interests of the US primacy.

At the early phase of the process, the work was to be done mainly with the hands of soldiers for hire armed and financially supported by «the democracies». On December 10, 1917 US Secretary of State Lansing recommended in a memo submitted to W. Wilson installing a military dictatorship in Russia. The US President's instruction was to immediately and secretly make support available to Kaledin's movement, and to blame everything on Great Britain and France — the countries known to have urged the Cossacks to fight the Soviets - in case any information about the transactions surfaced.

In addition to Kaledin, Dutov, and other Cossack leaders, the West courted Russian army chief commander Dukhonin, Gens. Alekseev and Shcherbachev (the latter commanded joint Russian-Romanian forces), and Polish Officers Corps leader Jozef Dowbor-Musnicki. A lot was also expected by Western powers from the Ukrainian Rada, which combined the benefits of the Western sponsorship with the support it extracted from Germany.

The only principle upheld by the motley bunch was that whoever was the strongest was right, thus proving M. Weber's concept that civilized savagery is the worst form of savagery ever. Examples illustrate the synchronization of activities within this community of haters of Russia.

The annexation-oriented endeavors targeting Russia's periphery were mentioned above. Attempts to seize the territories of Russia proper followed shortly. On February 18, 1918 Germany launched an offensive along the entire front line from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The aggression continued despite the ratification of the Brest Peace Agreement (March 15, 1918) by the Fourth Congress of the Soviets. St. Petersburg asked Washington whether Russia could count on the support of the US, Great Britain, and France in case German activity continued. At the same time, Russia probed into the reaction of its former allies to Japan's plans (OKed by Berlin) to seize Vladivostok and the Chinese East Railroad. All of Russia's appeals remained unanswered. France did check whether the US would provide any assistance to Russia to help to fight Germany. Lansing wrote that there was absolutely nothing to discuss.

The logic of the Entente was that the more troubles Russia ran into the more intense pressure on it had to be exerted. London was bracing for an intervention into Russia's northern regions, and Washington was aware of the intention. Sadly, Murmansk Soviet Chairman Yur'ev was helping to put the plan into practice. Instructed by Trotsky he entered into an «oral agreement» with Great Britain about the landing of the «friendly» foreign forces in Murmansk. To make things more serious, “the democrats” were

also going to dispatch 15,000 soldiers to Arkhangelsk. The German attack at the western front forced Great Britain and France to suspend the operation. Nevertheless, already on June 3 the Entente Council decided to invade the Kola Peninsula and the region of the mouth of the Northern Dvina. British (28,000), US, French, and Italian (over 13,000) soldiers were to fulfill the mission.

The March-June lull was marked with encouraging Japan to occupy the Soviet Far East. On April 5, 1918 the Japanese army took Vladivostok. The US and Great Britain promptly put claims to a share of the region's extensive resources. The Soviet government's protests were of course ignored. But that was not all yet. On March 16, a day after the ratification of the the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, US ambassador to Russia Francis called the counter-revolutionary forces to jointly overthrow the Soviet rule. They were promised immediate assistance, predictably for fighting Germany. Who was to become the winner and who — the loser?

Let us take a look at the Armistice Treaty signed in the Compiègne Forest. Historians routinely pay no attention to its clauses which reflected the winners' plans to convert Germany into a bastion against the Russian Bolshevism (the thesis belonged to British Secretary of War Lord Milner). German forces were to be withdrawn from all areas in France, Belgium, Austria-

Hungary, Romania, Turkey, and East Africa, as well as from Alsace and Lorraine and the left bank of the Rhine River. Yet, they were supposed to leave Russia only when the allies decided based on an assessment of the situation in the country that it was time to. In the meantime the allies were given unobstructed access to Russia's German-occupied territories to be able to verify German compliance with their instructions.

Let us compare the Brest and the Armistice (Compiègne) agreements. It is hard to say which was more offensive from Russia's standpoint, but one thing is clear: despite his efforts to take a role in the game against Russia, German minister Matthias Erzberger also failed to negotiate decent terms for his country. Berlin did, however, manage to put Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on the anti-Soviet track. Germany was tolerated only as long as it helped to an extent to isolate Russia from Europe — the Weimar Republic did its best to remain modest.

Finally the Entente masterminded Avalov's campaign against St. Petersburg. The German forces stationed in the Baltic region in accord with Article 433 of the Versailles Treaty were offered a central role in the venture, but Berlin found the courage to refuse to participate. As a punishment, German forces were thrown out of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The «democracies»' disappointment with the Weimar

Republic became almost irreversible in April, 1922. The Rapallo Treaty broke the isolation of Soviet Russia. Moreover, it openly and clearly cast in a legal form the philosophy of the Soviets' October, 1917 Decree on Peace which called for coexistence of countries without privileges.

To Washington, London, and Paris, what Germany had done was sacrilege. Enormous sums of money were spent and so many lives — sacrificed to do away with Russia. Overall, some 320,000 — 330,000 Entente soldiers besieged Russia in 1922. The intervention forces in the Far East counted over 150,000 soldiers, plus some 130,000 in the Caucasus and over 40,000 — in Russia's northern regions. The forces of Germany and Austria-Hungary in Belarus and Ukraine in the spring of 1918 — winter of 1919 numbered almost one million. On top of other concerns, the West's prestige suffered a severe blow.

The story of Poland deserves particular attention. Restored on the day of the German capitulation in Compiègne, the country led by Pilsudski immediately earned the reputation of a European trouble-maker. The encouragement of the Polish extremism by the «democracies» had cost Lithuania the Vilnius region and Germany — the coal-rich Upper Silesia. Importantly, both episodes constituted milestones in the demise of the configuration defined by the Versailles, but let us focus on how the West worked to turn

Poland's rusty spears against its perpetual foe — Russia.

The West altogether launched three interventions against the Soviet Republic. During the first one, the main force was the army led by Kolchak who was — with Washington's blessing — proclaimed «the supreme ruler of Russia». The campaign was a spectacular failure. The second intervention, which Churchill called an expedition of 14 powers, continued from July, 1919 till February, 1920. The key role was given to Gen. Denikin. He was to be supported by the countries bordering Russia, but Poland happened to be the only one to express enthusiasm. Again, the venture produced no results. During the third attack, which took place in April–November, 1920, the main force was the Polish army jointly with Wrangel's White Army.

Even prior to the declaration of Poland's independence a Paris-based «Polish National Committee» handed over to its patrons a memorandum demanding control over Kamenetsk-Podolsk, Brest-Litovsk, and Kovno (Kaunas) for Gen. Gallier's army which was being urgently formed in France. The document stated that the occupation would ensure the security of Poland's eastern frontier and provide a base for the allies' future operations in Russia.

When the bid was under the examination of the allies, French foreign min-

ister Pichon suggested playing a broader game and setting the borders the Polish Kingdom had prior to its first partition in 1772 as the basis for the future territorial arrangement. Despite the US and British objections — the two countries generally espoused the idea of ethnicity-based borders — French President Clemenceau pushed for a 1772 Poland, the legacy of Napoleon's epoch. The dispute ended with the worst possible option — the question about Poland's eastern frontier — and, consequently, Russia's western one — was left open.

Due to pragmatic regards, the “democracies” were forced to draw the Curzon Line (December 12, 1919) which was to guarantee the future of the newly independent Ukraine and Belarus.

When Denikin lost, the US and France resorted to the reserve called Poland, simply because of having no better options at their disposal. Preparing Poland for the role began in the spring of 1919 when the US, Great Britain, and France supplied 1,500 canons and 10 mln shells, 2,800 machine-guns, 400,000 rifles, 576 mln cartridges, some 700 planes², 200 armored vehicles, cars, communications equipment, medications, and 3 mln sets of uniform to the Polish army. Interestingly, the arsenals of the defeated Germany were used to arm «the free Poland». Warsaw got 1,200 machine-guns, 360 canons for 30 heavy artillery divisions, and 1,100 canons for 63 field

artillery divisions from German stockpiles.

Guidelines for the Polish offensive were mostly developed by French military planners. Galler's army of 70,000 received hands-on training during the seizure of Mensk on August 8, 1919 and in numerous border incidents. The creeping aggression escalated in the summer of 1919, but officially April 25, 1920 is regarded as the starting date of the Soviet-Polish war. On the day, Pilsudski declared "the restoration of Poland's historical borders". On May 7, 1920 the Polish army seized Kyiv. Pilsudski was dreaming of a parade in Moscow.

Red Army's counterstrike forced the Polish army to flee, and Pilsudski's hope never came true. The Polish aggression was accompanied by violence against the civilian population, especially in the Jewish settlements in Belarus and Ukraine³. Later Poland became notorious for the inhuman treatment of POWs.

«Democracies» did all they could — from threatening Moscow with a new intervention to attempts to «appease» it - to save their puppet. While Great Britain was distracting Moscow with talks about setting the Curzon Line as the border between Russia and Poland in case the Red Army would not go any further, France acted assertively. Paris organized massive supply of weapons and munitions to the Polish army via Germany, and French offi-

cers practically took over as its commanders. The result was "the Vistula miracle" when the Russian forces had to roll back to their starting positions.

Marshal F. Foch, the author of the «miracle», urged the Western political establishment to mobilize an army of 2 mln to fight Russia. The plan was to synchronize the West's offensive with the Japanese onslaught in the east. It factored into the situation that at the time Japan retained control over extensive Russian territories in the Far East. Frightened, the Soviet leadership agreed to sign the March 18, 1921 peace treaty in Riga which left Ukraine and Belarus ruthlessly partitioned for over 18 years.

"The Vistula miracle" which Pilsudski owed to France became his guiding star for years to come. In May, 1926 he became Poland's de facto dictator «accountable only to God and history». The Polish leader's emotional swings were endless. He demanded to recognize Poland's great power status equal to that of Great Britain and France as well as its right of veto in East European if not in Central European affairs. Poland's ambitions complicated the situation at the 1925 Locarno Conference which further contributed to the ills of the configuration which had been created by the Versailles Treaty and was to ensure prosperity in the West and freedom for political and military adventurism in the east.

French Foreign Minister A. Briand did make an attempt to advocate the inviolability of the established European borders but promptly dropped the theme at the face of the German and British disapproval. Quasi-compromises were somehow reached concerning Germany's borders with Poland and with Czechoslovakia. It was proposed to submit the corresponding disputes for arbitration, while Lithuania and the Soviet Union were not found to deserve even such honor. The Weimar Republic's chief diplomat G. Stresemann voiced the conclusion that the cornerstone of the Versailles system had been blown up in Locarno. He hoped Germany would “regain” territories in the east in addition to restoring Germany's sovereignty over the Rhine province.

British Foreign Office chief N. Chamberlain was a lot more far-sighted. He discerned in the set of the Locarno Treaties the contours of a new «holly alliance» within which Germany would serve as the bastion of the European civilization. At the same time, Lord Balfour introduced the term «appeasement».

Poland was highly sensitive to the British call for anti-Russian solidarity. The Locarno Conference demonstrated that — as many had already realized — the Grand Entente was a matter of the past and the Little Entente was experiencing serious difficulties. Alternative military-political combinations were emerging, and

Warsaw had to be alert to make the right choice in the process of looking for a new patron. Was it going to be London or the increasingly assertive Berlin? Pilsudski made up his mind in the late 1933-early 1934.

In April, 1927 A. Briand who was looking for a way to give the reputation of France a face lift proposed to outlaw wars and to codify the «peace forever» concept in a treaty between France and the US. Washington insisted on making the agreement multilateral. On August 27, 1928 the Kellogg–Briand Pact (also called the Pact of Paris) was signed by 15 countries.

Moscow was not allowed to take part in editing the text of the Pact. G.V. Chicherin said this was indicative of the plan to create a new instrument for the isolation of the USSR and the struggle against it. No doubt, he had serious reasons for the assessment.

Great Britain and, of course, Poland opposed the Soviet Union's joining the Pact, alleging that condemning war and rejecting it as an instrument of international politics could not be made universal and applicable in the cases of countries lacking broad recognition and unable to ensure order and security on their territories. France was undecided, but the US favored inviting the USSR to join. The eventual compromise was that there would be no Soviet envoy at the signing ceremony, but on the signing date the French Em-

bassy in Moscow would offer the Soviet Union to join the Pact.

In the longer run, the Kellogg–Briand Pact was joined by 63 countries, but the breadth of the consensus could not offset the treaties' fundamental shortcomings. Essentially, what the international community got at the outlet of the process was a declaration of intentions. Being aware of the fact, Briand shortly thereafter suggested establishing a federative European Union (akin to what much later materialized in the form of the OCSE) as a permanent institution with executive powers. The French politician expected it to undertake the task of resolving social conflicts, preventing revolutionary outbreaks, and overcoming economic hardships based on the functioning of the free market. Great Britain and Spain opposed the idea, and the Weimar Republic set the universal equality as a precondition for its involvement.

When the authors of the Locarno Treaties - A. Briand, N. Chamberlain, and G. Stresemann were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, in fact a delayed-action mine was presented as a guarantee of the future security. Essentially, nothing changed, and the great powers remained obsessed with the idea of suppressing on the worldwide scale the heresy of Bolshevism, while the latter term was used indiscriminately.

Readers can easily guess what connec-

tion existed between the pledges to give Germany back the control over territories in the east, London's severing the diplomatic relations with Moscow in 1927, and Great Britain's attempts to put together a new anti-Soviet alliance comprising Germany, France, Poland, Japan, and the US. “Democracies” turned the disarmament talks in Geneva into a waste of time, and neutralized any efforts aimed at arresting the negative dynamics generated by the Locarno Treaties.

It must be clear in the context how outraged the «civilizers» had to be by the signing of the Soviet-German Neutrality Pact on April 24, 1926. According to the agreement, (1) the relations between the two countries had to be based on the Rapallo Treaty; (2) either of the sides was to remain neutral in case the other came under an unprovoked attack; and (3) neither of the two countries would join any coalitions pursuing the objective of the economic and financial isolation of the other.

Furthermore, earlier than the Kellogg–Briand Pact was ratified Moscow managed to convince the Baltic Republics, Romania, and even Poland to sign the so-called Litvinov Protocol establishing that war was not a method of resolving international disputes. Subsequently the USSR reached agreements with Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Turkey on the definition of what constituted «an aggression».

At the same time, Great Britain was reiterating that as an empire it could not possibly be aggressive.

The above Soviet politics was an integral element of the implementation of the Soviet Union's program of creating a system of indivisible international security. The gap between the buildup of arsenals and the state of the clearly insufficient international regulation was widening ominously. The end of World War I did not lessen the threat posed by militarism whose manifestations were not limited to subversive activity and raids targeting the USSR. The next global redistribution that loomed ahead could not be described as an opposition between the two camps — of those who won and those who lost World War I — or in terms of routine civilizational rhetoric. The process clearly had a profound geopolitical dimension.

Germany in its Weimar edition had no intention to cater to the tastes of the exemplary «democracies». Whenever it got a chance to and occasionally with serious success, it skilfully exploited the weaknesses of those who saw themselves as global teachers. The 1922 Treaty of Rapallo and the 1926 Treaty of Berlin can be cited as instances of the practice. Besides, London, Paris, and Washington had to view with some concern the instability of Germany's leadership - the country held 14 parliamentary elections over 14 years (twice the normal number according to the German constitution)

and had been led by 14 Chancellors. There was no certainty as to which political force in Germany to invest in, and it took a firm hand to suppress the chaos.

The US was eying the Nazi already in 1922. T. Smith, an aide to the US military attache, mentioned the Nazi leader's bravado in his report - the future Fuhrer indicated that instead of waiting to clash with communists the West could charge him and his brethren with the mission to rid the world of them. Washington listened attentively, and soon the Nazi started to receive funding from the US in addition to that from sources in Switzerland. E. Hanfstaengl was introduced to Hitler's inner circle to make sure the money was not wasted. A son of a German father and an American mother and a Harvard graduate, he was no stranger to the US centers of political decision-making. After World War I Hanfstaengl returned to Germany and started establishing connections among the Munich aristocracy and cultural elite. Subsequently he helped the Nazi to make it to the parlors of his acquaintances.

The cultivation of Hitler, which was Hanfstaengl's job, was not fruitless. The process was to an extent described in *Mein Kampf* written by the Nazi leader in 1924. The American friend's money helped to turn the obscure *Völkischer Beobachter* into a national-level Nazi party outlet. Hanfstaengl was generously rewarded

for his service — he became the party's foreign press-secretary and the chief of the foreign press department in the headquarters of Hitler's deputy. Hanfstaengl organized Hitler's meeting with the Churchills some six months before his boss became the German Chancellor⁴.

Hanfstaengl fled Germany in 1937. A legend says he was worried over his safety and simply chose to disappear. Or had Hitler changed his course against the will of those who were directing him — did a former friend turn a foe? Or did the Center decide that Hanfstaengl's mission had been accomplished? Serious conclusions stem from the fact that at the final phase of his career Roosevelt's university peer Hanfstaengl served as an adviser to the US President.

Let us draw the intermediate bottom-line. It was not all of a sudden and not without serious financial support that the Nazi movement rose in Germany and its leader ascended to power in the country. The fact that the Weimar Republic sank into oblivion and its place was taken by the Third Reich cannot be explained solely by the public discontent with the weak rule of the German oligarchic capital and aristocratic offshoots or by the global financial crisis.

The late 1920ies were marked with growing tensions. «The breath of the coming war is felt everywhere», said the declaration presented by the Soviet

delegation at the meeting of the League of Nations' preparatory commission on disarmament on November 30, 1927.

British conservatives and the US administration were arranging for an onslaught on Soviet Russia. France, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and remnants of the Denikin, Wrangel, and Cossack forces were supposed to get involved in it in the west, and Japan jointly with Chiang Kai-shek — in the east.

The plan was undercut by the disagreements in the ranks of imperial powers. London severed the diplomatic relations with Moscow, but Canada was the only country to do the same. Germany was gladly accepting payments for the job to be done in the future. By 1930 Germany managed to attract some \$28-30 bn in foreign investments to rebuild and modernize its economy, and poured a considerable part of the amount into its military-industrial sector. However, the new generation of Germans was not going to allow to exploit itself, as the story of the US-instigated seizure of the KVZhD (The Chinese Eastern Railway) in 1928 clearly showed. Details of the event will be discussed below.

The unprecedentedly severe economic crisis which erupted in the late 1929 rocked the foundations of the entire imperialist system. Washington, London, and Paris attempted to overcome

problems by sacrificing other nations to predators. The US found itself at the epicenter of the crisis and saw its industrial output drop by 46.2% and the GDP - shrink by a factor of two. Over 17 million people in the US lost their jobs. The industrial output shrank by 40.6% in Germany, 36.7% in Japan, and roughly a third in France. The numbers of unemployed grew by 7.5 mln in Germany and about 3 mln in Japan. Great Britain was affected by the crisis to a lesser extent - its industrial output decreased by a quarter.

The developments in the global politics were also taking a threatening turn. For the first time since the Civil War, the US saw its political system jeopardized. Conspirators simply lacked accord to realize their plans — otherwise the White House could be subdued by the military, and the global consequences of the coup could be unpredictable.

Interestingly, the crisis was attributed to Moscow's intrigues and to Soviet damping made possible by the exploitation of forced labor in the USSR. Vatican called for a crusade against the Soviet Union under the pretext that religion was persecuted by the communist regime. A military dictatorship in the US, if it inherited Hoover's techniques, would have probably attacked right away, causing the satellites of the US to recklessly join the offensive. The plan of partitioning Russia was developed in detail under the Hoover Administration.

Let us return to the KVZhD (the Chinese Eastern Railway) story. The part of the drama that unfolded behind the curtain really deserves attention. Washington and London instigated the seizure of the railroad and the arrest of the Soviet personnel by Chiang Kai-shek. The US intended to bail out the railroad after its being operated for some time by «a neutral commission» and to create a foothold along the 2,500 km-long Soviet border (Stimson's plan). Japan, though, decided that the US was going to rip the benefits of its efforts. Since the late XIX century Tokyo strove to turn China into a sphere of its exclusive influence.

Stimson's plan thus clashed with Tanaka's one. The latter was implemented in 1931. Later US Secretary of State Stimson knowledgeably tracked the evolution that led to World War II from the railroad near Mukden.

Great Britain had no objections to a “neutral” control over the railroad taken away from the Soviets. The approach was typically British: agreement in a form combined with the rejection of the essence.

London preferred to see Japan strengthen its positions rather than see the US gain a foothold in the region. It should be noted that the rivalry between Great Britain and the US was the key factor in international politics in 1939-1940. This rivalry evolved into a downright conflict during the

crisis. Great Britain managed to outpace the US in international trade and to curb the US influence in Europe and the Middle East.

Due to economic and other regards, Berlin tended to avoid damaging its relations with the USSR. At the same time, Germany made it clear that under any circumstances it would adhere to its strategy aimed at regaining the global power status and, among its other benefits, at securing access to the Asian periphery as an equal. Chancellors H. Muller (1928-1930), and H. Brüning (1930-1932) who hoped to combine Germany's growing aspirations with an acceptable international status were already giving way to von Papen, Ludendorff, and Hitler. Chancellor Schleicher (1932-1933) was playing into the hands of the above three politicians who needed no arguments to get involved in banishing the new heresy and its carrier — that is, communism and Russia, the country which by its very existence created problems for the nations believing in their manifest destiny.

Chamberlain proclaimed that making Russia disappear was necessary for Great Britain's survival. Lord Lloyd, an insider of the circle which generated Great Britain's political doctrines, described their essence as diverting the aggressiveness of Germany and Japan from Great Britain and making the USSR face a permanent threat. He said Great Britain would give Japan full freedom of maneuver in acting against

the USSR, let it expand the border between Korea and Manchuria to the Arctic Ocean, and let it annex the eastern part of Siberia. As for Germany, the plan was to let it expand to the east.

Lloyd said the above in 1934, and the statement requires substantial corrections. By the time Japan de facto had the freedom of maneuver, and the road to the east was open to Germany, London and Washington competed in courting actual and potential aggressors. German foreign minister G. Stresemann said that nowhere did the politics of Berlin in the post-Versailles period find as much understanding as in the US.

What was the ideological essence of Germany's «renovated» politics in the mid-1920ies? Nazi politics differed from that of the respectable grands by its deliberately radical appeal. «Germany cannot realize its potential within the four walls of the Reich» - contrary to what you might expect, the phrase does not belong to Hitler. Its author was Minister of Justice E. Koch-Weser. President of the Reichsbank and chief Nazi financier J. Schacht also demanded the return of Germany's former colonies. The Oberbürgermeister of Cologne K. Adenauer wrote that the Reich was too small for its population and the German nation needed more space and, consequently, needed colonies.

What earned the US G. Stresemann's

gratitude? Most of the credits extended to Germany — legally or secretly — came from overseas. It was thanks to Washington's efforts that the Reich got rid of the burden of reparations. This was the objective of Dawes's (1924) and Young's (1928) plans, as well as of Hoover's moratorium (1932). «The sinews of war are infinite money» - it does not matter whether Hoover and the Secretaries of State in his Administration knew this phrase, which was attributed to Cicero. Clearly, they acted in accord with the wisdom. To endure the crusade, the horse needed good horse-shoes and a decisive and fearless rider⁵.

It is unlikely that the US Administration will admit researchers to the documents the US confiscated at Hitler's last headquarters in Thuringia. The materials showing how and why mankind ended up being confronted with the nightmare of World War II can be a source of major embarrassment to Washington. A lot can be learned from them about the US flirt with the Nazi in 1922 and on, as well as about the reasons due to which Washington — in the settings of a global economic crisis — was helping Hitler become German Chancellor.

These days a knowledgeable scholar would hardly have any doubts that visibly or implicitly US envoys had to be among those who attended the meeting in Cologne, organized by banker Schroeder, during which control over Germany was handed over to the Na-

tional Socialist German Workers' Party. Was Hanfstaengl around? Someone had the impression that J.F. Dulles was spotted on premises. This could be explainable — he worked for the law firm co—owned by Schroeder's father who settled down in the US before World War I and became an influential figure in the American financial world.

In the future, researches will find out who played the leading role in dismantling the Weimar Republic — US oligarchs jointly with their German peers or the US government. In any case, those who fostered Hitler clearly had to be fully aware that there would be a war at the end of the road.

Why was it that the fundamental transition in Germany's development took place in 1931-1932 and «the cherry trees started to bloom» in Japan at the time?⁶

A record of the July 7, 1931 government meeting in Tokyo said that the fulfillment of the five-year plan in the USSR presented a serious threat to Japan and stated that as a result the «problem of Mongolia and Manchuria» had to be addressed urgently.

In Germany, the Nazi garnered 37.4% of the vote in the 1932 elections. Schleicher, in collusion with Hitler, disbanded the parliament shortly thereafter, expecting that the Nazi Party would win the race during the snap elections to be held amidst the

devastating crisis. Instead, some 2 mln voters turned away from Hitler's party on November 6, 1932 as the political preferences of the population were rapidly drifting towards the left. On November 19, 1932 owners of over 160 major German banks and manufacturing companies responded to the situation by submitting a memorandum to President Hindenburg in which they recommended to institute «a dictatorial government» with Hitler as its head.

Reactionary forces in Europe and the US were alarmed by the outcome of the November, 1932 elections in the US. Extreme rightist H. Hoover lost the presidential race to F. Roosevelt who promised a new course in the domestic and foreign politics. What was going to be new? Roosevelt's opponents felt they had to get their job done urgently and make the new US President face accomplished facts. The processes in Asia were already evolving in the «desired» direction, and Europe's turn was coming.

On September 18, 1931 Tokyo wrote the first line in the history of World War II. A Japanese force numbering just 14,000 soldiers attacked the barracks of the Chinese army in Mukden. Launching the mission, Japan thus probed into the situation, and the conclusions it drew were optimistic. Chiang Kai-shek ordered the army not to resist and asked the population to avoid panic and to exercise restraint.

Japan's forecasts concerning the reaction of the US, Great Britain, and France proved absolutely adequate — the countries were not going to take any practical steps to help China and only called (both sides, oddly enough) to abide by the Charter of the League of Nations, the Kellogg–Briand Pact, and the Nine-Power Treaty⁷.

As a parallel process, various «commissions» were established which bowed to Tokyo and twisted the arms of Nanjing. Efforts were made to compel China to recognize Japan's «special rights» in north-east China considering the threat that emanated from the border of north Manchuria. Moreover, the rights were to be recognized gratefully as Japan was thus helping Chiang Kai-shek's regime fight the «Red peril».

Actually, “the Nine-Power Treaty” came to the minds of the “democracies” only after Japan attacked a suburb of Shanghai on January 28, 1932. Washington proposed to declare the region adjacent to Shanghai, where US monopolies had vested interests, a neutral zone. Tokyo rejected “the compromise”.

Great Britain advocated the Japanese cause in the League of Nations. When the Litton report (published in October, 1932) was discussed, Britain's Foreign Secretary Simon brushed off all charges against Japan. As long as the Japanese aggression did not spread too far to the south, Japan could rely

on Great Britain for protection in diplomatic affairs. The 1902 Anglo-Japanese Treaty, which mainly targeted Russia, expired in 1921, but its spirit lived on past the date. As discussed below, its echo was going to be heard more than once in the future.

Looking at the global developments beyond the narrowly national perspective one would easily identify the German and Italian borrowings from the Japanese experience. There was the same tendency to benefit from the discord in the ranks of great powers and from their readiness to sacrifice the interests of others, the same League of Nations boycott, and the same invocations of the ghostly threat posed by the left. The “civilizers” hid behind the talk about non-intervention when fascists destroyed the Republic in Spain while an embargo was imposed on the supply of military aid to the republicans. In contrast, Japan had no problems buying arms from the US and Great Britain in the process of its incursion into China.

A lengthy examination of Tokyo's politics in the XX century should illuminate the interconnections between various phenomena, especially since the key roles on the European and the Far Eastern political scenes were in many cases played by the same actors. Unfortunately, a lot of lessons have remained unlearned. Summarizing the experiences of his eventful political past, E. Daladier admitted in 1963 that ideological issues oftentimes over-

shadowed strategic imperatives. Truly speaking, they did as a general rule rather than oftentimes, and not only before but also after World War II.

So, On January 4, 1933 Hitler was left in charge of the Weimar Republic. He received from President Hindenburg the mandate to form a “national concentration” government (speaking in the terms of K. Adenauer). On February 28 the Order of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State - the first in a series of decrees eliminating the constitutional civil rights - saw the light of day in Germany. A month later the parliament supported by the party of the center gave Hitler extraordinary powers. On July 14 the imperial government proclaimed the NSDAP the only state party and disbanded all others along with trade unions.

Listed below are just some of the milestones on the way from “where Germany stopped 600 years ago” to “the politics of the future – the politics of expansion” (Mein Kampf). Hitler wrote that not provinces but geopolitical categories, not national minorities but continents, not defeating the enemy, but annihilating it, not allies, but satellites, not a shift of borders but an overhaul of statehood across the world, not a peace treaty but a death sentence had to be the goals of a great war.

The question is: was there anything that the “democracies” were unaware

of? Didn't they realize where the money from US and British banks and their German divisions land? Could it be that Vickers, Imperial Chemical Industries, Standard Oil, DuPont and other grands had no idea why Germany was keenly interested in their advanced technologies? Let us not be naïve and buy that the explanation could be Germany's skill in creating fifth columns and – as Hitler said – destroying the enemy from within, making it defeat itself with its own hands. The truth is that social instincts simply suppressed common sense.

Judging by the available data, the US leadership was more active than the British one in paving the Nazi's way to power. Still, there is one more pertinent circumstance. The crisis ate away at Washington's potential to dominate the world. W. Wilson's business plan – the US should finance the whole world and, as the one who gives money, learn to control the world – was rendered temporarily inapplicable. Roosevelt's new course emphasizing self-sufficiency in economy and defense largely grew out of opportunism disguised as rationality or isolationism.

Great Britain promptly entered the game and – in an attempt to be ahead of the developments – started modernizing the Versailles configuration. Mussolini is widely believed to be the author of the “pact of the four”. Though, he did sketch the first “plan for the cooperation in European and

non-European affairs, including the colonial ones”, it essentially reflected the views shaped by discussions with London of the political tendencies in the US, the empowerment of ultra-radicals in Germany, and the conflict in the Far East. One must be hopelessly naïve to believe that British Prime Minister MacDonald and Foreign Secretary Simon could come to Rome without preliminary discussions. At stake was a regrouping of forces and a correction of the contours of the post-Versailles world. Predictably, the themes at the British-Italian summit were the revision of the treaties imposed after World War I on Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria, the equal rights for Germany in the armaments sphere, and, above all, the quartet's right to influence other countries.

The Weimar Republic spent some 15 years attempting to get rid of the Versailles legacy. Less than two months after Hitler's becoming the German Chancellor, Germany was granted the great power status and invited to run Europe on par with Great Britain, France, and Italy.

Reporting to the House of Commons on March 23, 1933, Simon justified the military-political alliance with Germany and Italy by saying that peaceful corrections of particular Versailles Treaty clauses were better than explicit violations. What causes did he mean? Along with the equal right to armaments, Germany got the right to revise “in a legal way” all former reg-

ulations. The statement that signatories to the Pact would seek agreement over disputed issues changed little. What really mattered were the recognition of the faulty character of the 1919-1920 redistribution of the world and the de facto sanctioning of the Nazi revanchism.

Under public pressure, by the signing date (June 7, 1933) the text was decorated with references to the Charter of the League of Nations, the Locarno Treaties, and the Kellogg–Briand Pact. References to Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria were dropped as was the passage concerning the influence over other countries. Germany's equal right to armament was linked to the development of a system of security for all nations.

Thus repackaged, the Pact was supported by the US. Washington described it as sending a positive message, but the verbiage did not alleviate the concerns of the Little Entente countries and Poland. Nevertheless, the Pact was signed on July 15. Though France was one of the signatories, its National Assembly never ratified it.

The latter fact had no chilling effect on Berlin, and it went ahead with its plans with London's full understanding. Exactly two months later, on September 15, Germany demanded in the form of an ultimatum fully equal rights to armaments, and in four more weeks Berlin withdrew from the

Geneva Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations. Hitler said the decision was a matter of honor and an expression of opposition to attempts to treat Germans as a second-grade nation.

The “democrats” were somewhat confused by the demonstrative character of the moves – they would prefer the advancement towards the common goal to be a less noisy process. London and the rightist groups in France were responsive to the Nazi lure – the offer to resolve bilateral disputes peacefully, and any other – at Russia's expense. Replying to the question about Berlin's approach to the USSR, which was asked by US diplomat H. Davis, Nazi foreign politics spokesman A. Rosenberg said in April, 1933 that Germany's view of certain other countries would depend on the Anglo-Saxon countries' view of Germany. The reason why the themes were interlocking can to an extent be understood based on Hitler's conversation with Rauschning. The Nazi leader did not rule out a deal with Poland against Russia, but added that Soviet Russia was a big piece that was not easy to swallow, and it was not going to be the one he would start with.

In May, 1933 A. Rosenberg informed Great Britain about his chief's “grand plan” that Bismarck commented on by saying that Warsaw would soon realize that France had abandoned it, and that Poland would then have to surrender the Danzig corridor in return for ac-

cess to the Danzig seaport and a compensation in the form of potential territorial gains in Ukraine. When a Canadian interviewer remarked that the Soviet Union would oppose such compensation, Bismarck replied that Germany would paralyze the USSR by focusing on it the hatred of the whole world. Bismarck clearly forgot the testament left by his powerful grandfather.

Speaking at the June, 1933 International Economic and Financial Conference in London, German Minister for Economy, Agriculture and Food Hugenberg called the Western powers to jointly put an end to revolutions and domestic chaos which allegedly spread from Russia. He demanded to return colonies to Germany and to give “the nation lacking land” new territories which the “energetic race” would inhabit. At the time Berlin was touting its “peaceful” politics as it had to court its partners in “the pact of the four” – and Hugenberg was called off from the Conference for his uninvited candor.

According to “the pact of the four” Poland got a secondary role as a friendly third-party country. Of course, its hopes related to France eventually failed. In April, 1933 Poland offered France to discuss reacting harshly to Germany's re-armament initiative, but the offer was ignored. Pilsudski started thinking which partner to opt for. He clearly liked Hitler's aggressive style, listened attentively to German prom-

ises to abide strictly by existing treaties, and instructed his trustees – foreign minister J. Beck and ambassador to Berlin J. Lipsky to open a long and markedly emotional dialog with Berlin and to pretend that some sort of consensus was reached.

The USSR and the US abandoned the gloomy rhetoric concerning the 1933-1934 developments and restored the diplomatic ties. On November 16 Moscow and Washington exchanged notes expressing the hope that the relations between the two countries would revert to normalcy and that they would cooperate to safeguard peace. Beware of unwarranted optimism.

The disintegration of the Big Entente as the result of Great Britain's mistreating France, a chill in the relations with Poland, and the surging German nationalism had a sobering effect on a number of French politicians. A French-Soviet non-aggression pact was signed on November 29, 1932. The need to strengthen security bred interest in a model of joint response to Germany's preparations for a war. In December, 1933 Moscow proposed France and Poland a regional agreement on mutual defense against German aggression. Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland were invited to participate. In addition to mutual protection, the agreement included mutual diplomatic, moral, and material support in the case of a German attack, which, however, was not explicitly

mentioned in the text.

The USSR and France continued promoting the idea of an eastern pact throughout 1934. L. Barthou's idea was that it could unite the USSR, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, and Czechoslovakia. France, while not being signatory to the pact, was supposed to be its guarantor. Moscow accepted Barthou's concept as the basis for the deal. A draft plan was compiled jointly and linked to the Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Treaty which had to be concluded at the same time.

Germany refused to join under the pretext that it feared Soviet aggression and that the pact would help to encircle it. Following Germany's reaction, Poland also rejected the pact. London had expressed opposition to it even earlier.

Clausewitz once said that the main human mistake is to be more concerned over current problems than over those of the future. Definitely, this was the mistake made by Poland. US ambassador to Moscow Bullitt wrote in June, 1934 to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull that Pilsudski's refusal to sign the Eastern Pact was due to the anticipation of a war between the USSR and Japan: the Polish leader wanted to preserve full freedom of action in the east in the hope to restore Poland's past grandeur.

The struggle against the Eastern Pact united Warsaw, Berlin, and Tokyo. Pil-

sudski and Hitler reached agreements on the Anschluss and the partition of Czechoslovakia, as well as on joint action against the USSR in the case of complications in the Far East, which were expected to occur. In its practical aspects, the Lipsky – Neurath declaration (1934) was markedly anti-Russian, which could not but delight Great Britain. Since the Eastern Pact was going to materialize anyhow, on July, 27, 1934 Germany and Poland agreed to create a military alliance jointly with Japan and to make an attempt to attract Hungary, Romania, the Baltic republics, and Finland to it.

Poland was blinded by the notion that an armed conflict between the USSR and Japan was imminent and that it would erupt no later than in the spring of 1935. As Austrian ambassador to Prague F. Marek wrote, Poland was under the impression that – with the active involvement of Japan and a certain contribution to the process from Germany - Ukraine would eventually be torn out of the Soviet Union. The political flirt between Warsaw and Tokyo was paralleled by a buildup of the military-technical cooperation between Poland and Japan and the coordination of their intelligence activities⁸.

The May, 1934 Soviet proposal to transform the disarmament conference into a permanent forum authorized to render timely assistance to endangered countries met with roughly as much success as the one concerning the

Eastern Pact. France and a number of less influential countries expressed interest, but it was short-living. Great Britain opposed the idea entirely. US Secretary of State C. Hull told the Soviet envoy he could not clearly say “Yes” or “No” due to Washington's general reservations concerning integration into international organizations.

The assassination of L. Barthou (October 9, 1934) weakened the Soviet-French ties which seemed to hold a promise of tighter European security. New French foreign minister P. Laval demonstrated “continuity” of the French course in foreign politics. On December 5, 1934 he did sign an agreement by which France and the USSR pledged not to open negotiations with countries invited to join the Eastern Pact (especially those which remained undecided concerning their participation) in case the talks could potentially hinder its preparation or that of related treaties. The deal was supposed to strengthen the understanding and further build trust between Moscow and Paris. A week later Czechoslovakia joined the agreement and the prospects of signing Soviet-French and Soviet-Czechoslovakian mutual assistance treaties became a reality.

In September, 1934 the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations, which was a major contribution to the cause of the European collective security. Since the moment, it became much

more difficult for haters of Russia to mute the voice of Moscow since the USSR had the status of a permanent member of the League Council.

The Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Treaty did materialize on May 2, 1935. The two countries assumed the obligation to help and support each other in the case of an aggression launched by any European country against either of them or attempts to infringe upon their territorial integrity and political independence. The Soviet-Czechoslovakian treaty signed two weeks later established a similar framework. Czechoslovakia's foreign minister Edvard Benes made the readiness of France to rise to the defense of the victim of aggression a precondition for the enactment of his country's treaty with the Soviet Union.

It became clear in the not-so-distant future that the efficiency of international treaties depends not the crispiness of their wording but on the readiness of signatories to abide by their terms. For Laval, France's treaties with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia were instruments of pressure on Germany rather than practical guidance. He indicated to Beck that the point of the treaties was to gain additional advantages in the negotiations with Berlin and to prevent the Soviet-German rapprochement. With this tactic in mind, Laval avoided a military convention without which the mutual assistance treaties were in fact formalities.

In the meantime, the “Western front” grew active. On January 13, 1935 the population of Saarland demanded integration into Germany. Laval stated on the eve of the referendum that France had no preferences concerning its outcome. Great Britain and Italy helped sway the balance in Germany's favor. Predictably, the Saar precedent boosted the Nazi expansionist claims. For example, The Völkischer Beobachter demanded a referendum in Memel which it called “East Saarland”.

“Democracies” stubbornly pretended not to notice the connection between the Nazi Lebensraum concept and Germany's open re-armament. By the early 1935 its regular army already counted 480,000 servicemen (while the threshold set by the Versailles Treaty was 100,000). Soviet warnings had no effects – in February, 1935 Great Britain and France notified Berlin they were ready – with some imitation of rigor - to waive the military obligations imposed on Berlin by the Versailles Treaty.

On March 16 the German foreign ministry handed over to the British, French, Polish, and Italian ambassadors the text of the “act on the restoration of the forces of national self-defense”. Conscription was reinstated in Germany and its planned 12 corps and 36 divisions were proclaimed “a peace-time army”. Even Laval was shocked by the Nazi pushiness and showed enough courage to

submit a collective protest bid to the League of Nations. Later, in April, Great Britain unsuccessfully tried to block the passing of any anti-Nazi resolutions, and the League of Nations did interpret the March 16 German Act as a violation of the existing regulations. Berlin responded by saying the League of Nations had no right to judicial powers over Germany.

The British Foreign Office criticized Berlin very slightly for the lack of tact and volunteered mediation. British conservative media commented on the official course with remarkable candor – coercive measures with respect to Germany were unacceptable, Locarno was a mistake, and east Locarno – a mistake of even greater proportions.

Talking to Simon (March 24-26, 1935) Hitler tried to convince the British visitor that national socialism was the only force capable of safeguarding Germany as well as the entire Europe against the worst – that is, Bolshevik – catastrophe. Hitler held that the re-armament of Germany was necessary for the undertaking and, judging by available records, Simon voiced no objections.

On May 21, 1935 Hitler rolled out a revised version of his “peace program”. Condemning mutual assistance pacts on the whole and the Soviet-French treaty in particular, he expressed willingness to sign non-aggression pacts with all of Germany's neighbors except for Lithuania.

Hitler leveled charges of violating the Versailles treaty against basically all other countries and proposed “moral disarmament” as the basis of settling the disputes over the status of German populations outside of Germany. The Conscription Act was published to prove that Germany's stance in foreign politics was cooperative. Within a year the number of its troops was to reach 700,000, its parks of tanks and planes – 3,000 and 2,000 vehicles respectively, and the number of canons in the German army – 3,500.

S. Baldwin who succeeded MacDonald as Great Britain's Prime Minister and S. Hoare who took over the country's Foreign Office after Simon decisively went ahead with the appeasement of Hitler. A naval convention was signed on June 18, 1935 which legalized the Nazi access to navigation. The German navy was allowed 35% of the tonnage of the British one for ships and 45% - for submarines. Moreover, Germany got full control over the Baltic Sea. Its navy practically rose to the level of the French one in terms of its composition.

There was another no less important circumstance. While Berlin had to play solo in the arms race till the middle of 1935, now Great Britain was actively helping it to accelerate the demise of the Versailles system and push the world to the brink of disaster. Mussolini was not going to lag behind

his German colleague. Planning the seizure of Ethiopia, he secured in advance the consent of London and Paris as well as Washington's tolerance to the venture. The starting phase of the operation was similar to that of the Japanese incursion into China. In December, 1934 Italians attacked an Ethiopian group in the Ual-Ual oasis located deep in the country's territory and started concentrating forces along its border. The Ethiopian government asked the League of Nations to take measures to stop the aggressor. The League formed a “committee of five”, then a “committee of eighteen”, but the sanctions it imposed as the result were largely illusory. Italy was not affected by the League of Nations' arms supply restrictions as the country was already heavily armed. Rather, the side hit by the sanctions was Ethiopia. Italy owed its major vulnerability to the dependence on oil import, but only 10 countries – the USSR, Romania, Holland, and Iraq among them – agreed to stop supplying fuel to it. London did everything possible to make the process of imposing sanctions maximally protracted, while British and US companies were actually raising the volumes of oil export to Italy.

Overall, the story was not much different from that of the commissions which made decision-making last indefinitely during the developments in Manchuria. Washington received intelligence reports about the coming occupation of Ethiopia already in 1934, but

in December US Secretary of State Hull instructed Washington's envoy to Addis-Abeba to avoid any steps that might encourage the Ethiopian government to seek the US mediation. In August, 1935 – when serious problems loomed on the horizon in Europe, Asia, and Africa – the US Congress passed a “neutrality bill” that Roosevelt enacted literally on the eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Thus Washington absolved itself of any moral or political need to join the regime of anti-Italian sanctions (should they be imposed) or otherwise express solidarity with the victim of aggression.

Japan learned the lessons from the Italian campaign against Ethiopia. “Democracies” watched idly when fascists used chemical warfare to suppress the resistance with which they met in the country. The absence of reaction made Tokyo feel that it was safe to do the same, eventually Japan did so 530 times, as well as resorted to bacteriological warfare. Nevertheless, the developments were invariably interpreted as “expeditions”, “incidents”, etc. but never as real wars, and the Hague and Geneva conventions were never invoked. “No rules” actually meant “no bans”, but it is till widely held that chemical and bacteriological warfare had never been used during World War II.

Reference data on fatalities during World War II paint a strange picture. China had lost some 20 mln people

prior to September 1, 1939 set as the beginning of World War II by the “democracies”. Overall, China's death toll as the result of the Japanese aggression reached 30-35 mln. Very approximately, the loss of life in Ethiopia due to the Italian aggression is estimated at 500,000 – 600,000. Franco's mutiny organized by Germany and Italy and the subsequent intervention against Spain launched by the two countries cost 1,500,000 lives. Nevertheless, the crimes against humanity are hardly even mentioned in chronicles. Millions of people perished unnoticed, and Austria, Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia, and Albania simply disappeared from the map of the world. Apologists of the appeasement politics prefer to describe all of the above as coincidences in the process of explaining the origin of World War II.

The appeasement has several faces. It can materialize in the form of the enforcement of peace on unfair terms, in the practice of concessions to the aggressor, or – in the framework of a monumentally cynical scenario – in reorienting accomplices or even opponents to make them target rival countries. The latter version is based on the concept that one's enemy's enemy is a friend. The disposition in international politics in the mid-1930ies was clear: the concepts of indivisible common security and collective efforts aimed at achieving it were banished from the political reality in the clash with the

socioeconomic dogmas and imperial ambitions of “democracies”. Regional conflicts and local tensions were merging to form a global catastrophe.

In that epoch Germany's military elite embraced the Nazi expansionist doctrine and pledged allegiance to Hitler. The country's economy, science, and education underwent broad militarization, and its foreign politics switched to the military track. German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs von Bulow and his camp did what they could to arrest the drift in the “eastern” politics. As professor I. Fleischauer wrote, “unfortunately, the struggle ended with the death of Bulow and the advent of Ribbentrop to Wilhelmstrasse. On Trinity Day of 1936, the old foreign ministry died together with Bulow”⁹.

Hitler annulled the Locarno Treaties in March, 1936 and ordered the German army to march into the demilitarized Rhine zone. The army numbered just some 30,000, and only three battalions crossed the Rhine River to march in Aachen, Trier, and Saarbrücken. The Nazi leadership must have endured serious stress over the first 48 hours not being sure if Germany would get away with what it had done. Europe was watching and no reaction followed (German Reich and World War II, v. 1, p. 603).

There were more than enough reasons to start analyzing the situation. The arguments behind Berlin's decision to

depart from the Locarno Treaties sounded alarming: allegedly, France took a step unfriendly to Germany by signing a pact with the USSR. Translated into the language of political transactions, the above meant that Germany's response to attempts to maintain status quo in the east would be to violate the status quo in the west.

In October, 1936 Berlin and Rome signed a secret protocol on the interaction between the two countries. A month later, Germany concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan. The Pact's secret addendum set the Soviet Union as the target of the two countries' aggressive intentions. In the case of war or a threat of war between either of them and the USSR, the other one was to avoid any measures that might benefit the Soviet Union. It was also decided that Germany and Japan would not sign any political treaties with Moscow that might contradict the spirit of the Pact. Italy and Hungary joined the Pact in November, 1937, Franco's Spain and Manchukuo – in 1939, and Bulgaria, Finland, Romania, Denmark, Slovakia, and Croatia – in 1941. The 1939 Pact of Steel and the 1940 Tripartite Pact put the finishing touches on the picture of the block-forming process among the World War II aggressors.

British Prime Minister Baldwin admitted in 1936 that in case an armed conflict erupted Great Britain could probably rout Germany with Russia's help, but the tentative result would

have been the Bolshevizaion of Germany. He preferred a course premised in the assumption that the quest for expansion would drive Germany east, since that would be the only direction open to it, and as long as the Bolshevik regime continued to exist in Russia, the expansion could not be peaceful (British Foreign Office memorandum, February 17, 1935). To induce the realization of the scenario, Great Britain lavishly praised Hitler and generously dispensed hints indicating where Germany could conquer the desired Lebensraum.

Visiting Berlin in 1937, British Foreign Office chief Lord Halifax thanked Hitler for his having done the great work of banishing communism from his own country and thus preventing it from spreading over West Europe. Thus Germany was entitled to the status of a bastion in the struggle against communism. A kind of basic understanding was emerging between Great Britain and Germany. Halifax believed that France and Italy did not have to stay out of the process and that the four powers – and no other countries – were to maintain control over the situation.

For Hitler, one of the prerequisites for the “understanding” was the annulling of France's and Czechoslovakia's treaties with the USSR. He said what his British partners must have been happy to hear – that Soviet Russia was the only country which stood to benefit from a general conflict. In his

turn, Halifax said that London was aware of the need to adapt to new circumstances, to correct past mistakes, and – as an addition - to alter some elements of the current reality. He stressed that in the world which was not static no types of changes in the surrounding reality had to be rejected from the outset. Contrary to the British tradition, Halifax did not leave his counterpart searching for hidden meaning in the statements made and said that sooner or later changes desired by Germany - specifically, those concerning Danzig, Austria, and Czechoslovakia - would take place in the European order, and that Great Britain only hoped that the changes would be delivered by peaceful evolution.

The conclusions were obvious – Germany had to promptly grab what was offered to it. The buildup of its might would then open new opportunities. Hitler was not prone to self-deception and realized that any single failure could render his entire snap-offensive strategy, which required maximal mobilization, totally inefficient. A failure at the start could easily become a prologue to demise. On November 5, 1939 Hitler called a meeting with Horning, military minister Blomberg, foreign minister Neurath, and the army commanders. Whereas the requirement formulated in his August, 1936 note to the four-year plan was to put Germany in shape for a war with any adversary by 1940, this time he stated

that the Lebensraum problem had to be solved by 1943-1945. Taking Austria and Czechoslovakia were the first steps as well as an opportunity to probe into the extent of Great Britain's tolerance and of the interest of "democracies" in forming a world-wide anti-Soviet alliance.

Germany annexed Austria on March 12, 1938. Two days earlier Chamberlain's top adviser H. Wilson confided to Berlin that the closure of the problem of Austria would not prevent London from steering the course aimed at accord with Germany and Italy. He added that the interests of the USSR were safe to ignore as some day the regime running the country would fall. France's impulsive reaction to the Anschluss was immediately neutralized by Great Britain. In a speech delivered at the House of Commons Chamberlain condemned those who talked about using force and put obstacles in the way of diplomacy. The British government was unprepared to assume any obligations concerning the regions where the interests of Great Britain were not affected to the same extent as in Belgium or France.

Italy, which was not too happy with the Anschluss, also had to be given something to let it benefit from the British generosity. On April 16, 1938 Chamberlain and Mussolini signed a friendship and cooperation treaty which legitimized the occupation of Ethiopia. At the same time, Franco got from the Prime Minister the status of a

side in a war for his forces, and the Spanish Republic was doomed after such recognition.

No doubt, Germany was not the kind of a country comfortable to deal with. Nevertheless, its uncompromising hostility to the Soviet Union was a more than sufficient compensation for the problems that might arise, and all that "democracies" had to do was to guide their partner in accord with their own interests.

In November, 1937 Great Britain and France agreed to sacrifice Czechoslovakia to Hitler. To justify Great Britain's inaction Chamberlain simply said that a brief inspection of the map would show that neither it nor France could do anything to preserve Czechoslovakia in case Hitler dared to launch an aggression against it, and that was the reason why he also advised France against extending guarantees to Czechoslovakia.

What Chamberlain was pushing for was a solution acceptable for all countries except for Russia. His statement in the House of Commons was a response to the Soviet Union's recent proposal to call a conference involving the USSR, Great Britain, France, the US, and Czechoslovakia with the aim of forming a broad alliance opposing the Nazi plan to dominate the world. Moscow's readiness to abide by its military obligations to Czechoslovakia was perceived by London as a challenge. The British Prime Minister said

it would be a disaster if Czechoslovakia survived thanks to the Soviet assistance.

Initially Prague and Paris appeared responsive to the Soviet initiative, but their enthusiasm evaporated as soon as they were forced to choose between the USSR and Great Britain. Great Britain also rejected the US initiative to organize a global conference that was supposed “to purge” global problems and set the rules of peaceful international cooperation, simply because London regarded any US meddling with European affairs as unacceptable. Similarly, the US ignored the Soviet invitation to join the efforts meant to save Czechoslovakia: as Secretary of State Hull wrote later, Washington left the offer unanswered to avoid upsetting Moscow with a formal refusal.

B. Selovsky, the author of a fundamental treatise titled “The Munich Agreement” wrote that the Western powers were driven by anti-Sovietism instead of the principles of international law. Great Britain was determined to bar the “semi-Asian” Russia from Europe¹⁰.

Warsaw's position on the eve of the Anschluss and the Munich Agreement was markedly extremist. Polish foreign minister J. Beck linked Germany's claim to Austria with the Polish plan to “appropriate” Lithuania. The messages – from Beck to Horing (January, 1938) and from Horing to ambassador Lipsky - constitute mate-

rial evidence of the collusion. In anticipation of Soviet counter-measures, the Nazi leadership proposed to reach an agreement on the Polish-German military cooperation against Russia. On March 17 Lipsky was instructed to inform Horing that Warsaw was ready to take Germany's interests into account in the context of “the potential action”. It was meant that Polish and German forces would be dispatched to the corresponding parts of Lithuania simultaneously. A Soviet warning made the two countries call off the aggression against Lithuania. As an act of revenge, Poland started putting together an anti-Soviet alliance (involving the Soviet Union's western neighbors, Yugoslavia, and Greece). The mission of the alliance was to impede Russia's assistance to Czechoslovakia and France in the case of their conflict with Germany.

It followed from the words of Polish ambassador to Paris Lukaszewicz (during a conversation with the US ambassador on September 25, 1938) that Warsaw and Berlin had discussed synchronously attacking Czechoslovakia in case it did not give in to political pressure. Under the circumstances, the Polish troops would have been deployed not only to the Tesin enclave, but also to Slovakia, and would have formed a common front with Hungary. In fact, Poland was creating a serious trap for itself. France's obligations to Poland could not outweigh its obligations to Czechoslovakia, and from the

strategic standpoint the partition of the latter made Poland's situation hopeless¹¹.

The Munich Treaty was charted without the Czechoslovakian government and was signed by Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy on September 29. By all means, it was an exemplary case of dictate. The Treaty established that the dispatch of German troops to the regions with predominantly German population would begin on October 1 and altogether take a week. Additional agreements defined the process of separating from Czechoslovakia the regions compactly inhabited by the Polish and Hungarian minorities.

On September 3, 1938 a British-German declaration formalized the agreements “symbolizing the wish of both nations to never again fight each other”. London and Berlin pledged to rely on consultations to examine issues of bilateral importance and expressed the determination to continue working towards the elimination of sources of discord and thus to promote peace in Europe.

Germany also promised to France peace and stability of borders, as well as bilateral consultations in the case of complications in international politics. J. Bonnet and J. Ribbentrop signed a declaration containing the full set of expressions of friendliness on December 6, 1938. Ribbentrop said the result was the total elimination of the threat

of a French-Russian alliance. Bonnet concluded that from the moment the German politics would be entirely focused on countering Bolshevism and that Germany expressed the will to eastward expansion. That was predictable considering that Paris declared to Berlin in the process of preparing the declaration that France would not take any interest in eastern and south-eastern affairs.

It is almost forgotten these days that Chamberlain and Daladier offered Hitler and Mussolini during talks in Munich to freeze “the Civil War” in Spain and to jointly convince the conflicting sides to reach compromise. The idea met with the Nazi resistance and the German foreign ministry said “the civil war” in Spain should continue until the establishment of an authoritarian rule of a military kind. Such outcome was regarded as favorable by Germany and Italy on the eve of a broader European conflict. The Nazi intervention in Spain was meant to ensure the supply of resources to the German military-industrial complex. Germany controlled over 70 Spanish mining companies by the fall of 1939. The fighting in Spain provided Germany with ample opportunities to test its new armaments in the conditions of real combat and its military personnel – to gain the practical experience of using and servicing the new weaponry. Germany and Italy invested some 1.5-2 bn marks in Franco, and Italy lost about 50,000 servicemen

in Spain.

The “democracies” certainly had the potential to stop the aggression, jointly with the USSR or without it. What they had no intention to do was prevent the aggression against the USSR. “Democracies” lacked the loyalty to principles and the firmness that it would have taken to counter the rise of fascism. London was so eager to make Hitler and Mussolini compliant that occasionally it even lied about the position of France while speaking from its name. Relaying a French warning to Hitler on September 27, 1938 H. Wilson used the phrase “active hostile action” instead of the original “active attack”. Even the softened version made Hitler listen to his commanders' recommendations and accept Mussolini's proposal to hold a four-lateral meeting in Munich, though initially the Nazi leader was going to ignore the plan.

When Chamberlain arrived at the conclusion that defeating Germany quickly would be impossible and a protracted war with it would pose a lethal danger to Great Britain due to the social unrest it could generate, he made securing a deal with Hitler the sole basis of his strategy. On September 1, 1938 H. Wilson told German envoy T. Kordt that it would not be a problem to ignore the opinions of France and Czechoslovakia in case Great Britain and Germany reached understanding bilaterally. Wilson said that the settlement of the Czechoslova-

kian crisis would open opportunities for the economic expansion into South-East Europe. In his September 13, 1938 letter to King George VI, Chamberlain emphasized that Germany and Great Britain could serve as Europe's two pillars of peace and two bastions in the struggle against communism.

After the signing of the Munich Agreement, the leaders of Great Britain and France, as well as a number of politicians in Washington, had an illusion that sacrificing Ethiopia, Spain, Austria, and finally Czechoslovakia had produced the desired result. Former US President H. Hoover, for example, was open about his belief that West Europe would not have to worry about the aggressiveness of the Third Reich if its expansion, “naturally” oriented east, went unobstructed. The remaining task was to persuade Berlin to adopt the same vision.

Initially, the strategy seemed to work. The Nazi leadership was actively probing into Poland's readiness to transform the cooperation organized in the process of the Anschluss, the partition of Czechoslovakia, and the parallel transactions with Japan into a full-scale military alliance hostile to the USSR. Poland had no fundamental objections to heading east. Their precondition for supporting the venture was that Germany's anti-Bolshevist offensive had to by-pass Poland and be channeled, for example, via the Baltic

region or Romania. It was clear from the dialog between the Polish foreign ministry and the Romanian government that indeed Germany had serious reasons to connect to Bucharest.

The impression created during Ribbentrop's October 24, 1938 meeting with Polish ambassador Lipsky and January 6 and 26, 1939 talks with Beck in Warsaw was that Poland would side with Berlin in Germany's conflict with the Soviet Union. A different picture emerged when Germany sized the remnants of Czechoslovakia on March 15 without revealing to its Polish partners the plan to disregard the territorial prescriptions of the Munich deal.

Warsaw was not too happy that London and Paris did not even comment on Berlin's new aggressive step. Nor did Washington voice any concern, even if there was any. US Under-Secretary of State A. Berly remarked that the US President – like many in Great Britain – perhaps hoped that the German expansion east would ease the situation for Great Britain and France. Ambassador Bullitt stressed the British and French post-Munich tendency to help the situation evolve into a war between Germany and the USSR, by the end of which the “democracies” could attack Germany and make it capitulate. Churchill made a stronger statement – he said the war had already begun but did not elaborate who was fighting and against whom.

Hitler planned in 1937 that most of the fighting leading to Germany's conquest of the desired Lebensraum would take place in 1943-1945. Later he set 1942 as the crucial period of time. Japan regarded 1946 – the year by which the US was going to withdraw from its bases at the Philippines – as the optimal time to gain control over Indonesia, the Philippines, and other South Asian and Pacific region territories. For Nazi leaders, not only economic calculations but no less the Western powers' indecisiveness and willingness to compromise provided arguments in favor of accelerating the implementation of the expansionist plans. Neither materially nor psychologically, the “democracies” seemed ready to clash with the aggressors.

The idea that by the fall of 1938 Hitler was ready to introduce a radical change into his strategic plans and seize France before embarking upon the mission of his life – the annihilation of Russia – appears dubious. In June, 1939 Horing mentioned to British ambassador Henderson that if London waited for at least 10 days to extend guarantees to Poland, the situation would have taken a completely different turn. Hitler said the same to Ciano on August 12, 1939, as did R. Hess to Simon upon landing not quite successfully in Scotland. According to Hess, Poland was getting increasingly ready to accept Germany's terms in the dispute over Danzig and the corridor, but its position changed under the

British influence.

In the political and legal senses, the Soviet Union found itself in the situation it used to be in prior to the signing of the Rapallo Treaties. Paris froze its Mutual Assistance Treaty with the USSR. The Soviet Union's relations with Germany were in disrepair. Coming under attack from the east or from the west the Soviet Union would have no allies at all and be left facing major uncertainty as to the positions of various countries in the situation of war, not diplomatic intrigues. There were numerous indications that the USSR was the next country on Germany's list of targets.

Ribbentrop could see the involvement of Japan in a full-scale military alliance with Germany as a potential reward for severing the relations with the Soviet Union. However, also in 1938 a group of "old school" German diplomats looked deeper into the benefits Germany could draw from reviving the diplomatic game with Moscow. It is still unclear who floated the rather unexpected idea to normalize the relations with Soviet Russia instead of antagonizing it. It could be Germany's hyperactive ambassador to Moscow Schulenburg, the so-called "Russian faction" in the German foreign ministry, or some other player or group of players. Some guesswork even points to Horing as the mastermind behind the alternative approach.

Some influence from the upper levels

of the German hierarchy had to factor into the situation in the process of resolving the disagreement between the Reich's diplomatic and economic decision-making centers when the package of economic offers to Moscow was compiled. In any case, on December 22, 1938 the Soviet trade mission in Berlin received the proposal to sign an inter-governmental agreement by which a credit in the amount of 200 mln marks was to be extended to the USSR to import German industry's products in return for Soviet commodity supplied over the coming two years.

On January 11, 1939 Soviet envoy A. Merekalov informed the German foreign ministry that the Soviet Union was ready to open negotiations and invited German representatives to Moscow for discussions. Literally next day - during the New Year reception - Hitler treated the Soviet envoy with particular attention, and rumors started after the episode that the Soviet-German relations were about to see a recovery. In reality, Hitler's gesture and the credit offer were a warning to London, Paris, and Warsaw that was meant to bring back to life the ghost of Rapallo and to make the three capitals more receptive to Germany's demands. In any case, this is how the situation was seen by British experts, judging by a special dossier from the archive of the British Foreign Office.

The intrigue continued for a couple of weeks. German foreign ministry ad-

viser K. Schnurre requested a Soviet entry visa and even got on a train to Moscow, but was taken off it on the way not to anger Poland which Ribbentrop was courting quite successfully, as Hitler, Horing, Hess, and Moltke believed. A lull ensued and it transpired that the steps aimed at reviving the relations with the USSR were meant to improve Germany's standing in the context of the relations with other countries which were hostile to Moscow.

A myth is frequently reproduced in various publications that the starting point of the Soviet-German dialog was Stalin's address to the XVIII party congress (March 10, 1939) during which he spoke about pursuing the policy of peace and economic cooperations with all countries and about exercising caution and not allowing provocateurs to drag the USSR into conflicts. This is a total legend. The statements hardly drew the attention of the German embassy to Moscow or the German foreign ministry.

It should be noted that Stalin said in the same address: "The war which crept unnoticed into the lives of nations has already drawn 500 mln people into its orbit and spread over the enormous territory from Tianjin, Shanghai, and Canton (Guangzhou) across Ethiopia to Gibraltar. The new imperialist war is an accomplished fact... we are witnessing an undisguised redistribution of the world and the spheres of influence". Stalin pro-

ceeded to remark that "the non-aggressive democracies with their forces combined are certainly stronger than the fascist countries in the economic and military sense". The whole address examined without taking its elements out of the general context leaves no doubts as to which side the USSR was at.

Great Britain was the first to react to the address delivered by Stalin. On March 18, 1939 Halifax talked to Maisky and British ambassador Seeds - to Litvinov about the pressure exerted by Germany on Romania and asked whether the USSR was going to take any measures in the case of a German aggression. Protracted talks between Great Britain and the Soviet Union – and later between Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France – commenced.

German leaders played "the Soviet card" again after Great Britain preempted J. Beck's maneuver which he probably had discussed ahead with Berlin – he intended to say during a visit to London that Poland no longer trusted Great Britain and France and would switch to Germany as the partner. On March 30, 1939 – prior to Beck's arrival – Chamberlain's government published a unilateral statement that protection would be offered to Poland in the case of an attack against it. A week later the statement was beefed up and became a Mutual Assistance Treaty between Great Britain and Poland which was to be invoked

whenever the independence of either of the sides was threatened directly or indirectly. Later London extended similar guarantees to Romania and Greece.

The British government's explanation of London's unusual decisiveness was that it sought not to protect particular countries that might be confronted with the German threat but to prevent Germany from dominating the continent and thus gaining the power to jeopardize Great Britain's security. Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs A. Cadogan admitted three decades later that Chamberlain assumed serious obligations and there could be no room for lingering doubts or lack of decisiveness in the case of a German aggression against Poland. Cadogan described the guarantees as a horrible game since Great Britain – like France – was not going to actually fight over Poland.

British military planners projected that Poland would be able to endure a German attack without Russia's help only for a limited period of time. In their view, a treaty with Russia was the best way to prevent a war, while unsuccessful negotiations with the Soviet Union could entail a rapprochement between Russia and Germany. For Chamberlain, however, ideological regards outweighed military ones.

Hitler responded to Great Britain's new roadmap with the order to brace for an invasion of Poland. On April 3,

Keitel instructed the armed forces to start implementing Fall Weiss so as to be able to launch the offensive any time starting September 1, 1939. Ten days later, Hitler confirmed the final version of the plan. It envisaged the maximal isolation of Poland to limit the war to fighting across its territory. The deepening domestic crisis in France and the resulting British restraint were regarded as factors making the above task easier to fulfill. Germany believed that Russia's intervention, even if it were possible, was not going to help Poland as it would have led to its being destroyed by Bolshevism. The positions of Finland and the Baltic republics were expected to depend entirely on Germany's military demands. While Berlin viewed Rome as a reliable ally, it had strong reservations concerning Hungary in this regard.

It should be noted that as of April 11 Hitler regarded the USSR as an enemy. Nevertheless, by mid-April German diplomats were instructed to seize every opportunity to imitate a new Rapallo phase in the relations between Germany and Russia. A situation in which this could be done emerged shortly. A. Merekalov submitted a protest to the German foreign ministry over the obstacles put by the German command in the way of Skoda's manufacturing the products ordered by the Soviet Union in April – June, 1938. Prior to the incident, on March 18, 1939, the Soviet Union

made it clear that it did not recognize the non-existence of the Czechoslovakian statehood and regarded the German occupation and everything that followed it as an aggression, the violation of stability in Central Europe, and a major cause for concern.

State Secretary E. Weizsacker received the Soviet envoy on April 17.

Merekalov did not provide in his report to Moscow details of what had been said by the German official, but, as it follows from the German account of the conversation, Weizsacker showed that the economic terms and the political climate were interdependent. He indicated that the Soviet Union would not manage to have equally good relations at the same time with Germany and Great Britain on which he blamed the tensions in Europe.

A month later German foreign ministry adviser K. Schnurre notified Soviet envoy G. Astakhov (Merekalov was dismissed by the time) that Berlin would look “positively” into the possibility of keeping the 1935 trade treaty between the USSR and Czechoslovakia in effect “on the territory of the Bohemian and Moravian protectorate”. Germany rose the contacts over the matter to a higher level on May 20. Ambassador Schulenburg asked to be received by Soviet diplomacy chief V. Molotov. Molotov spoke to the visitor harshly and charged Germany with using economic leverage in a dishonest game.

Berlin decided to exercise restraint until Russians send a signal, but Moscow did not, and Berlin had to take the next step.

On May 30 E. Weizsacker invited Astakhov and said that the German foreign ministry had contacted the Soviet Union on Hitler's order and acted under his supervision. He said Russia is confronted with a broad choice in the German political store – from normalization of the relations to hostility. He wrote in his diary that Germany was making unilateral offers but Russians were mistrustful. The same day, Schulenburg was given the new scheme of “playing the Russian card” - the starting point was a request to grant the Soviet trade mission in Prague the status of a division of the Berlin one. Since the situation bred a number of fundamental questions, the Soviet request was submitted to the German foreign minister and the normalization of the relations was linked to the evidence of mutual interest.

In May – June, 1939 Italian foreign minister G. Ciano took the role of a mediator between Germany and the USSR. His first move was to cast a shadow over London's sincerity – he said Great Britain would be deliberately delaying progress in the talks with the USSR until it was late, nor should the Soviet Union be rushing to join the coalition. Ciano expressed full support for Schulenburg's plan to rebuild the relations with the Soviet Union and recommended (1) to help

improve the relations between Japan and the USSR and put an end to border conflicts between them; (2) to propose to Moscow a non-aggression pact and joint guarantees of the independence of the Baltic republics; (3) to reach a broad trade agreement.

On June 28 Schulenburg asked to be received by Molotov to share the impressions from his trip to Berlin. He spoke at length about Germany's having no "evil intentions" and, in particular, mentioned that it had not annulled the Berlin Treaty on Neutrality. Schulenburg stressed that the German government wanted not only to normalize but even to improve the relations with the Soviet Union and remarked that he made the statement on Ribbentrop's order and that, moreover, it had been approved by Hitler. Having reported to Berlin, Schulenburg received the reply that enough had already been said and was instructed to abstain from further political discussions.

A pause ensued and lasted for about a month. In politics, pauses are never quite real – Berlin remained active in July and on. It discussed a military alliance with Japan and Italy as well as talked to Great Britain about the balance of regional and global interests. Ribbentrop offered Warsaw to form a German-Polish alliance to "jointly suppress Soviet Russia" and to tear Ukraine out of it for subsequent division between the two countries. Poland was hesitant as Chamberlain

and Halifax urged it to seek a peaceful solution to the Danzig and corridor problems while also warning it against forging excessively close ties with Berlin.

It was a tangled web – London was talking to Japan and Germany, France and Poland, Greece and Turkey, the US and Russians. Berlin was engaged in arm—wrestling with Great Britain, playing hide-and-seek with Poland, and looking for a way to attract Japan without adapting its plans too much to those of Tokyo. Washington was enigmatic. Moscow was trying to realize who stood where in its relations with Great Britain and France, was deeply mistrustful of Germany with all of its promises, and was half-involved in a war with Japan. What could the outcome be?

In May-August, 1939, important events took place at the Khalkhyn Gol where tens of thousands of soldiers supported by aircrafts and tanks clashed and the number of fatalities exceeded that during the fascist occupation of Poland. The developments in the region were watched carefully and analyzed with an eye to future strategic planning by the aggressors and the appeasers alike.

On June 7, 1939 German ambassador to Tokyo E. Ott sent a message to Weizsacker saying that an instruction was sent on June 5 to ambassador Osima (Japan's ambassador to Berlin) according to which Japan should be

ready to automatically enter any war started by Germany, provided that Russia would be Germany's enemy in it. Japan expected Germany to assume symmetric obligations. Soviet spy Richard Sorge reported to Moscow on June 24 that Japan would automatically enter a war against the Soviet Union in case one breaks out between the USSR and Germany, as well as would automatically enter a war between Germany and Italy on one side and Great Britain, France, and the USSR on the other. In case Germany and Italy start a war against Great Britain and France in which the USSR would not be involved, Japan would be the ally of Germany and Italy but will decide on engaging the British and French forces depending on the situation. Japan would, however, enter the war immediately in case the interests of the trilateral alliance necessitated its involvement.

Judging by available documents, the concept of automatism was seen as a potential problem in Berlin. The interpretation of the Khalkhyn Gol events was up to Tokyo – it was free to either continue presenting them as “an incident” or to go further and turn the Soviet aid to Mongolia into *casus belli* for Germany. Besides, Berlin's assessment of the Japanese military potential was fairly critical. On the other hand, it was a test for the Anti-Comintern Pact. Hitler decided to make Tokyo face accomplished facts and adapt to Berlin's strategy.

Coincidences in time – even fatal ones – are possible. However, the July 24, 1939 joint British-Japanese statement known as the Arita - Craigie Agreement was by no means one of them.

When fighting was raging at the Khalkhyn Gol, its outcome still unpredictable, and talks between the USSR, Great Britain, and France about creating a barrier in the way of aggression were underway, London blessed Tokyo's expansionist politics. The Arita - Craigie Agreement read: “The British Government fully recognize the actual situation in China, where hostilities on a large scale are in progress and note that, as long as that state of affairs continues to exist, the Japanese forces in China have special requirements for the purpose of safeguarding their own security and maintaining public order in the regions under their control, and they have to take the necessary steps in order to suppress or remove any such acts or causes as will obstruct them or benefit their enemy. The British Government, therefore, will refrain from all acts and measures which will interfere with the Japanese forces in attaining their above mentioned objects”.

It was a strange agreement, and not only in form. London sided entirely with Japan in the process of its aggression against China. Or did Craigie express reservations and Arita respond with some pledges? Nothing of the kind is mentioned in the text of the agreement. Could there have been a

secret addendum to it? The truth will become known in 2017-2020.

Later, books were written about the “special requirements” of the Japanese forces in China and the “necessary steps” they took. The following remark should be made in the present context. The “full recognition of the actual situation in China” was tantamount to the recognition of China's borders as defined by Japan. It was a possible interpretation of the agreement that Great Britain accepted Japan's version of the Khalkhin Gol “incident”, by which Mongolian personnel supported by the Red Army took a part of China's territory rather than the Kwantung Army invaded Mongolia.

The absence of official British reaction to the May 11, 1939 Japanese attack against Mongolian border checkpoint in the region of Lake Buir Nuur combined with the British agents' attempts to instigate a rebellion in Xinjiang, the province via which most of the Soviet aid to China was delivered, as well as the ambiguous position taken by the US Department of State, altogether left a negative impression. Clearly, Tokyo was offered to turn north and thus to make the Drang nach Osten option more attractive from Hitler's standpoint.

The pause in July was marked with meetings and contacts between the trustees of the British and German leaderships. A scandal erupted after

revelations in the press about the talks Nazi special envoy K. Wohltat held with British foreign trade minister R. Hudson and Prime Minister's adviser H. Wilson. Wohltat was presented with an extensive program of cooperation in the political, economic, and military spheres, which had been approved by Chamberlain. The Prime Minister even offered to meet with Wohltat personally, but the German envoy said he was not authorized to.

Great Britain proposed that the British Commonwealth and Germany both pledge non-aggressions and pursue policies based on non-intervention in each other's affairs. In the military sphere, London was interested to know with greater precision the current parameters of the arms race. The economic cooperation could encompass the formation of an international colonial zone in Africa, the opening of access to commodity supplies and sales markets to the German industry, the resolution of the international indebtedness problem, and the financial assistance to Germany's “sanation” of East and South-East Europe. Hudson promised Germany “an international loan” totaling 1 bn British pounds.

The objective set was to reach an agreement between Great Britain and Germany over all significant issues by which Great Britain would be absolved of all obligations to Poland and Romania.

Wilson assured his counterpart that

London was ready to consider other issues of interest to Germany. He added that Hitler's consent to negotiations would be regarded as a sign of restoring trust.

London's insincerity in dealing not only with the USSR, but also with France, the US, and Poland is more than obvious. No common British-German politics materialized. Hitler thought that the situation was not ripe yet and blew a remarkable chance for the third time. In November, 1937 Halifax was pushing him towards the idea of "a general settlement". In September, 1938 Chamberlain proposed a historical alliance of the two empires. Wilson's summer, 1939 offer was supported by the conservative majority in the House of Commons.

Let us restore the chronology of the events which is truly informative. On July 8-21 H. Wilson, R. Hudson, and influential conservative G. Ball were scheming with Woltat in the hope that Berlin's positive answer would follow shortly. On July 23 Halifax notified Soviet envoy Maisky of the readiness to open military negotiations without waiting for the outcome of the political talks and promised that the British delegation would be able to go to Moscow within 7-10 days. In 10 days there was still no response from Berlin concerning Wilson's "program". To earn a delay, the British delegation boarded on a freight-and-passenger liner which was technically the slowest means of getting to the negotiating

table in Moscow. To free Berlin from the need to engage in guesswork, on August 3 Wilson invited ambassador G. Dirksen to his office to continue synchronizing the British and German positions.

The ambassador reported to Berlin that, as it followed from Wilson's words, for Great Britain the recent strengthening of the ties with other countries – the USSR, Poland, and Romania – only served as a reserve instrument for a fundamental reconciliation with Germany. The ambassador gathered that the ties would become unimportant as soon as the truly serious objective – reaching an agreement between Great Britain and Germany – was accomplished, and that, potentially, Italy and France could be drawn into the process as well.

The report left Hitler convinced that – owing to Great Britain's non-intervention – the conflict between Germany and Poland was not going to yield a major war. Nevertheless, he made an untypical move in a further effort to avoid problems. On August 11 Hitler summoned High Commissioner of the League of Nations in the Free City of Danzig, C. Burckhardt and asked him a favor – to explain to the West the meaning of what was happening. Hitler said: "Everything I undertake is directed against Russia. If the West is too stupid and too blind to comprehend this, I will be forced to reach an understanding with the Russians, turn

and strike the West, and then after their defeat turn back against the Soviet Union with my collected strength. I need Ukraine and with that no one can starve us out as they did in the last war”.

Newspapermen managed to learn about Burckhardt's visit to Hitler and his mission was depreciated. Why did Hitler need Burckhardt? The answer is still unclear. Anyhow, the message Burckhardt was to deliver to the West was timed to coincide with the opening of the trilateral military talks in Moscow. Hitler obviously sought to provide London with additional arguments that could strengthen its intention to avoid deals with Moscow that would be in any sense binding.

On August 12-13 Hitler was waiting to see what would come out of Burckhardt's mission. He ran out of patience on April 14 and notified Horing, field marshal Brauchitsch, and admiral Raeder of the decision to attack Poland at most within two weeks.

The Soviet leadership received enough information to be aware of the current conspiring and political games. A report about Hitler's December, 1936 meeting with the Wehrmacht top commanders during which it was said that Poland was going to be routed prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union made it to Stalin's desk in just a couple of days. It took the Kremlin 10 days to learn about the April 3, 1939 decision to activate Fall Weiss. It would be an

overstatement to say that the Soviet dictator knew everything or almost everything, and it was even less true that Stalin's judgments used to be based entirely on facts. Like most rulers with unlimited and unchecked power, oftentimes he acted contrary to what facts suggested.

The lull that ensued after Ribbentrop, as he described it, sent Stalin off with a flea in his ear on June 28, ended on July 24 when G. Astakhov was invited to the German foreign ministry to get familiarized with Berlin's view of the potential phases of a transformations in the relations between Germany and the USSR. Schnurre told that the chief of the German diplomacy saw the process as follows: first, successful talks on trade and credits, then the normalization in the spheres of cultural interactions, the press, etc, and finally – political rapprochement. The German side was worried over Molotov's tendency to avoid exchanging opinions with Schulenburg and the Soviet envoy's in Berlin not answering Weizsacker's questions which were of interest to Hitler. Schnurre suggested that if Moscow was unprepared for exchanges on the highest level, perhaps, officials of a lower rank could try to break the stalemate.

Ribbentrop summoned Astakhov on August 2. He maintained during the meeting that there were no unresolvable disputes between Germany and the USSR concerning the territory stretching from the Black Sea to the

Baltic Sea, that there was enough space for both countries, and that, accordingly, there had to be no contradiction between their interests. As for Poland, Ribbentrop said Germany was watching the developments attentively and coldly, but provocations would be punished within a week. The German minister hinted that understanding with Moscow was desirable on the eve of any turn of the events. He also remarked that he had his own point of view on the relations between the USSR and Japan and did not exclude a *modus vivendi* between them.

The Soviet envoy was invited to the German foreign ministry again on August 3. On the order of the minister, K. Schnurre made additions and corrections to yesterday's conversation. If the Soviet side wants to improve the relations, would it delineate the range of issues it would like to touch upon in the process of exchanging opinions? The German side said it was ready to do the same and asked who – from the Soviet side – was authorized to open the dialog. It was indicated that Germany would like the exchange of opinions to take place in Berlin since Hitler was personally supervising this direction of political activity. Finally, Ribbentrop was to leave for his summer residence shortly and hoped that at least Moscow would confirm that it was ready to open negotiations.

It was indicative of Berlin's impatience that Schulenburg was instructed to ask to be received by Molotov im-

mediately and to reproduce what Ribbentrop said to Astakhov. The meeting took place on August 3. According to the ambassador's report, Molotov appeared freer than usual but demonstrated no desire to make real efforts aimed at rapprochement. Responding to the ambassador's call to stop thinking of the past and to look into the possibilities that were still untapped, Molotov said that to do so explanations would have to be obtained concerning three issues: the Anti-Comintern Pact, Germany's support for Japan's aggression, and the attempts to push the USSR out of the international community. On August 4, Schulenburg sent a message to the German foreign ministry saying that the USSR was aiming for an agreement with Great Britain and France.

It should be noted that Astakhov received no instructions from Moscow prior to his contacts with Ribbentrop, Weizsacker, and Schnurre. Molotov only told his envoy that the right tactic was to listen to the counterparts' statements and to promise to relay them to Moscow. Three cases are known in which rather diffusely worded instructions concerning the improvement of the relations between the USSR and Germany were sent to the Soviet mission. Astakhov was told on August 4 that the continuation of the exchange was desirable but a lot would depend on the outcome of the Berlin talks on trade and credits as far as the issues invoked by Ribbentrop were concerned.

On August 4, Schnurre mentioned for the first time the secret protocols. Molotov immediately warned Astakhov that the offer of a secret protocol accompanying the signing of a trade deal was deemed inappropriate. Moscow considered it “uncomfortable” to create an impression that a trade agreement was concluded to improve the political relations. From its perspective, the move would be unlogical and premature.

Molotov sent another message in response to Astakhov's paper in which the diplomat pointed to the risks posed by German perfidy and also laid out his vision of what issues could be of interest to Berlin in the framework of the dialog: “We are interested in the list of issues presented in your paper as of August 8. Discussing them would take preparations and certain intermediate steps on the way from the trade and credits agreement to other themes. We prefer to hold talks on these themes in Moscow”.

Berlin could not imagine that officials dealing with a realm of politics as important as the standoff between two dictatorial states could make contacts without a sanction obtained from the higher level of the hierarchy. Astakhov's counterparts were convinced that whatever Astakhov said followed Moscow's blueprints. Instead, they should have wondered why A. Merekalov - the only diplomat in the Soviet mission who officially had the right to speak without referring to au-

thorizations - dropped out of the race at its very initial phase.

Documents show that the Soviet Union's spring and summer 1939 attempts to build a coalition of states opposing the aggressors were a waste of time. Given a minimal amount of good will, it should have been possible to reach an agreement with the “democracies” within a relatively short period of time. However, as H. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior in Roosevelt's Administration, wrote in his dairy, Great Britain hoped it would manage to make Russia and Germany clash while remaining unaffected by the conflict. The British government needed a pretense that talks with Moscow were underway to preclude a rapprochement between the USSR and Germany.

Chamberlain's government turned down the arguments of its army, navy, and air force commanders in favor of forming – jointly with the USSR - a serious front against the aggression. The Prime Minister was an uncompromising opponent of an alliance with the Soviets and said he would rather resign than endorse it. The consensus among the conservatives was that talks with Moscow had to be kept alive for a period of time and that Great Britain had to move on from exchanging notes to round-table discussions with the USSR to keep up the pretense that progress in the relations with it was made. Both Great Britain and France preferred to limit the interactions with the Soviet Union to the ambassadorial

level. The Soviet invitation to Halifax to take part in the negotiations personally was declined by Chamberlain who said his visiting Moscow would be “a humiliation”.

British ambassador W. Seeds assisted by W. Strang was given the task of taking as much time as possible and creating the impression that London was interested in reaching an agreement. On July 4 the British government confirmed that the objective of the negotiations with the USSR was to prevent it from establishing any ties with Germany. Halifax projected at the government meeting over the procedure of the “technical” military talks with Moscow that they would not be a major success. He explained that the negotiations would be long and that the obligations each side would exact from the other would be of purely general character. Thus, in his view, Great Britain was to get the most out of the situation that could not be avoided. The aforementioned J. Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, expressed the view even more cynically: he said Great Britain needed full freedom of maneuver to be able to tell the USSR it did not have to get involved in the war because it disagreed with the Russian interpretation of facts. In other words, if the plan to outsmart Russians failed and some agreement had to be signed, its formulation would be maximally indefinite. The conclusion to be drawn from Simon's statement was that in the framework of

the British model of the alliance London could, for example, avoid declaring war on Germany in the case of its aggression against Poland and merely watch the Soviet Union get confronted with all the hardships of the armed conflict.

What options were open to Moscow at the face of Chamberlain's political intrigues? What posture was it to adopt, knowing about the instructions given from the outset to Admiral Drax who came to Moscow for military talks after a long and deliberately slow journey by ship and an extensive tour of Leningrad museums? The instruction was that the British government had no intention to assume any specific and binding obligations and that the military agreement had to be worded in a maximally general fashion. Halifax told Drax to take as much time as possible. Practically, this meant making sure that the talks produced no result till September or early November, when natural conditions would render Hitler's program unsustainable regardless of the response of the countries opposing Germany¹².

The war was about to break out. On August 7 the Soviet leadership received a report saying that the deployment of the German forces and the concentration of resources for an attack against Poland would be completed by August 15-20 and an offensive would be likely starting August 25. A day or two later the same information became available to Great

Britain. The sinister warnings previously given to London by German embassy adviser T. Kordt and by Italian officials were materializing, and the time when games could be played was over.

According to Drax, he realized on his very first day in Moscow that the Soviets were keenly interested in an agreement with Great Britain. Chief of headquarters B. Shaposhnikov said at the August 15 meeting of the three delegations that the USSR was ready to confront the aggressor in Europe with 136 divisions, 5,000 heavy canons, 9,000-10,000 tanks, and 5,000-5,500 aircrafts. Drax sent a message to London saying the USSR was not going to employ the defensive tactic the British negotiating team was instructed to prescribe to it, but rather intended to attack in the case of war. Head of the French delegation Gen. J. Doumenc reported to Paris that the Soviet negotiators presented a plan of highly efficient support they were going to provide. In its turn, the French foreign ministry recommended Prime Minister E. Daladier to set the Soviet support, which it regarded as necessary, as the prerequisite for the British and French guarantees to Poland.

Why was it that a day before the above estimates - quite positive to the uninitiated – Drax confided to his colleagues that he felt their mission was over? The answer is simple – the “democracies” neither planned to di-

rectly engage Germany nor bothered to get in touch with Poland over its potential cooperation with the USSR and the opening of the Vilnius corridor in the north and the Galician one in the south, which the Red Army needed to engage the aggressor. A break till August 21 was declared on Drax's suggestion to let Great Britain and France discuss the military interactions theme with Poland.

On August 19, Gen. F. Musse and British military envoy to Warsaw spent three hours in a polemic with Polish chief of staff Stakhevitz who kept swearing at the Soviet Union and Stalin and obviously had nothing else to say. The account of the conversation led the French foreign ministry to present Beck with an ultimatum. After that, in the afternoon of August 23, Warsaw authorized chief of the French military mission in Moscow Gen. J. Doumenc to tell K. Voroshilov Poland realized that the cooperation between Poland and the USSR on terms to be specified in finer detail was not ruled out (or was possible) in the case of a German aggression. The message reached the French Embassy in Moscow in the morning of August 24 when the Non-Aggression Pact between the USSR and Germany had already been signed.

What could be the algorithm of coordination between the three countries under the purely hypothetic scenario that Poland assessed the situation soberly and accepted the Soviet

Union's offer of help?

Soviet military planners intended to confront the aggressor with a powerful group of forces, roughly at the level of 70-100% of what could be contributed by Great Britain and France. The armies of the three countries had to be combat-ready 15-16 days after the declaration of mobilization. What if Great Britain sent no forces whatsoever and avoided engaging the aggressor for 1-3 months?

Suppose that Great Britain and France failed to avoid specifying in the agreement text the numbers of military forces as well as the regions and timetables of their dispatch. How would they be fulfilling the obligations considering that they never took any measures to prepare for the mission? No operative and strategic planning of the interaction with the Red Army accompanied the Moscow negotiations – the “democracies” did not rule out the possibility of fighting a “strange war” in the east parallel to an armed conflict between the Soviet Union and Germany. Did London and Paris have any difficulty grasping that in the summer of 1939 Hitler's top priority was to prevent the three countries from forming a military alliance rather than to sign a non-aggression pact with the USSR? Hitler used to say that he would be able to rout Poland without risking to trigger a conflict with the West as long as Great Britain and France had no treaty with Moscow. Launching the offensive in the east he

even had no ready operative plans for a campaign in the west.

On August 9 Ribbentrop passed to Italian ambassador Attolico a reply to Mussolini's letter by which he informed Germany that Italy was unprepared for war. The reply containing Hitler's creed in a condensed form said:

- The decision to attack Poland was irreversible;
- The conflict in Poland would remain local as Great Britain and France would not dare to take action against the axis countries;
- In case they did support Poland militarily, the axis would hardly ever get a better chance to score with them;
- Due to the superiority of the axis, the war – even in case it grew wider in scope – would still be short.

The exchange of opinions between Germany and the Soviet Union became a reality on August 15, but at the time in the form of a dialog rather than of negotiations. Moscow remained undecided despite the ample evidence showing that Great Britain and France were not ready to confront the aggressor jointly with the USSR. Moreover, it followed from the correspondence intercepted by the Soviet intelligence service that the West was bearing in mind a replay of the Munich Agreement – a deal excluding the USSR and hostile to it in character.

Like H. Wilson, British ambassador to Berlin H. Henderson worked tirelessly in the name of the Anglo-German accord. Swiss, Swedish, and US envoys dutifully contributed to the cause. According to Burckhardt's papers, on August 11 Hitler said he was ready to meet a British politician of "the Halifax format" immediately and pointed to Marshal Ironside as a potential negotiating partner. The Nazi leader asked Burckhardt to relay the information to London.

It must be admitted that the Soviet Union's dropping the role of Germany's adversary – regardless of the reasons behind it – made Poland a much easier target for Hitler. At the same time, the notion that Hitler would become an angel if there was no Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact is simply ridiculous. The impression the trilateral talks in Moscow were supposed to create for the rest of the world was that of total uncertainty. Both Hitler and Chamberlain employed the delaying tactic with days or weeks at stake. Each of them had his own reasons to favor uncertainty. The British Prime Minister hoped that roads would become impenetrable in the fall and thus London would get a chance to settle its "family dispute" with Berlin.

Hitler had his own motivations to be content with the British delaying tactic. The endless trilateral talks made it impossible for Great Britain, France, and the USSR to take efficient meas-

ures at the crucial opening phase of the armed conflict. If debates in Moscow lasted till September 1, by the key date the three powers would have been armed with a plan requiring 15-16 days to ready their forces for combat. Later the negotiators who evidently forgot that the events were unfolding in the fast-paced XX century were surprised to realize that the collapse of Poland took only 17-18 days.

Furthermore, the "democracies" signing the military convention with the USSR and even Great Britain's declaring war on Germany would not have made the western part of the conflict any less "strange". In any case, Great Britain and France would not have been eager to seriously engage the German forces and those would be equally willing to avoid fighting in the west. The Soviet Union would have faced a totally different reality. Inspired by the easy victory the German army would have reached a border much less suited for the Soviet defense than the one from which Russia had been attacked by Pilsudski in 1921 and would be attacked by the Nazi in 1941.

As a part of the realization of Fall Weiss, Germany was to gain control over the territories of Lithuania and Latvia "up to the borders of former Courland". Hitler confirmed during the May 23 meeting with army commanders that he was determined "to resolve the Baltic problem". A legal pretext for the offensive was formu-

lated in advance – Germany's non-aggression pacts with Estonia and Lithuania included a secret clause by which the two republics had to implement “security measures” against the Soviet Union as agreed with Berlin and advised by it. The Estonian and Lithuanian governments stated in the pacts that the USSR was the only country posing a military threat and that the politics of real neutrality made them seek protection against it. Accordingly, Germany was supposed to help them in the cases where their own potentials were insufficient. The stated objective was to prevent the Baltic region from being converted into a foothold for an offensive launched by other countries and to make arrangements for the region's republics to counter attempts to encircle them until the German forces arrived¹³.

Consequently, for the Soviet Union entering into an alliance with Great Britain, France, and Poland would have entailed problems bred not only by its own insufficient readiness to fight Germany, but also by the above arrangements.

Suppose Hitler did not take further risks and the German forces stopped by the Soviet border. It would nevertheless be likely that Japan would intensify its efforts to put into practice the plan of synchronizing the aggression against the Soviet Union in the east with that in the west. Quite possibly, extremists would have managed to tame the influence of Japan's foreign

minister H. Arita, an opponent of an overly aggressive anti-Soviet course, over the country's foreign politics, and to induce a shift in the views of the naval command which so far used to focus on the southern direction. Japan's motivation would not have been limited to avenging the Khalkhin Gol defeat. Documentary evidence suggests that gaining control over China was regarded by Japanese strategists as an intermediate step in the fight with the USSR. Tokyo was actively trying to get both Great Britain and the US involved in the anti-Soviet venture. On June 30, 1939 Roosevelt told Soviet envoy Umansky that Japan offered him to share the natural riches of Siberia – from the Pacific coast almost to Lake Baikal – as a program for the future.

Even the signing of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact did not put the final dot in the story of the appeasement. Great Britain was going to make the Soviet Union face new problems. Chamberlain said at the August 26 governmental meeting that if Great Britain did leave Hitler alone in his sphere (East Europe), he would leave it alone as well. It was a matter of the price to pay, principles notwithstanding.

The Soviet leader's priority was to avoid facing the aggressor – or two aggressors – alone and to delay the moment of the final reckoning. His 1937-1938 repressions left the Red Army with an acute shortage of skilled

commanders. Three of the country's five marshals, 11 deputy commissars of defense, 75 of the 80 members of the Supreme Military Council, 14 of the 16 army commanders, 60 of the 67 corps commanders, 136 of the 199 division commanders, and 221 of the 397 brigade commanders had been executed. As a result, there was almost nobody left to lead the army.

In the early August Moscow was already weighing the option of something similar to the 1926 Berlin Treaty as an alternative to inconclusively worded deals with Great Britain and France. It is probably true that the verbiage at the Moscow talks reflected to an extent the negotiators' lack of confidence in the sincerity of partners and the ability of their countries' leaders to produce an actual result. The imitation of activity was meant to impress Germany, the fourth player invisibly present at the negotiating table.

What would have happened in case Stalin turned down Hitler's persistent requests to urgently receive Ribbentrop in Moscow? Hitler's letter was handed over to Molotov by Schulenburg at 3 pm on August 21, 1939. The German ambassador had Stalin's reply by 5 pm the same day. One can only guess why afterwards it took some 9 hours to deliver the 14 lines of the text from Stalin's letter to Berlin. Was the delay induced deliberately and if it was, by whom?

No later than on August 22 Hitler was

informed that Goring had been invited to meet Chamberlain and Halifax. The chief of the British intelligence was personally charged with organizing the contact so as to avoid publicity. On August 23 London played the trump card - it offered to hold a four-lateral summit where all disputes could be settled without Poland and the USSR. The offer delivered via an unofficial channel was backed by a message from Chamberlain in which he literally begged Hitler not to take irreversible steps.

A Lockheed-12a of the British secret service which was to deliver Goring to a secret meeting with Chamberlain and Hitler's personal Junkers which was made available to Ribbentrop to fly to Moscow waited at the Tempelhof airport starting August 21. The future course - that of Europe and the whole world - depended on which of the two planes was to take off.

Naturally, there was no guarantee that the sides would reach an agreement during the talks in Moscow. En route to Moscow, Ribbentrop's plane came under fire from the Soviet air defense near Velikiye Luki but remained unharmed. Critics of the Pact should admit that the decision to attack Poland was made and the date for the offensive (initially August 26) was set by Berlin prior to Ribbentrop's meeting with Stalin and Molotov and to the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact with all of its addenda. The widespread errors in the chronology of the

story are not random – they are introduced deliberately and replicated in quantities to ensure the acceptance of the distorted version of the events.

Was the Soviet Union choosing the smaller of the two evils in 1939? At least after the talks between Gen. Musse and Stachiewicz the Moscow talks obviously stood no chance. Could the prolongation of the 1926 Berlin Treaty do instead of the Non-Aggression Pact? Theoretically, it could, though there is nothing wrong with the new treaty by which signatories agree that there should be no place for violence in their relations.

Definitely, Moscow's position could be more moral if there was a clause in the August 23 Treaty saying the signatories would be no longer bound by the obligations assumed in case one of them launched an aggression against a third-party country. In that epoch, however, treaties without likewise provisions – such as, for example, the September 30, 1938 Anglo-German declaration were routine and were not regarded as immoral.

The Bolsheviks' 1917 revelations about various state secrets caused a shock across the world, but that is a matter of the past. Secret addenda (protocols, additional clauses, letters) to international treaties remain ordinary practice. Polish, Lithuanian, and Estonian treaties with Germany, not to mention the Italian and Japanese ones, exemplify the trend. It was also

planned that the convention on mutual aid between Great Britain, France, and the USSR would include a protocol not open to the public.

Therefore, neither in terms of the method using which it was compiled, nor in terms of its content the secret protocol to the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact constituted a departure from the international law. The Act passed by the 1988 USSR Congress of People's Deputies described it as “a breach of Lenin's principles in the Soviet international politics”, but that's something completely different.

Generally, defining spheres of influence is not necessarily an oppressive act. It can be interpreted as setting a border crossing which renders the entire package of agreements invalid. Strictly speaking, taking Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia out of the sphere of German supervision as it was done in August-September, 1939 did not infringe upon their independence. The transformations which took place in 1940 could not be predicted at the time the protocols were compiled and had nothing to do with them.

Reconstructing the course of Ribbentrop's August 23-24 negotiations with Stalin and Molotov is an uphill task. At the moment, the best work on the subject belongs to Prof. Ingeborg Fleischhauer, but a lot is still to be done. The widespread approach based on rethinking history in line with the currently dominant political philoso-

phy is clearly unproductive. In the past, leveling criticism at the ideological opponents used to be an end in itself. One might think that things have changed these days, but “democrats” still prefer to keep archives sealed. Obviously, the documents stored in them can be a source of major embarrassment even decades after they were written.

An unbiased scholar can draw certain conclusions from Molotov's August 31, 1939 speech at the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet. The chief of the Soviet diplomacy said: “The decision to sign the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany was made after the military talks with Great Britain and France ended in a stalemate. Since the talks showed that there was no hope of signing a mutual assistance pact, we had no other choice but to look into other possibilities of maintaining peace and eliminating the threat of war between Germany and the USSR”. Molotov's interpretation of the August 23 deal was that the USSR was under no obligation to get involved in a war against Germany on Great Britain's side or against Great Britain on Germany's side.

From the standpoint of the practice of the international relations, it is rather untypical to explain opting for one partner by another one's shortcomings or the feasibility of a particular act – by the failure to reach an optimal agreement on a different track. Was it Molotov's problem with self-express-

sion or was it a message to London and Paris saying they had to change their attitudes to get another type of results?

It usually evades observers that the USSR still tried to keep the dialog with London and Paris alive after the signing of the Pact with Germany. Molotov said to French ambassador Nadjiar: “The non-aggression treaty with Germany is not incompatible with an alliance based on mutual aid between Great Britain, France, and the USSR”, but Moscow's signals urging the “democracies” not to burn the bridges remained unheard. London and Paris demonstratively ignored their former negotiating partner while the British conservatives' consensus-searching with the Nazi clearly gathered momentum.

Hitler responded to the British call not to take irreversible steps with an offer, passed via Henderson, to form a bloc on the following terms:

- Germany was to get back Danzig and the Polish corridor;
- Germany was to guarantee Poland's new borders;
- An agreement on former German colonies had to be reached;
- Germany's western borders had to be regarded as inviolable;
- The arms race had to be curbed.

In return, Berlin would have promised to protect the British Empire against

any external threats.

The above is a curious mixture of Berlin's claims to Poland aired in October, 1938-January, 1939, and the British ideas fed to Hitler via Wilson in July-August, 1939. Hitler added a note to the proposal indicating that Great Britain's declaring "a demonstrative war" for the sake of prestige would not be a major problem provided that the key aspects of the future reconciliation were agreed in advance.

Hitler contacted Mussolini upon meeting Henderson. The discussion with the Italian dictator left him in a good mood and at 3:02 p.m. he ordered to activate Fall Weiss. The offensive against Poland was to be launched at sunrise on August 26, but things did not go as planned. The Italian embassy informed Berlin that Rome was not ready for a war. At 5:30 pm the French ambassador in Berlin issued the warning that his country would fulfill its obligations to Poland. At about 6:00 pm BBC broadcast that the Anglo-Polish alliance treaty was enacted. At the moment Hitler was unaware that the information about Italy's not joining the attack against Poland was passed to London and Paris earlier than to Berlin.

German chief of staff Gen. Halder wrote in his diary that Hitler was confused and there was some hope to get the demands declined by Poland fulfilled via negotiations with Great Britain. In the meantime, Keitel was

ordered to stop the dispatch of the German forces to the positions specified by Fall Weiss and to present the movement of the troops as exercise.

On August 26 Hitler sent an offer of a full alliance to London with Swedish citizen Birger Dahlerus. The idea was that London could help Germany to regain Danzig and the Polish corridor and Germany could pledge not to support any countries – Italy, Japan, or the USSR – in their activities hostile to Great Britain. In the past, Wilson used the possibility of Great Britain's annulling the guarantees it had extended to Poland and other European countries to lure Hitler. Now the Nazi leader put at stake all his promises to Rome and Tokyo, as well as the Pact with Moscow which had just been inked. The mediator delivered the reply on the night of August 28. The British side expressed interest in finding a solution but supplied no details concerning its form and content. On August 27 Chamberlain told the government he made it clear to Dahlerus: there was a chance Poland would agree to part with Danzig, though the Prime Minister had not consulted Warsaw.

At 10:30 pm ambassador Henderson told Hitler that the British Prime Minister shared Hitler's wish to make friendship the basis of the relations between Great Britain and Germany and was ready to accept his August 25 offer with some additions which would have to be discussed. The talks

could be organized promptly and with a sincere wish to reach an agreement provided that Germany and Poland settled their dispute peacefully. Handing the letter over to Chamberlain, Henderson said that the Prime Minister could bring his policy to completion, but only provided that Hitler was open to cooperation. Hitler listened inattentively. Several hours earlier he made up his mind that the invasion of Poland would take place on September 1. Henderson maintained at the August 26 meeting of the British government that the real worth of London's guarantees to Poland was that they made it possible for Warsaw to settle the dispute with Berlin. On August 30 – when Germany had dispatched 46 divisions to the starting positions for an offensive against Poland – Halifax said the concentration of troops was no argument against further talks with the German government.

Washington concluded already in late July that Chamberlain's plans made the alliance between Russia, Great Britain, and France – the idea Roosevelt seemed to like, judging by his spoken message to Molotov – totally impossible. Washington knew no less than Great Britain about the rapprochement between the USSR and Germany. In any case, it was the first to learn about the secret protocols in the framework of the August Non-Aggression Pact. Having received the information about the division of the spheres of influence from H. Her-

warth, an employee of the German embassy to Moscow, the US President sent addresses to the King of Italy (August 23), Hitler (August 24 and 26), and Poland (August 25). The content of the addresses had a lot in common with the US arguments invoked a year earlier to promote the Munich deal. On September 1 Roosevelt called Hitler to fight with moderation, preserving the lives of the civilian population.

The information about Hitler's impression from the outbursts of the US activity still has not surfaced. Quite possibly, they convinced Hitler to go easy on Great Britain and France during the initial phase of the war (Hitler's Directive #2 of September 3, 1939).

On September 2 Wilson told the German embassy on the Prime Minister's order that Germany could get what it wanted in case it stopped the attack against Poland. Then London was ready to forget about the past and open negotiations. Chamberlain did not plan to use force against Germany. The economic pressure was supposed to make Berlin revert to the forming of the “new Europe” with Great Britain and Germany as its pillars. In the November 5, 1939 letter to Roosevelt, Chamberlain expressed his confidence that the war would be over soon, and not because Germany would be defeated but because Berlin would realize the economic costs of war.

London's attempts to talk to Hitler did not stop him. What the Nazi leader needed was not a political success but a military triumph, and the Lebensraum could only be conquered. For that, Hitler had to seize the initiative. Perhaps, Great Britain could expect to be treated better than others as “a racially close nation”.

It was not easy for Chamberlain and Halifax to admit that both their own politics and the entire British post-World War I strategy had crashed. Under pressure from the House of Commons, the Prime Minister declared war on Germany. The same was immediately done by Paris. Thus the conflict between Germany and Poland was evolving into a world war.

Japan received the first trustworthy report about the reset of the Soviet-German relations in the evening of August 21 during a phone conversation between Ribbentrop and ambassador Osima. The Japanese leadership, which ascribed the highest priority to its treaties with Germany, was really shocked. The whole Anti-Comintern architecture was jeopardized, and Tokyo's trust in the partnership with Germany was undermined. Hiranuma's government resigned and Japan's massive aggression against the USSR was postponed indefinitely. On September 16 Japan officially notified the USSR that its military offensive in Mongolia was frozen.

N. Starikov discerns a certain synchro-

nism between the above date and September 17 – the date when the Soviet forces entered West Ukraine and Belarus¹⁴. Arguments can indeed be found to support the view. Moscow is known to have declined several times and under various pretexts to dispatch its troops to the separation line as suggested by Germany (on September 3, 8, and 14). Soviet representatives stressed that the involvement of the Red Army forces was motivated by political, not military regards¹⁵.

The latter circumstance was important. During the week critical in terms of the future relations – September 17–24 – Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull made up their minds not to regard the crossing of the eastern Polish border defined by the 1921 Peace Treaty of Riga by the Soviet forces as an act of war. Due to long-term considerations, the arms and military supplies embargo required by the law on neutrality was not imposed on the Soviet Union. Starting with September 5 such sanctions were imposed on Germany (on paper) and formally on Great Britain and France (suspended orders).

It took London and Paris a while to formulate their interpretation of the Polish border crossing by the Red Army in 1922. The correction of the August 23 delineation of the spheres of influence, which was carried out in a rush, helped them to come up with a more balanced judgment on the issue. The new secret protocol dated September 28 set the border to coincide with

the Curzon Line charted in December, 1919 by the Entente Supreme Council as Poland's eastern frontier.

Having ratified at 11:55 pm the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, the USSR avoided being drawn into a total disaster. The new military-political landscape, however, also promised

no good news to Moscow even in the mid-term. The residual freedom of maneuver evaporated before it could generate seizable benefits, and the only practical result left to the Soviet Union was the delay which it needed desperately to get prepared for the imminent war.

References

1. US Secretary of State C. Hull's testament is to remember that Russians with their heroic struggle saved the allies from a disgraceful separate peace with Germany that could become a prologue to three decades of war. "Since no particular event or date were referred to in the statement, apparently the idea of a separate deal was in the air and did not materialize solely due to the stability of the Nazi "new order" and the failure of the attempts on Hitler's life."
2. Only US pilots served in the Kosciuszko Escadrille under the command of Cedric Fauntleroy.
3. N. Starikov. Who Forced Hitler to Attack Stalin. Peter Publishers, 2008, p. 235-236 (in Russian).
4. The information supplied in E. Hanfstaengl's Hitler, My Friend and Hitler: The Missing Years is confirmed by other sources.
5. Chancellor Papen dispensed favors to Herriot for the waiver of the reparations with the possibility of concluding "an anti-communist treaty", the cooperation between the army staffs, the creation of the customs union, etc.
6. In September, 1930 a group of Japanese military officers formed a secret "Cherry Bloom Society". Its members and patrons aimed for the military dictatorship in Japan and the broadening of the aggression which at its initial phase targeted China. The coup they planned to organize on March 12, 1931 became unnecessary due to the advent of the new government in which key posts were held by Gen. Minami and his supporters linked to the extremists.
7. The Treaty signed on January 6, 1922 by the US, Great Britain, Japan, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, and China obliged the signatories to respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of China provided that equal opportunities in the spheres of trade and industry were opened in the country to all nations.
8. For details, see: S.V. Morozov, On Japan's Role in Hitler's and Pilsudski's Eastern Plans. An abridged version was published in International Life, Issues 1-2, 2007.
9. Ingeborg Fleischhauer. Der Pakt: Hitler, Stalin Und Die Initiative Der Deutschen Diplomatie 1938-1939
10. Celowski B. Das Muenchener Abkommen. Stuttgart. 1958. S. 32
11. S.V. Morozov outlines significant details of the Polish position in "Relations Between Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1933-1939". Moscow State University Publishers, Moscow, 2004.
12. The above information about London's approach to the negotiations with the USSR is borrowed from: the protocols of meetings of the British government and the documents obtained by the Soviet intelligence service.
13. Ingeborg Fleischhauer. Der Pakt: Hitler, Stalin Und Die Initiative Der Deutschen Diplomatie 1938-1939
14. N. Starikov. Ibid., p. 2294-295
15. One of the formulations was: "Due to the advancement of the German army, we are forced to state that Poland is collapsing and the USSR has to come to the rescue of the Belorussians and Ukrainians threatened by Germany". The version left Ribbentrop outraged.

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