

ВТОРАЯ МИРОВАЯ ВОЙНА WORLD WAR II

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Наблюдая за Гитлером и Сталиным: отношение Британии к союзу с СССР (январь — июнь 1941 г.)

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Статья посвящена представлениям правительства Соединенного Королевства и СССР об антигитлеровской коалиции в преддверии операции «Барбаросса». Британские дипломаты, включая министра иностранных дел Э. Идена и посла Британии в СССР сэра С. Криппса, оценивали степень, в какой Советское правительство было привержено Договору о ненападении с Германией и насколько И. Сталин был готов уступать А. Гитлеру, тем самым пытаясь предотвратить вооруженный конфликт с Третьим Рейхом. Соответственно, вслед за поражением Франции от Германии летом 1940 года Британия была единственной страной, которая противостояла мощи нацистской Германии. Правительство Британии все больше обращало свои устремления к СССР как средству спасения, хотя многие британские официальные лица традиционно относились к Советскому Союзу с чувством серьезного беспокойства. Однако британские дипломаты сообщали, даже сокрушались, что Советское правительство настолько опасалось войны с Германией, вкупе с глубоким недоверием Сталина к Британии, что надежды на отказ Москвы от Договора о ненападении с Германией и объединение сил с Лондоном в антигитлеровской коалиции были слабыми.

Ключевые слова: Договор о ненападении, Балканы, Турция, Иран, страны Прибалтики, США, Иосиф Сталин, Адольф Гитлер, Энтони Иден, Страффорд Криппс, Иван Майский, Вермахт, Красная армия, СССР, Баку, антинацистская коалиция, антигитлеровская коалиция

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One Eye on Hitler, the Other Eye on Stalin: How Britain Explored a British-Soviet Alliance from January to June of 1941

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Abstract: This essay examines how the British Government, in the lead-up to Operation Barbarossa, perceived the notion of an anti-German coalition comprising Britain and the Soviet Union British diplomats, including Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Ambassador Sir Stafford Cripps, assessed the extent to which the Soviet Government was committed to its Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany and how far Josef Stalin was prepared to appease Adolf Hitler and thereby prevent a military conflict with the Third Reich. As a consequence, following the fall of France to the Germans in the summer of 1940, of Britain perilously standing alone against the might of Nazi Germany, Whitehall looked increasingly to the USSR, a country which many British officials traditionally harboured feelings of grave disquiet over, as a means of salvation. However, British diplomats reported, indeed, lamented, that such was the fear felt by the Soviet Government of a war with Germany, together with Stalin's ingrained distrust of Britain, that the chances of Moscow abandoning its Non-Aggression Treaty with Berlin and joining forces with London in an anti-Hitler coalition were negligible.

Keywords: Non-Aggression Treaty, Balkans, Turkey, Iran, Baltic States, America, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Anthony Eden, Stafford Cripps, Ivan Maisky, Wehrmacht, Red Army, Soviet frontier, Baku, anti-Nazi coalition, anti-Hitler coalition.

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Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on 22 June, 1941, signified the commencement of the most abominable war of conquest and enslavement that mankind has ever witnessed. Soviet lands from the western borders of the USSR to the Ural Mountains were to be colonised by German settlers and made racially pure, in pursuit of the central National Socialist ideological tenet of *Lebensraum*. It must be said, though, that the concept of German colonisation of not only Russian lands but also of other Eastern European lands preceded what Adolf Hitler had written in *Mein Kampf*; such a view had first been proclaimed in Imperial Germany. The Soviet populations in the areas which Hitler had envisaged to be part of a Greater Germany were to be treated as slaves, whilst, simultaneously, systematically exterminated. Over the course of time, there would be no trace of the hated Slav culture in the newly acquired Soviet lands; instead, the lands would serve as proof of the racial supremacy of the German *Herrenvolk*.

On the 80th anniversary of Operation Barbarossa, a campaign that was to decide the outcome of the war in Europe, and also determine the fate of Hitler's crusade for a German-colonised European Russia, attention should be directed to the country in Europe which, up until the German invasion of the Soviet Union, was the sole one in defying the Third Reich: Great Britain.

With the European continent, save for the neutral countries of Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey, under either occupation of the Wehrmacht or part of the Axis or in collaboration with Berlin, and with the Soviet Union's relations with Germany governed by the Non-Aggression Treaty of 1939, Britain was in a perilous position, facing the power and wrath of Nazi Germany alone.

With no realistic prospect in sight of British arms, by themselves, being able to defeat those of the Third Reich, Whitehall, from 1941 onwards, increasingly looked to the USSR as a possible means of salvation, though this consideration was accompanied with feelings of trepidation, stemming from a profound aversion to communism, combined with inherent suspicions of Russia, which were both ingrained in the British official mind.

In the period following the signing of the Non-Aggression Treaty between Berlin and Moscow there was considerable speculation in Whitehall as to whether the USSR was a potential enemy to Britain, especially as a consequence of the Red Army's campaign in eastern Poland, in September of 1939 (two weeks after the German invasion of the country), and the Soviet Union's war with Finland, from November of 1939 to March of 1940. Still, by the beginning of 1941, one of the main areas of topics under discussion amongst British officials was how committed the Soviet Union was to its agreement with Germany and whether Josef Stalin could be persuaded to join an anti-Hitler coalition with Britain.

Evaluation of USSR-Germany relations in the documents of the UK Embassy in Moscow

In a telegram to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, dated 26 January, 1941, the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Stafford Cripps, noted how, in his opinion, the economic and border agreements signed earlier on in January between the Soviet and German governments (which, amongst others, extended the German-Soviet Commercial agreement until August of 1942, together with having settled the status of the newly-incorporated Baltic States into the USSR) marked a “determination” by the Soviet Union to “avoid any armed conflict with Germany at almost any price.”¹ Specifically regarding the Baltic States, Cripps commented on how the Soviet Government’s “settlement of all outstanding questions” relating to this region was a “major success for Russian diplomacy”: Moscow had “avoided the danger of any “incidents” in that area and stabilised vis-à-vis Germany their occupation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, in such a manner that it will be almost impossible for Germany in the future to make any trouble for this country [USSR] over relationships arising in these areas.” Returning to the economic agreement between Moscow and Berlin, the British ambassador opined that the Russians can “temporarily appease the German menace and comply with German economic requirements, or if they fear a too early termination of the war before the combatants are sufficiently enfeebled they can - if now they think the British chances good - delay the end of the war until both sides are sufficiently weakened.” As regards any affinity felt by the Soviet Government to Germany, Cripps dispelled any such notion by contending that: “The truth is both Russia and Germany would each like to see the other as heavily engaged as possible in difficulties with other countries, so that each could feel so much the safer against any attack by the other.” Cripps’ view that the USSR and Germany were not genuine allies, and that Moscow had consented to the non-aggression pact with Germany out of necessity, was a view shared by a number of other British diplomats, though by no means all. Such an opinion was more evident in the Northern Department, a branch within the Foreign Office responsible for accumulating and analysing information on the Soviet Union, including the decision-making process of the Soviet Government.²

The view that the Soviet Union was determined to avert a military confrontation with Germany was again expressed during a meeting of ministers, including Eden, held at the Foreign Office on 28 January 1941. There the opinion was put forward that the policy of the Soviet Government

¹ FO 954/24B/270: 26 January 1941. The National Archives. Telegram from Stafford Cripps, British Ambassador in Moscow, to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on the Soviet Union's relations with Germany, Finland, the Balkans, Romania, Iran, the Far East, and Great Britain.

² FO 371 24843/N 3538: 14 March 1940, memorandum by Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary in the Northern Department.

was “governed by fear”, in that the USSR was “unlikely to do anything that might lead to an open clash with Germany”³. It is the case that the notion Stalin was deeply fearful of Germany, especially as a consequence of the Soviet leader having been left aghast at the speed in which the Wehrmacht had conquered Poland and Western Europe, was regarded by Whitehall as the key factor in preventing a British-Soviet military alliance against Hitler from materialising.

A somewhat different opinion, to that of Cripps’, on the Soviet Government’s relationship with its German counterpart, was held by the Greek Ambassador in Moscow, whose views were conveyed to R.A. Butler, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, by the Greek Ambassador in London. Butler noted how the ambassador in Moscow believed that tension was rising between the Soviet Union and Germany, and he corroborated his view by citing how the USSR had deployed as many as 130 of its ground divisions, together with 31 air force divisions, on the German frontier, which were opposed by between 80 and 90 Wehrmacht concentrations.⁴ The Greek ambassador in Moscow was of the view that: “Hitler would probably at some date strike against the USSR. The USSR must remain to Germany a potential enemy in view of her armed strength. Germany would not like to face the next winter with the strength of the Soviet Union undiminished. It was therefore possible that, if the Germans met with strong resistance in the British Isles, they would attempt to polish off the Russian enemy before the winter and thus not leave till next year their two great enemies, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, with their strength unimpaired.” Butler reported, however, that the Greek Ambassador in London rejected the diagnosis of his colleague in Moscow, arguing that “menacing concentrations” on either side of the Soviet-German border were “more likely to be a prelude to further bargaining, and a new compact between the two powers, than to indicate an intention to enter upon hostilities.” That assertion was met with agreement from Butler, who said that the British Government “on the whole” was of the same opinion, though Butler gave a caveat: “The possibility of Germany falling upon the Soviet Union following upon a failure against the British Isles was not to be underestimated.”⁵

A particularly insightful document detailing the appraisal of Soviet-German relations by the British Embassy in Moscow centred on a letter from Cripps to Eden, dated 27 May 1941. The British ambassador began by saying that “we are completely in the dark here so far as any facts are concerned and that we have nothing really tangible by which to judge the progress...of the situation.”⁶ Perhaps, by his words, Cripps was lamenting, in a veiled manner, a failure by British intelligence to gather information, which would have thrown more light on the inner workings of the Moscow-Berlin relationship. In any case, the ambassador went on to express his view on Stalin’s mindset, something which constituted a mystery for many in Whitehall, though imperative for the purposes of determining whether the Soviet leader could, in certain circumstances, break from his pact with Hitler and enter the war on the side of Britain. Cripps wrote that the Soviet leader is not “affected by any pro-German or pro-anything feeling except for pro-Soviet and pro-Stalin.” He added that: “He is no more friendly or antagonistic to us than to Germany and he will always use any country that he can to attain his objective which is to keep out of the war as long as he can without jeopardising his regime or Soviet forces in doing so.”⁷ Such an opinion on Stalin was, in the early months of 1941, the prevalent one in Whitehall, signifying how previous views of the Soviet leader having found common cause with Hitler and how he was intent on carving up Europe with the Germans (following the conclusion of the non-aggression

³ CAB 65/57/14: 28 January 1941, meeting of ministers at the Foreign Office concerning, in part, Russian-German relations.

⁴ FO 954/11A/45: 18 March 1941, minute by R.A. Butler, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, from his conversation with the Greek Ambassador in London.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ FO 954/24B/304: 27 May 1941, letter from Cripps to Eden on the attitude of Stalin towards Britain and Germany.

⁷ Ibid.

agreement between Moscow and Berlin), was now a faint, though not totally dispelled, memory within the British Government. Cripps contended that there were two principal factors, which would determine whether Stalin might feel inclined to enter the war against Hitler. First, the “actual military situation and his calculation” of German power, Britain’s powers of resistance, and the strategic implications for a German attack on the USSR; and second, an appraisal of how appeasement of Berlin could endanger the future preparedness of the Soviet Union.⁸ In view of Cripps’ analysis, it can be persuasively argued that Whitehall was of the opinion that nothing short of a German invasion of the USSR would bring the Soviet Government into conflict with Hitler because (as British officials would have realised) it would have been painstakingly clear to Stalin and the rest of the Soviet leadership that German power, by May of 1941, had grown inordinately following on from Germany’s recent conquering of Yugoslavia and Greece. Furthermore, the rapid and clinical defeat inflicted on the British Army in Greece by the Wehrmacht would not have been lost on Stalin vis-à-vis Britain’s long-term ability to successfully resist the Third Reich and assist the USSR if it was engaged in a war with Germany.

Issues relating to a possible German attack on the USSR and potential UK aid to Russia in talks between Eden and Maisky

During the month of June 1941, there was a flurry of meetings between Eden and the Soviet Ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, an anglophile which made him, in Whitehall’s eyes, someone whose word and intentions were considerably more reliable than those of his predecessors who had occupied the chief Soviet diplomatic position in Kensington Palace Gardens.

In one such meeting, on 10 June, Maisky informed Eden that, contrary to the content of the recent Radio Rome statement, there was “no military alliance” in existence between Germany and the USSR, and nor was one “contemplated”⁹. The Soviet ambassador went further and said how the Soviet and German governments were not engaged in any new political or economic agreements with one another. Upon Eden expressing a degree of surprise over the absence of any new economic negotiations in progress, Maisky said that whilst there might be “ordinary informal talks” about economic matters, there were no “large-scale negotiations for a comprehensive economic agreement.”¹⁰ Such information would have, undoubtedly, pleased the British Government as it meant that whilst there was no indication to suggest that the USSR would terminate its Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany, at the same time the relationship between Moscow and Berlin was not strengthening.

The conversation between Eden and Maisky then turned to the matter of German concentrations of troops and equipment on the Soviet frontier. The Soviet ambassador commented that his government felt “no anxiety” about those concentrations, to which the British foreign secretary responded by saying that if Germany and the USSR were to become embroiled in military hostilities with one another, then Britain would be “prepared to take what counteraction” lay in British air power by attacking “German-occupied territories in the West.” Upon hearing that comment, Maisky “nodded but made no comment.”¹¹ Here the Soviet ambassador was extremely careful to not give any impression to Eden that such offers from the British Government had been received with any degree of interest by the Soviet Government, out of fear that this could somehow be leaked and become known to Berlin thereby encouraging Germany to take military action against the USSR.

By the middle of June of 1941, the flow of reports coming into Whitehall about Wehrmacht

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ FO 954/24B/317: 10 June 1941, telegram from Eden to Lacy Baggallay, Counsellor of the British Embassy in Moscow.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

movements all along the Soviet border had increased considerably. Alarmed by that news, Eden, on 13 June, held a meeting with Maisky, who was, rather interestingly, accompanied by his Counsellor. Reports on how German military movements on the USSR's border had risen dramatically over the preceding 48 hours were discussed by the two officials. The foreign secretary explained that whilst he did not want to "prophecy" over the reason for those deployments, he wished to convey "certain obvious possibilities" about them.¹² He said: "They might be for the purpose of a war of nerves or they might be for the purpose of an attack on Russia. We did not know but HM Government were bound to consider, in the light of these very formidable concentrations, the possibility of conflict between Germany and Russia, and we thought it right to tell the Soviet Government of certain action we could take in such an eventuality, although we fully appreciated that the Soviet Government might think the eventuality most remote." Should hostilities break out between Germany and the USSR, Britain, Eden added, "should" be prepared to despatch a military mission, comprising personnel from all three services, to the Soviet Union "not because we pretended to any superiority in the art of war over Russian commanders but because it would be composed of officers who had had the most recent experience in actual conflict with the German forces. We thought that their experience would be useful."¹³ That Eden felt the need to qualify his message about the possible deployment, to the USSR, of a British military mission for practical usefulness, and not out of a sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority, was, in part, a result of how Whitehall was of the opinion that Russians suffered from an inferiority complex, especially when in front of Westerners. Hence the British Government, at a time when it was perilously isolated in Europe, did not want to be seen by Soviet officials as racially condescending and thus potentially jeopardising any possibility of the USSR and Britain fighting side-by-side against Germany.

Building on the option (in the event of a German invasion of the Soviet Union) of a British military mission being sent to the USSR, Eden said that his government "should" also be prepared, in the same circumstances, to "consider urgently with the Soviet Government Russia's economic needs" so as to help to enable the Red Army to maintain effective resistance against the Germans.¹⁴ Intriguingly, Eden chose to use the word "should", and not "would", on two occasions when informing Maisky about British measures to assist a USSR that was at war with Germany. Undoubtedly, such a choice of word would hardly have been conducive in encouraging the Soviet Government to depart from the Non-Aggression Treaty with Berlin and join Britain in an anti-Nazi coalition.

Maisky's outward opinion of a possible German attack on the USSR, and how, in Eden's words, Britain "should" be to assist the Soviet Government in such a scenario materialising, appeared to have undergone a slight change when compared to his and the British foreign secretary's previous meeting on 10 June. Rather than merely nod at the suggestion of British assistance, Maisky asked the foreign secretary whether the British Government could provide "details" about German troop movements as it would be "useful if he could have this information at an early date, either today or during the weekend, for it was always useful to check one's own reports with those of another country." The Soviet ambassador also enquired as to whether the economic help would "only be available if Russia came into conflict with Germany", to which Eden answered: "This could clearly only be given at the expense of our own war effort. While we would be willing to attempt to do this if Germany and Russia were in conflict, no similar effort could be expected of a nation at war towards a nation that was neutral." Furthermore, Maisky referred Eden to their previous aforementioned meeting where the latter had proposed British military action against Germany in the event of a German-Soviet conflict; Eden replied

¹² FO 954/24B/318: 13 June 1941, telegram from Eden to Baggallay in the British Embassy in Moscow.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

by affirming what he has previously told Maisky: “I replied that I thought that it might be possible to take some air action from this country against enemy-occupied territory and that this would be examined.”¹⁵ Again, at a time when Maisky and, indeed, many other Soviet officials were becomingly increasingly apprehensive about a possible German-Soviet conflict, Eden’s use of the words “might be possible” to launch British air attacks against German-occupied Europe would hardly have inspired confidence in the Soviet Government about the benefits accruing to them from an Anglo-Soviet alliance.

However, Maisky, during the meeting, was consistent in that he dismissed the possibility of a German invasion of the Soviet Union, arguing that the British Government had “exaggerated” the concentrations of German forces along the Soviet frontier and that, instead, reports of these concentrations were “part of a war of nerves.” Eden, it would appear, was frustrated; he said: “He [Maisky] thought that the kind of message I had given him would pre-suppose intimate collaboration between our two Governments. Did I feel that any such conditions of collaboration existed? He himself thought that his Government would have been likely to have received this message more favourably had it been accompanied by action on our part now showing that we desired more friendly relations with the Soviet. I replied that we are dealing with a situation, which, according to our information, was one of the utmost urgency. There were two courses open to us, either to say nothing to the Soviet Government unless the eventuality we foresaw was actually realised and hostilities began, or to show them in advance in all frankness what our attitude would be. We thought that the latter was the fairer course, though we realised the Soviet Government might not agree with our diagnosis of the danger for them.”¹⁶ It was evidently clear that whilst the Soviet Government was prepared, in private, to listen to British proposals on how Britain could assist the USSR in a war with Germany, Soviet officials, nevertheless, expected and wanted these proposals to be accompanied with substance.

Reflecting on his meeting with Maisky, Eden remarked on how “stiff” the discussion had been, which, he said, could have been partly due to the presence, throughout, of the Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy. The foreign secretary noted that both Maisky and the Counsellor had known that “I should have preferred to see the Ambassador alone.”¹⁷ With reports reaching Stalin, including from highly trusted Soviet agents abroad, of an impending German attack on the USSR, combined with his profound fear of how any word spoken or measure undertaken by his government could provoke a German military onslaught against his country, the Soviet leader would have sought to ensure that his ambassador in Britain be deterred from saying anything controversial in conversations with the British authorities. If leaked, the information could have been either construed by Berlin as anti-German and evidence of the USSR preparing to enter into an alliance with Britain, thereby warranting German military action against the Soviet Union, or simply used as a pretext by the German Government to wage war against the USSR. That deterrent would have taken the form of the Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy in London accompanying Maisky to meetings with British officials because, invariably, Soviet counsellors were, in fact, intelligence officers. As a matter of fact, the counsellor who accompanied Maisky to his meeting with Eden was Kirill Vasilevich Novikov, whom Eden had referred to as a “Kremlin watch-dog upon Maisky.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James’s, 1932–1943 (Yale, Yale University Press, 2015), p. 339. Novikov Kirill Vasilyevich (1905–1983) in 1931 graduated from the All-Union Boiler-Turbine Institute, then was its director of the evening department. In 1933–1934, held the same positions at the Leningrad Electromechanical Institute, then acting director of the Leningrad Industrial Institute (Kirill Vasilyevich Novikov. <https://www.spbstu.ru/university/about-the-university/history/rectors/novikov/>). In 1937–1940 – Chairman of the Technical Council of the People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry. Since 1940, N. was in diplomatic work: in 1940–1942, counsellor to the USSR Plenipotentiary Mission in London, in 1942, accompanied W. Churchill on his trip to Moscow; in 1942–1947, N. was

Evaluation in the Foreign Office of Russia's position on the Balkans, Turkey and Iran

Concurrent with assessments, in the run up to Operation Barbarossa, about the Soviet Government's relationship with Germany, were discussions over Moscow's position on the Balkans, Turkey and Iran. Whilst, at the beginning of 1941, Romania was an Axis power and had Wehrmacht divisions stationed on its territory, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey and Iran had all proclaimed neutrality, though the Germans were wooing these four countries, something that was to the consternation of both Britain and the Soviet Union. Statements by, and conversations with, the Soviet Ambassador to Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov (who had previously served as Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, as well as having held prominent roles in the Soviet security apparatus, including head of the foreign intelligence and counterintelligence sections of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), were valued highly by British officials in their assessments of the Soviet Government's relationships with Balkan countries, Turkey and Iran.

Cripps, in January of 1941, referred to a conversation between Dekanozov and the Turkish Ambassador in Berlin as the "most authoritative statement" of Moscow's attitude towards the Balkans.¹⁹ The British ambassador, citing the conversation with Dekanozov, as well as a statement by him, laid out the Soviet stance on Bulgaria: "The Soviet Government have no fear of any attack except from Turkish or Iranian territory...If Germany passes through Bulgaria with or without the consent of the Bulgars Russia will do nothing, and will treat that occupation in exactly the same way as she treated the German occupation of Roumania. The Soviet Government interests itself in these events but will under no circumstances risk an armed conflict with Germany over them. This attitude, I assume, must be known to Germany, though perhaps not in such express terms, and therefore Germany can disregard Russian foreign policy in the Balkans so far as any fear of actual opposition is concerned." Cripps asserted that, in the light of Dekanozov's statement about Moscow fearing only an attack from Turkey or Iran, this illustrates the "wisdom of the German propaganda as to the danger of a British landing in the Balkans and the need for action in such an event." The British ambassador then drew the conclusion that, in the event of a German penetration of the Balkans, Moscow will "remain completely passive", while using this as a window of opportunity to exert "pressure upon an enfeebled Turkey and an Iran deprived of any effective assistance from Turkey"²⁰. Present in the minds of British officials such as Cripps was the traditional view of Whitehall that perceived Russian expansionism involved Moscow annexing areas of both Turkey and Iran.

In summing up his diagnosis as regards the USSR's relations with Turkey and Iran, Cripps argued that the Russians "must be regarded as a potential enemy" to both countries but not in terms of the Soviet Union carrying out a military attack on either. The British ambassador explained that the possible danger of the Soviet Government to Turkey and Iran lay with Moscow making claims upon both in the event of Ankara and Tehran becoming weakened. If the Turks and the Iranians were to resist such Soviet claims, Cripps said that the Soviet Government "might

head of the 2nd European Department of the NKID of the USSR. As General Secretary of the Soviet delegation, N. participated in the Yalta Conference (1944) and the San-Francisco Conference (1945), where N. and other members of the delegation signed the UN Charter on behalf of the USSR. N. was member of the USSR delegation to the Potsdam Conference (1945). For his work during the war, N. was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor in 1944 and the Order of Lenin in 1945. In 1947-1953 - Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR to India, in 1953-1964 - Head of the Department of Southeast Asian Countries. In 1964-1974 — Head of the Department of International Organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, member of the Board of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. See: Ambassador Kirill Vasilevich Novikov (1905-1983) // "Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn" [International Affairs], 2002, No4, pp. 102-112. [footnote by the Editor]

¹⁹ FO 954/24B/270: 26 January 1941, Cripps telegram on the Soviet Union's position on the Balkans, Turkey and Iran.

²⁰ Ibid.

well go so far as to enforce their claims by an ultimatum and even war”²¹. Again, the traditional view of British officials that Moscow sought territorial expansion at the expense of Turkey and Iran was clear in Cripps’ assertion; as such, this perception did not bode well for any prospect of the Soviet Government terminating the Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany and declaring war on Berlin.

During a meeting of ministers in January, which included, amongst others, Eden and the Minister for Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, the view was put forward that the policy of the Soviet Government was “governed by fear”, with the result that whilst the Russians disapproved of the possibility of Germany penetrating the Balkans, nonetheless, the Soviet leadership would not adopt any policy which could provoke a clash with Germany.²² The ministers were then informed of the opinion of the Russian Military Attaché in Ankara who had recently stated that: “If war breaks out between Germany and Turkey, Russia would preserve a benevolent neutrality towards Turkey.” According to those present at the meeting, such a scenario was the “best that we could hope for.”²³ Undoubtedly in the minds of many British officials was the nightmarish scenario in which Germany would attack Turkey from the West, while the USSR would invade Turkey from the East, replicating what Berlin and Moscow had carried out in Poland, in September of 1939. Thus, a Soviet Union remaining neutral in the event of a German war with Turkey was most certainly the best course of development that Britain could have hoped for.

Discussions about Iran heavily centred on the implications for the Soviet oilfields in Baku, in the event of the Iranians falling under Germany hegemony. In a letter to Eden, from May of 1941, Cripps wrote that Baku is “fairly well placed against a German attack” because of its distance from the frontier and could “only be reached after a considerable Russian defeat.”²⁴ The British ambassador noted that whilst Baku is “essential not only to the fighting forces but to the economic life of Russia”, Germany could not “afford to destroy” the oilfields there, owing to the limited amounts of oil at Berlin’s disposal. However, Cripps said that if the oil wells or Iraq or Iran were to be in Germany’s possession, then the Germans could “afford to attack and destroy Baku.” He added that: “The advance of Germany into Iraq or Iran creates a completely new and much more dangerous problem for Russia and one that, as far as I can see, can only be dealt with either by war or by some appeasement. Clearly the Soviet Government will not go to war in the present circumstances, it must therefore be prepared for some appeasement which may create a situation in the future which will at least give a possibility of defending Baku against a German attack or of getting some alternative sources of oil supply. Once Stalin either accepts the entry of Germany into the Near East as inevitable, or it becomes a fait accompli, it seems to me that he must for his own preservation try and arrive at some sort of partition which will keep the Germans as far from Baku as possible.” Cripps concluded by opining that he had “little doubt” Stalin would prefer Britain to remain in control of the Iraq oil wells but that also the Soviet leader was not “in the position and has not the wish to take any action to attack us in maintaining that control.”²⁵

The history of relations between the USSR and Britain had been marked, since their birth, by mutual suspicion and hostility, as, indeed, relations had been, over centuries, between Imperial Russia and Britain, though the Bolshevik Revolution had marked a decisive turning-point in ties between Moscow and London because, along with its traditional dimension, the perceived Russian threat was now held by British policy-makers to contain an ideological element that was believed to undermine the British Empire, or even Britain itself, from within. However, with Britain, in

²¹ Ibid.

²² CAB 65/57/14: 31 January 1941, meeting of ministers regarding, in part, the position of the Soviet Union on the Balkans and Turkey.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ FO 954/24B/304: 27 May 1941, letter from Cripps to Eden.

²⁵ Ibid.

1941, facing Germany alone, following the German conquest of France and the Low Countries in the summer of 1940, Whitehall needed to ascertain the stance of the Soviet Government on its British counterpart as part of London's endeavour to gain insight into whether the USSR could be persuaded to join Britain in an anti-Hitler coalition.

In a telegram to Eden, from January of 1941, Cripps commented extensively on the Soviet Union's attitude towards Britain. The British ambassador cited Finland and the Black Sea region as constituting the only two areas where the "Soviet Government anticipates any direct contact with Great Britain."²⁶ Concerning Finland, a country, which was, at the time, maintaining close relations with Germany, Cripps noted that the Soviet Government "will do their utmost to diminish British influence in Finland and to create friction between the two countries." And in regard to the Black Sea region, Cripps opined that Moscow perceived "Turkey and Iran as both sufficiently closely in contact with Great Britain to provide possible bases for an attack, and in addition they are fully conscious of the influence of British naval power upon the control of the Dardanelles." Furthermore, the Soviet Government's policy towards the Balkans, Cripps wrote, contained a "definite anti-British element."²⁷

On UK sanctions on the USSR and the US factor in Russia-Germany relations

On the matter of the Baltic States, which the Soviet Government had incorporated into the USSR in June of 1940, while Hitler had been preoccupied with conquering France, and regarding the eastern part of Poland (which the Soviet Government had acquired in September of 1939 together with Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, which Moscow had obtained from Romania from June to July of 1940), Cripps wrote how these, despite being areas of disagreement between Moscow and London, were "fait accomplis". He elaborated: "Unless His Majesty's Government are prepared to adopt the same attitude as the German Government there is little or no likelihood of any settlement being arrived at before the eventual peace negotiations. It is possible that some temporary way out might be found but this is unlikely unless the economic considerations are strong enough to force the Soviet Government into a settlement."²⁸ Here Cripps was implying that the British Government could resort to economic sanctions as a way of coercing the USSR to adopt a different and more productive approach to Britain, which could only be to the detriment of the Soviet Union's Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany.

Certain diplomats in the Northern Department, such as its long-serving head, Laurence Collier, were hopeful that Stalin could be persuaded that it was in the security interests of the USSR to gravitate towards Britain. In a blow to those diplomats in Whitehall, Cripps sounded a sombre note: "It must never be forgotten that the whole history of Anglo-Soviet relations leads to a continued and bitter hostility against Great Britain, and that this hostility is unlikely to disappear unless some very visible signs of accomplished facts convince the Soviet Government of a change of attitude. This is why they have attached great importance to the questions arising out of their occupation of the Baltic States."²⁹ The status of the Baltic States was and would remain during the war years and, indeed, in a post-war world, a bugbear for Anglo-Soviet relations. Had London recognised the USSR's acquisition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in 1940, then this arguably would have left a profoundly positive impression on Stalin, demonstrating Britain's commitment to the Soviet Government in relation to Germany. But, unlike for Berlin, London refused to recognise the Baltic States as part of the USSR - and, indeed, never would - and this

²⁶ FO 954/24B/270: 26 January 1941, telegram from Cripps to Eden detailing the Soviet Union's relationship with Britain.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

served only to reinforce Soviet distrust of the British while, simultaneously, giving Moscow little incentive but to remain a party to the Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany.

Cripps returned to his earlier reference of Britain employing its economic prowess to obtain from the USSR what political measures might not be able to. The British ambassador commented on how the Soviet Union was in short supply of certain commodities which the country “requires badly” though “how badly it is impossible to estimate.” Cripps averred that rubber and tin are two resources which the Soviet Government was most likely to be in urgent need of and that Britain could exploit this vulnerability: “According to the degree to which they find it impossible to get them elsewhere they will be driven to try and obtain them from us.” Citing the economic sanctions which the British Government had, by this time, already imposed on the USSR, as a result of materials which the Soviet Government was delivering to Germany, as part of the Non-Aggression Treaty between Moscow and Berlin, the British ambassador argued that these should continue because they “no doubt” have some degree of impact on the Soviet Union.³⁰

According to Cripps, another potential means for Britain to exploit, so as to exert further economic pressure on the Soviet Government, revolved around the USSR’s relationship with America. The British ambassador noted that the Soviet Union’s attitude to America “has always been a sentimental and economic one rather than a political one” and that the Russians “have an immense admiration of the magnitude of American production.”³¹ Cripps highlighted how there were numerous products which the Soviet Government required and how they would endeavour to acquire these from America, which “is now practically the only source for machinery other than Germany.” Thus, the British ambassador contended that because the USSR regarded Britain as “allied” to America and hence “politically and economically associated” with the Americans, Soviet actions “vis-à-vis Great Britain might have an effect upon their relations with the United States of America.” Cripps then proceeded to analyse the Soviet “state of mind” in the context of America by arguing that this “makes it all the more essential that we should now closely relate our policies with the United States in the Far East and so far as the Soviet Government is concerned. I do not mean by this that we should necessarily adopt the same policies at all times, since our circumstances differ largely, but that we should work in the same and not in different directions.”³² In effect, Cripps was contending that by London and Washington adding further momentum to harmonising their political, economic and military policies, this would compel the Soviet Government to take a more flexible approach towards Britain, which, in turn, could help to draw Stalin away from his Non-Aggression Treaty with Hitler.

Cripps continued with his line of contention regarding the potential benefits accruing for Britain, in relation to the USSR, by London and Washington co-ordinating their policies more closely with one another. He commented that: “Given that it is right, as I believe it to be, for His Majesty’s Government to exert economic pressure on the Soviet Government to change their political outlook, then I think the United States should join effectively in that pressure and should let it be known that in fact the action is a joint action, and that an improvement in Soviet-United States actions is conditional upon a more friendly attitude being adopted vis-à-vis Great Britain.”³³ Accordingly, it can be said that Cripps was urging the British Government to utilise its position as the hub of the Anglo-Saxon world in order to maximise pressure on the Soviet Union as a way to undermine Stalin and Hitler’s Non-Aggression Treaty.

That economics was the most powerful and effective tool at the British Government’s disposal in bringing about a change of policy on behalf of the Soviet Government, in relation to Britain, was clear in Cripps’ mind. He wrote that: “I do not imagine myself that any quick reaction will be obtained to our present [economic] pressure which cannot from the nature of things be very

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

strong. I am however of the opinion that it will gradually have its effect and that sooner or later we shall have the opportunity of re-opening the question of Anglo-Soviet relations upon the basis of their economic needs. This will be all the more likely if we can concert our action with the United States of America.” But the British ambassador warned that such action could have a negative, albeit limited, effect on relations between London and Moscow. He argued that, in a scenario where London and Washington acted in economic unison against the Soviet Government, it would be “quite likely that our relations [with the USSR] will deteriorate.” He explained that: “I have little doubt that in the first instance the Soviet Government will attack us violently for our action in stopping their cargoes etc. They would not however carry this protest so far as to interrupt relations, in my belief, as they do not want to antagonise His Majesty’s Government too far in view of a possible British success and the danger of an eventual anti-Soviet bloc of all countries arising as a sequel to the peace.”³⁴

Operation Barbarossa commences, UK reacts

Despite the aspirations and attempts of the British Government to enlist the Soviet Union in an anti-Nazi coalition with itself, Stalin remained profoundly suspicious of British overtures, while his hostility towards Britain remained entrenched, not to mention his profound fear of Germany. The Soviet leader ardently and uncompromisingly kept to his policy of avoiding a military conflict with Hitler, thereby keeping the USSR out of the war. But all of that was to change when, at 3:15am, on Sunday 22 June 1941, Hitler ordered the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the USSR, which constituted, and still does to this present-day, the largest land invasion in the history of warfare, as three and a half million German soldiers, supported by two million soldiers from the Axis countries of Hungary, Romania and Italy, poured across the Soviet frontier. Accordingly, Britain was now no longer facing Germany on its own and was all but assured of having the USSR as a partner against Hitler. The time for a British-Soviet coalition had thus arrived.

Winston Churchill, an avid opponent of Bolshevism, also harboured racial prejudices about Russians, as well as the view that Russia, historically, constituted a menace to Western civilisation, all, of which, were deeply imbedded in the British official mind. But on the day of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Prime Minister Churchill spoke before the House of Commons and declared that Britain would fight shoulder-to-shoulder with the USSR and assist the Soviet Government, however the British Government could, in the Red Army’s gigantic clash with the Wehrmacht.

In a telegram to Stalin, dated 7 July 1941, Churchill expressed great admiration for Red Army resistance against the Germans, and detailed the assistance which Britain was undertaking - and would be undertaking - to help to relieve the pressure on the Soviet Union from the German onslaught. The British prime minister wrote that:

“We are all so very glad here the Russian armies are making such strong and spirited resistance to the utterly unprovoked and merciless invasion of the Nazis. There is general admiration of the bravery and tenacity of the soldiers and people. We shall do everything to help you that time, geography and our growing resources allow. The longer the war lasts the more help we can give. We are making very heavy attacks both by day and night with our Air Force upon all German occupied territory and all Germany within our reach. About 400 daylight sorties were made overseas yesterday. On Saturday night over 200 heavy bombers attacked German towns, some carrying three tons apiece, and last night nearly 250 heavy bombers were operating. This will go on. Thus we hope to force Hitler to bring back some of his Air power to the West and gradually take some of the strain off you. Besides this the Admiralty have at my desire prepared

³⁴ Ibid.

a serious operation to come off in the near future in the Arctic, after which I hope contact will be established between British and Russian Navies. Meanwhile by sweeps along the Norwegian coast we have intercepted various supply ships which were moving north against you. We welcome arrival of Russian Military Mission in order to concert future plans. We have only got to go on fighting to beat the life out of these villains.”³⁵

Churchill’s claim that the Royal Air Force was carrying out bombing missions against “all German occupied territory” was an exaggeration but one, nonetheless, designed to demonstrate to Stalin the British Government’s ‘sincerity’ and ‘ability’ about fighting alongside with, and aiding as much as it possibly could, the USSR.

The theme of demonstrating British ‘sincerity’ to the Soviet Union was present in another telegram from Churchill to Stalin, dated 25 July, 1941, in which the British prime minister said that the War Cabinet had decided to despatch 200 Tomahawk Fighter Aeroplanes to the USSR “in spite of the fact that this will seriously deplete our fighter aircraft resources.”³⁶ Churchill also informed the Soviet leader that other war materials had been assigned for the Soviet Union: “Up to three million pairs of ankle boots should shortly be available in this country for shipment. We are also arranging to provide during the present year large quantities of rubber, tin, wool and woollen cloth, jute, lead and shellac. All your other requirements from raw materials are receiving careful consideration. Where supplies are impossible or limited from here we are discussing with the United States of America.”³⁷

The subject matter of the Tomahawk aircraft was raised by an anxious Maisky in a meeting with Eden, on the same date as the aforementioned telegram from Churchill to Stalin, namely, 25 July. The Soviet ambassador said that the Soviet Government understood that Britain had 700 Tomahawks stationed in the Middle East and that the Soviet authorities would be “very grateful” if a portion of these could be despatched to the USSR, via the Caucasus.³⁸ Eden recalled how Maisky had informed him that though the Soviet Army was “holding its own”, the losses of the Soviet Air Force had been “heavy”. The British foreign secretary responded to Maisky’s claim about the Tomahawks by saying that it must be “erroneous” and so he telephoned the Secretary of State for Air who said that “the figure of 700 must be that of the total order for Tomahawks which we had placed in America for the Middle East. Only a small proportion of these had so far arrived, more were on their way, but the total of 700 included the 200 which we had already undertaken to make available to the Soviet Government. “Upon hearing the Secretary of State for Air’s response, Maisky, according to Eden, was “very little comforted.”³⁹ Soviet suspicion over the ‘sincerity’ of British pronouncements in wanting to help relieve the Red Army of the tremendous strain that it was enduring at the hands of the Wehrmacht would be a common theme during the war years, manifesting itself, most prominently of all, by Soviet misgivings about the absence of a Second Front in Western Europe in both 1942 and 1943.

Soviet scepticism towards British ‘goodwill’ was not necessarily unfounded, as a telegram from the British Ambassador to Turkey, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, demonstrated. Dated 22 June 1941, the day of Operation Barbarossa, the ambassador detailed the content of a conversation he had had with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs who had spoken with the German Ambassador to Turkey in the hours after the German invasion of the USSR. The German diplomat asked the Turkish minister to convey a message to London that “Great Britain and the United States should be in no hurry to associate themselves with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in this new situation.”⁴⁰ Rather significantly, Knatchbull-Hugessen enquired

³⁵ FO 954/24B/336: 7 July 1941, telegram from Winston Churchill to Josef Stalin.

³⁶ FO 954/24B/353: 25 July 1941, telegram from Churchill to Stalin.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ FO 954/3A/3: 25 July 1941, telegram from Eden to Cripps.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ FO 954/28A/128: 22 June 1941, telegram from the British Ambassador to Turkey, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, to the Foreign Office.

with the Turkish minister as to whether the German ambassador had “proposed any reward to Great Britain and the United States for their proposed abstention” to which the latter replied in the “negative” but said that the reward could be that Britain would be “given a free hand in the western part of Europe while Germany had a free hand in the eastern part.”⁴¹ It is the case that throughout the war, there were some British officials, especially in the military, who harboured such ill-feelings about the Soviet Union that they were hoping for a German victory on the Russian Front. One such case would concern two British military intelligence officers by the names of Major Tamplin and Captain Sillem who, in December of 1941, were regarded by the new head of the Northern Department, Christopher Warner, as “so anti-Russian as to be dangerous.”⁴² Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, of the Foreign Office Services Liaison Department and who chaired the Joint Intelligence Committee, would also express concern over Tamplin and Sillem: “Whenever the Russians achieve some success...these officers become plunged in doom. A Russian defeat fills them with joy.”⁴³ Furthermore, Cavendish-Bentinck would turn his attention to the War Office, regarding this as overwhelmingly anti-Russian: “I have a feeling that our War Office regard Russian officers as not being nice people to associate with.”⁴⁴

Another demonstration of the concern that some British officials felt about Britain fighting alongside the Soviet Union, came in the form of a telegram to Eden from Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Ambassador to Spain, on 2 July, 1941. Hoare began by saying that he was of the view that, by invading the USSR, Hitler had made a “strategic mistake and has given us an advantage that, though it may not show itself in the immediate future, will have a definite effect in expediting our victory.”⁴⁵ However, the British ambassador averred that the effect in Spain of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent association of Britain with the USSR, had constituted a “definite setback for us and an increase in our dangers and troubles.” Hoare elaborated: “No one who has not lived for some time in Spain can imagine the hatred of the Russians. There is scarcely a Spaniard out of prison who does not pray for their destruction. The result is that whatever we may say about Hitler’s real motives and the treachery of his record, the whole of Spain regards him at the moment as a providential deliverer of the world from the Red Anti-Christ. We must therefore expect thousands of Spaniards to enlist for service against Russia. And we must resign ourselves to a period in which we shall lose influence by our association with Russia. It may be that this situation will pass, or at least become less inflammable. For the moment, however, we must treat it with great caution and do nothing to make it worse.”⁴⁶ Further to that, the British ambassador suggested that it would be “highly dangerous” for the British Government to make any “formal protest” against the recruiting of Spaniards for the Russian Front.⁴⁷

Hoare ended his telegram by saying that now the USSR had entered the war against Hitler, Britain’s “main objective must be to give them as much help as ever we can.” However, the British ambassador urged Eden to “keep in mind the delicacy of the situation in the Peninsula ... and continue to maintain the line that Winston and you have already set to the country, namely that our military cooperation does not mean an alliance, still less does it mean any sympathy with communism.”⁴⁸ Thus, the British Government was looking to a post-war world in which its influence in Spain would be preserved.

From the beginning of 1941 until the start of Operation Barbarossa, the British Government continued, though with increased urgency, its endeavour to ascertain whether the USSR could

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² FO 371/29501/N 7081: 3 December 1941, minutes by Christopher Warner, Head of the Northern Department, and Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, Foreign Office Services Liaison Department and Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ FO 954/27A/170: 2 July 1941, telegram from the British Ambassador to Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare, to Eden.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

be persuaded to enlist itself with Britain in an anti-Hitler coalition. So despairing was the British Government over facing the Third Reich alone that Whitehall was prepared to enter into an alliance with the USSR, a country which many British policy-makers considered to be not just a threat to Britain but to the British Empire as a whole. As the British Chiefs of Staff had warned in 1926: “The present policy of Soviet Russia towards India is identical with that adopted in the past by Imperial Russia. The methods of the Soviet are...more insidious, more intangible, and, therefore...more dangerous than those employed by their predecessors in the past.”⁴⁹

What British officials reported, indeed, lamented, in the lead up to the German invasion of the USSR, was that the Soviet Government’s fear of war with Germany, together with Stalin’s distrust of, and hostility towards, Britain, meant that Whitehall’s hopes of Moscow abandoning its Non-Aggression Treaty with Berlin and joining forces with London would be without success. Ironically, the frustration felt by Whitehall over the failure to secure an alliance with the USSR in the period between January to June of 1941, paralleled the frustration which the Soviet Government had felt when it sought, but to no avail, collective security with Britain and France in the mid and late 1930s to try and deter Hitler from territorial expansionism. It was during those years that war could have been averted if Britain, France and the Soviet Union had established a military alliance with one another. However, by 1941, not only was war underway but Germany, buoyed on by its rapid conquest of the European mainland, had developed an insatiable appetite for further territorial expansion.

Accordingly, it is arguable that the die for war was cast when Britain and France shunned the Soviet Union’s quest for collective security and, instead, chose to sign individual agreements with Berlin, as well as pursue a policy of appeasement towards Hitler. That decision of London and Paris would have catastrophic consequences for Europe and in particular the Soviet people.

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⁴⁹ CAB 53/12/COS 45: 12 July 1926, report by the British Chiefs of Staff. See also: CAB 16/83: 25 March 1927, statement by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir George Milne.