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GREAT BRITAIN AND THE BALTIC STATES DURING
THE ANGLO-FRENCH AND SOVIET TALKS OF 1939

by

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SUMMARY

From the Eastern European power vacuum, created by the collapse of Russia and Germany during World War I, there emerged the free states of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These states soon gained British support and eventually recognition as well, for after World War I their natural role seemed to be to form a cordon sanitaire, separating the revolutionary Soviet state from the rest of the industrialized European continent.

However, by 1939 the situation had radically changed, and in order to contain Germany Great Britain had to bring the Soviet Union into process created for the balancing of power on the continent of Europe. In these circumstances, the situation seemed to demand that the Baltic States accept a new role as a bridge between the Soviet Union and Germany. But the Baltic States, convinced for good reasons that the Soviet government was not only anxious to recover the former Russian territories lost after World War I but to export revolution as well, feared that these new demands, if permitted to upset the Eastern European status quo, represented a grave danger to their very existence. Therefore, they insisted and vigorously tried to convince the British government during the
Anglo-French and Soviet talks of 1939 that they should be left alone.

Their first moves met with success, and the British policy makers, mistrusting the Russians, attempted to steer clear of Baltic problems. Nevertheless, the Soviet pressure was maintained, while the British need for Soviet help continued to become more evident. Consequently, the original British position was abandoned and the British government soon agreed with their Soviet counterparts that the independence of the Baltic States was to be guaranteed. A new problem, however, immediately appeared when the British, in order not to provoke the hostility of the Baltic States, proposed to introduce the guarantee in general terms only; and Soviet negotiators insisted upon naming the states concerned. Having agreed to name these states in a secret protocol, the British government discovered that the Soviet side wanted to guarantee the Baltic States against what it termed 'indirect aggression' as well. In due course it was ascertained that this device was really demanded by the Soviet negotiators only to gain a free hand in Eastern Europe. The British government, convinced that the acceptance of such a proposition, in the face of the Baltic protests, would undermine the moral position of the peace front and also tend to create a new threat to the
European equilibrium, decided to refuse Soviet demands.

In these circumstances, with both sides wanting to prevent the immediate breakdown of the talks, the British-French and the Soviet governments agreed to commence military negotiations. As soon as they were started, it again became clear that the Soviet Union planned all her co-operation with the West on the assumption that it would be permitted to use the territory of Poland, Rumania and the Baltic States. As the British negotiators were unable to promise the Soviet Union anything in this regard, this part of the talks, too, soon failed.

In short, this is a story of how the British desire to maintain the inter-war status quo and legality insisted upon by the Baltic and other border states, in the changed situation of 1939, ended in the failure of the vital Anglo-French and Soviet talks and the collapse of the British attempts to contain Germany in the East.
STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

J. RITENIS.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the inter-war years the Baltic countries of Estonia and Latvia, together with Finland, were the North-Western neighbours of the Soviet Union. The first two countries also formed part of the geographical bridge between the German Reich and the Sovietized Russian republics.

For this reason, when Anglo-French and Soviet political talks were begun in 1939 to discuss the German threat to Europe, the Soviet government, naturally concerned with the security of her North-Western borders, brought up the problem of the Baltic States. Thereafter, from the very first days of the talks in April 1939 until their breakdown in August of that summer, the problem of Soviet North-Western borders was ever present, and remained unsolved until the very end. The British government, though badly needing Soviet co-operation, was not prepared to overlook its own long-term interests nor the rights and the wishes of the three small nations, which had been independent only since 1918.

If published work is any indication, it is surprising that this interesting chapter of pre-war
international relations has been largely overlooked by both historians and students of international relations. Therefore, the writer of this thesis will endeavour in the first place to fill this gap by piecing together evidence as to what actually happened, and then put the findings into the broader perspective of pre-war international relations.

As hardly any Baltic documents are readily available, the events will be viewed almost entirely through British eyes and for this purpose the relevant published documents on British foreign policy will be extensively utilized. However, whenever possible this source will be checked with the contemporary documents found in the American, Polish and, to some extent, the Soviet and German official archives now made available. Newspaper reports, Hansard and other contemporary sources, too, will be used, always keeping in mind our main aim, which is to describe, analyse and evaluate the British foreign policy towards the Baltic States, during the few critical months here in question.

In this connection the writer shares the opinion expressed by Lord Strang that "the foreign policy of a state may be defined in a rough and ready way as embodying the purposes, intentions and objectives pursued by its
government in the conduct of relations with the governments of other states, and the methods adopted by it in order to achieve those purposes. Foreign policy as so defined is revealed by the acts of government, or may be inferred from these acts."(1) Consequently, attention has to be concentrated on the acts of the British government and its main office bearers.

Although in general and contemporary usage Finland was not treated as one of the Baltic States, the subject matter of this thesis demands that it should be so. On the other hand, Lithuania, the largest of the three Baltic States, did not share a common border with the Soviet Union and therefore did not greatly figure in the Anglo-French and Soviet negotiations. Consequently, it merits only a very limited share of our attention.

To get the events of 1939 into sharper focus, we propose to start by paying some attention to the very beginning as well as to the inter-war development of British-Baltic political relationships.

These relationships came into existence only during the later part of World War I after Germany had succeeded in defeating Russia on the Eastern front. The Russian defeat was the main reason for their March revolution of 1917, followed by the Bolshevik-instigated November revolution of the same year and the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, signed early in March 1918. By 1918, as the result of these events, the former Russian Baltic provinces were under the control of German military forces and about to become, though in a somewhat disguised form, Germany's Eastern provinces. After German troops had helped the Finnish Whites to suppress a Bolshevik-organized revolt, Finland, too, had come under a strong German influence.

For Great Britain and her allies this state of affairs meant that Germany's might was to grow, while the Western allies would lose their Eastern front, and so Germany would be able to throw all her forces against the Western powers. In addition the German acquisition of the Eastern European regions, with potential control over all Russia, was about to break the blockade which, during the preceding years, had deprived her of commodities essential for the continuation of the war.

The British government decided to help the various groups then opposing the still very weak masters of Red Russia because it expected that the anti-communists in
Russia, given some outside support, would be able to form an alternative government prepared to honour Russian international obligations and fight the Germans. Among the groups opposing the Soviet government perhaps the most outspoken were the anti-Bolshevistic national minorities, headed by the spokesmen of the various Baltic nationalities, who, determined not to remain under either German or Soviet rule, had decided to work for their own independence. They expected that the Western powers would win the war and were anxious to establish contact with them as the future masters of European destinies.

When the Baltic emissaries began to make their calls, the British Foreign Office naturally sympathized with their desire to have nothing to do with either Germany or the Soviet republic. Nevertheless, the sudden emergence of the Baltic nations represented a completely new problem for British foreign policy makers, who still believed in an undivided Russia. In general, they were very wary of committing themselves before the peace conference to such a principle as national self-determination. This was intended only for their defeated adversaries and could tear their Empire to pieces, Ireland being the first to go. Therefore,
in the beginning, the British did not go beyond the extension of de facto recognition to the Provisional governments of Finland and Estonia.

However, after the German surrender to the Western powers in November 1918, the British policy makers had to act immediately, for only the presence of the German occupation armies in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania until the day of the Armistice had ensured that these territories were not under control of the Bolsheviks. The British desire was to make sure that in the future the Bolsheviks did not come to use the territories of the Baltic lands for spreading their revolution, in accordance with the teachings of the classical marxists, to the industrialized West-European countries. To achieve this end it was decided that for the time being German troops should remain in the area to ensure peace and order, and this idea was incorporated in the armistice agreement.

Only a few days after the Armistice, however, the Bolsheviks denounced the treaty of Brest-Litovsk and established Soviet governments for the Baltic countries, stressing that the Baltic Sea must be turned into a red sea. Their troops, headed by the Red Latvian Rifles, began to push back the disintegrating German 8th Army. The officers of this army, seeing that the soldiers'
councils of their units were often in communication with the advancing red detachments, turned to the British for help, but almost always refused to co-operate with the newly established local forces.

In these circumstances, the Estonian and Latvian governments were pressing for British assistance - political, economic and military, the Estonians even asking for a British protectorate. (1) Appreciating the situation, the British Cabinet decided, however, that none of the tired World War I troops could be engaged in this (from the British point of view) remote area. Therefore, only units of the Royal Navy were sent to the Baltic shores, to deliver some military supplies to the new governments and to bolster their willingness to continue their resistance to the Bolsheviks.

When the first British flotilla, under the command of Rear-Admiral E. Alexander Sinclair, arrived in the Baltic waters, the Admiral reported back home that he found the Provisional governments of Estonia and Latvia helplessly ineffective to deal with the crisis on their hands, while the population, he said, was apathetic towards the two governments and afraid to join military

organisations fighting the Bolsheviks. (1) Nevertheless, Sinclair delivered to the new governments a few thousand rifles and several hundred machine guns and, despite his orders not to interfere in local affairs, fired on Latvian mutineers. In January 1919 the British authorities decided to call the flotilla home. However in the end it was only replaced. This illustrated the want for a definite plan and even the Chief of the British Imperial Military Staff complained, early in 1919, about the lack of a definite British policy for the Baltic area. (2)

This situation was at least partially explained by the desire of Britain and other allied powers to treat the Baltic States as a part of an undivided Russia while there was still hope that a pro-allied government could re-emerge and establish something resembling the old status quo. There was always room for hope while White Russian fortunes continued to fluctuate, and a new class of White Russian emigres was very influential in the Western capitals during the early post-war years.

(1) Ibid., loc. cit.
The non-existence of a definite policy was once more indicated when the commander of the second British flotilla to be sent to the Baltic was instructed that the primary object of his visit was "to show the British flag and support British policy". (1) No mention was made of what this British policy actually was, but only a definition of the British interest as "the necessity to prevent the destruction of Estonia and Latvia by Bolshevik invaders". (2) However, this British interest was to be served only by supplies of arms. (3)

To make the Baltic situation even more complicated, the Germans became active after the new German Commander in Chief in Latvia and Lithuania, General von der Goltz, arrived in Liepaja in February 1919. From then on, as a subsequent British student of international relations has observed, the old Prussian tradition - rejecting the Weimar Republic root and branch - fought its last battles in the Baltic. (4) On his own admission, von der Goltz was sent to the Baltic only to protect East-Prussia from the advancing Bolsheviks, but

(2) Ibid. Loc. Cit.
(3) Ibid. Loc. Cit.
once he had assumed command of the German forces centered around Liepaja, it soon occurred to him that Germany had not lost the war in the East. He felt that the situation here could still be turned to Germany's advantage provided the German policy of 1918 was continued, "perhaps together with the White Russians, in some sort of an elastic form, under the pretext of fighting the Bolsheviks". This approach seemed particularly plausible to von der Goltz, because Great Britain had so far engaged only her sea power in this area. (2)

To achieve their ends the Germans established a pro-German government in Latvia, in whose name by June 1919 they were fighting the troops loyal to the Provisional governments of Latvia and Estonia. The leaders of the British Military Mission, not quite aware of the real meaning of this, but anxious to prevent the anti-Bolshevik forces in the area from annihilating each other, promptly initiated negotiations which succeeded in stopping the fighting.

The Supreme Allied Council at Versailles then ordered the German government to recall von der Goltz from the area. However, the energetic German General

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(2) Ibid. loc. cit.
stayed on, and by October a combined German-Russian force under the White Russian adventurer Bermon-Ovalov was fighting the Latvians again, in a new effort to gain control of the Baltic lands for Germany.

In this situation the British naval guns offered most valuable assistance to the Latvians, and by the time the Germans had begun to retreat, the Peace Conference in Paris had made sure that the Germans evacuated the Baltic area altogether. Now that the victories of the local forces had proved their ever-increasing value, it was safe to assume that they would be able to keep out the already hard-pressed Bolsheviks too.

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the British government now stood for the independence of the Baltic States. Far from it, for when the leader of the British Military Mission in the Baltic, General Gough, began to take the side of the Baltic people against the always intriguing White Russians, he was discreetly recalled home. Lloyd George expanded somewhat on his Baltic policy when he told Churchill that it would be pointless to recognize the independence of the Baltic States even in return for their attack on the Bolsheviks, arguing that "in the end who ever won in Russia, the government there would promptly recover the old Russian Baltic ports ..."(1)

(1) G. Bennett, op. cit., p. 166.
He would not be prepared to go to war with an anti-Bolshevik Russia to prevent it. In other words the British policy makers believed that no Russian government would allow the Baltic States to survive.

The true intentions of the British Baltic post-war policy makers seem to be best illustrated by the fact that the monies expended in giving aid to the emerging Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were classified under the heading of aid given to the Russian armies.\(^{(1)}\)

This implied that the Baltic problems were treated by the British as a part of their Russian restoration move.

This, of course, was in line with the approach adopted by the other allied governments and expressed by Clemenceau and Lansing. Lansing stated, on behalf of the United States, that his government was even against the de facto recognition of the states, which had emerged on former Russian territory, with the exception of Finland and Poland, because to him this represented an unpermissible division of Russia.\(^{(2)}\)

Nevertheless, as soon as Denikin's and Kolchak's drives on Moscow failed, as did Yudenich's attacks on

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Petrograd, the Allied governments lost their conviction that the Russian Whites would soon overthrow Lenin and set up a democratic government in Russia, which the Baltic nations would gladly obey. To face the new situation Clemenceau formulated, on 23rd October 1919, his doctrine of cordon sanitaire - namely, the desire of the Baltic States to gain independence was to be encouraged so that, together with Poland, they would become a barrier between Communist Russia and Western Europe. The British readily accepted this new formula, but with two provisos: (a) the new states were to be under British influence; and (b) they were to serve as a bridge and not as a barrier between England and Soviet Russia.

Despite the new approach, Curzon revealed to the Latvian Foreign Minister, Meirovics, as late as January 1921, that as Britain was inclined to respect the United States' wishes and also feared that the Soviet Union would shortly absorb the Baltic States, it could not extend de jure recognition to Estonia and Latvia. (1) However, when the Italian and French representatives proposed at the Allied Supreme Council meeting in Paris that both countries were to be recognized de jure Lloyd George gave in and voted for the motion. (2)

(1) Latvju Enciklopedija, op cit, p. 107.
(2) Ibid. Loc. cit.
This behaviour seems to argue that the British policy towards Latvia and Estonia (Finland had been accorded full recognition in 1919) was still wavering, despite the knowledge that the new states, while serving their own ends, had also rendered a substantial service to the British policy makers. With some German and British help they had prevented the joining of the Russian Bolsheviks with the German Communists, and, practically single-handed, had defeated the first outburst of German post-war militarism. In addition, the two new states had already concluded peace treaties with the Soviet Union which, as the successor state of Tsarist Russia, unreservedly recognized the independence and the autonomy of both Estonia and Latvia. The British attitude of non-commitment was based on the fear, shared by the other large powers, that if the newly emerged nations were fully recognized they would demand, as soon as their uncertain existence was threatened, the protection of the other powers, in the name of the new idea of collective security. As the League of Nations was the very epitome of the idea of collective security, the Estonian and Latvian admission to the membership of that body was delayed until September 1921.
Our outline, covering the period when the British participation in the shaping of the political events in the Baltic area had reached its peak of activity, still illustrates that the British policy makers had only an ephemeral interest in the affairs of the Baltic States and that the assistance extended to the new governments was purely coincidental, even though the British later on loomed so large in the minds of the Baltic people. If the independence of the Baltic States became a political fact then this was not due to British machinations, as argued by some authors (notably in the Soviet camp),\(^1\) but to the temporary powerlessness of both of the Baltic States' big neighbours, namely Russia and Germany, which was effectively demonstrated on the Baltic battle fields during the first two post-war years. On these same battle fields it was also made clear that the Baltic people possessed the will to be their own masters. In fact, the British government in 1918 and 1919 would have preferred, politically, a return to the Russian status quo of 1914.

During the inter-war years, the British activities in the Baltic area were confined to the economic sphere and demonstrations of friendship only. Thus, they do not

deserve our attention and we can conclude our introductory chapter by a short discussion of the Baltic States in the international affairs during 1920-1939.

Even before their struggles were over, and their nations had become fully recognized members of the community of nations in 1919, the Baltic leaders came to feel that the favourable balance of power (for them) might not last for ever, and that sooner or later one of their large neighbours would be again planning to expand in their area. Preparing for this day, the Balts attempted to form a lasting political and military alliance with Poland. However, due to the Vilna dispute, caused by the Polish occupation of the Lithuanian capital, this attempt failed and Poland eventually sought her reinsurance treaties in the West. At the same time Finland was endeavouring to become a recognized member of the Scandinavian bloc of nations (headed by Sweden) which, sensing the potential danger of being involved in the Eastern Baltic politics, was determined to stay out of it. This meant that the Baltic inter-war co-operation resulted only in the Estonian-Latvian alliance, concluded in 1923, which in 1939 and again in 1940, when it was put to the test in the face of Soviet demands, turned out to be stillborn.
Lithuania, quarrelling with Poland over Vilna and with Germany over Memel, tried to escape isolation by luke-warm co-operation with the Soviet Union.

In the circumstances, being weak and relatively isolated (especially after the first obvious failings of the League of Nations) the Baltic people began to convince themselves that the democratic Western powers, and Great Britain in particular, had in 1919 amply demonstrated that they were not disinterested in the Baltic affairs, and thus if the status quo in the Baltic area was to be threatened the British naval guns would fire again.

This was not a very realistic assumption considering the British determination (stemming from their wishful thinking) not to be involved in Europe beyond the Rhine. Nevertheless, the Baltic policy makers, being relatively inexperienced themselves and unable to find a better solution, simply hoped for the best.

During the relatively calm nineteen-twenties their assumptions were actually tested on two occasions only. The first arose in 1924 when, during a Communist putsch in Tallin, the Estonian government turned to Great Britain with a request to show the British flag in the Baltic area.
once again and despatch British naval units to the Estonian shores (where the Soviet fleet was already assembled). Despite the danger that this could have been the end of independent Estonia, the British government did not comply with the Estonian request. However, these facts never became public knowledge and so the idea that the British would come immediately one of the Baltic States was in danger was perpetuated, at least where the popular image was concerned.

Nevertheless, the politicians should have drawn their inferences from the second episode, instigated by the Latvian Foreign Minister, Cielens, who in 1927 proposed that France, Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union on one side, and the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the other, should sign a common treaty guaranteeing the independence of the Baltic States. While both the French and German Foreign Ministers expressed their readiness to consider this matter under certain conditions, the British Foreign Secretary categorically refused to consider British involvement in Eastern Europe, saying that Britain was not prepared to extend its European guarantees beyond the Rhine, which was already covered by the Locarno pact. (1)


(2) [A.D. p. 26]
During the later nineteen-thirties, when Hitler came to display his aggressiveness, the Baltic States ENLARGED their participation in the League of Nations. When, by the end of the thirties, the League had become an obvious failure, all Baltic States, for the want of a better proposition, decided to hide under the cloak of neutrality. Yet their leaders must have realized that neutrality itself needed protection, and that their future was staked on the expectation that the Nazi-Soviet hostilities would be of a permanent nature. Therefore, as soon as one of these two powers moved against a Baltic country, it would be counterbalanced by the other colossus. While these assumptions provided some room for manoeuvring, the Baltic people deeply mistrusted both of their large neighbours and therefore hoped that, in the circumstances mentioned, they would not be in danger without a major European conflict, and that such a conflict would end with the Western powers becoming the final arbitrators, and in their own interests enforcing once again (as in 1918) the idea of cordon sanitaire as the final settlement for Eastern Europe.

As already stated, despite all these fears and hopes in the minds of the Baltic people, the British policy in the area remained passive until the Anglo-French
and Soviet talks of 1939, which originated as a British attempt to preserve peace by building a peace front.

During the talks it became clear that it was not possible to put the new alliance on a workable footing while maintaining the status quo. This was the very problem which moved the Baltic States into the limelight of European politics during the pre-war months, and it is the subject matter of this thesis.
The events leading to the Anglo-French and Soviet talks began to unfold on 14th March 1939, when Hitler's troops, contradicting all Führer's promises to leave non-German nations alone, marched into the rump of Czechoslovakia and placed the non-German Czechs and Slovaks under German rule.

Uncertain whether "this was the end of an old venture or the beginning of a new one" Chamberlain expressed the fear that this could, in fact, be a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force. (1) After stating that there was hardly anything he would not sacrifice for peace, he declared that one thing must be excepted — the liberty the British people had enjoyed for hundreds of years and would never surrender. (2) For almost two decades, despite the numerous international crises of the nineteen-thirties, the British people had not listened to such words coming from their Prime Minister. Nevertheless, in saying this, Chamberlain was only echoing the unusually strong

(2) Ibid. loc. cit.
opinions heard by then in the House of Commons, in public places and in the British Dominions. These negotiations turned out to be the first signs of the arrival of a new epoch in the British foreign policy.

The birth of this epoch was marked by an extremely intense diplomatic activity, extending over the last two weeks of March. The first week was overshadowed by the fear that Rumania was to be added almost immediately to Hitler's conquests. Living under this fear the British Foreign Office approached the Eastern European governments with the idea of forming a common peace front. Due to the British Government's mistrust, the Soviet Union was not among the countries consulted, so it acted on its own accord. On 18th March Litvinov informed the British Ambassador in Moscow, Seeds, that the Soviet government took the view that Britain, France, the Soviet Union, Poland, Rumania and Turkey should appoint delegates to confer together, preferably at Bucharest, on possibilities of common action to resist further German aggression. (1)

However, on the following day Halifax informed the Russian Ambassador in London, Maisky, that the Soviet

proposition was not acceptable to the British government. As was to be expected, the Soviet leaders were offended by such a British reaction. Nevertheless, they were made familiar almost immediately with Chamberlain's idea that a formal statement, signed by the four powers of U.S.S.R., France, Poland and Great Britain should be issued instead, declaring that they would act together in the event of further signs of German aggressive ambitions. (1)

However, the Poles soon argued that for the Soviet Union and Poland to appear as co-signatories of such a document was tantamount to serving notice on Germany that Poland was abandoning the policy of balancing between her two great neighbours and was openly entering the Soviet camp. According to the Polish Foreign Minister, Beck, this would provoke immediate and disastrous action by Germany against Poland. (2) Therefore, Poland was ready to associate herself with France and Great Britain as well as to help Rumania, with whom she was bound by a treaty of alliance directed against the Soviet Union. (3) Halifax was sure this would give the Soviet government the idea that the Western powers were pushing her to one side, but the

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(1) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 403.
(2) Survey, op cit, p. 79.
(3) Ibid, loc cit.
French Foreign Minister, Bonnet, hoped that it would be possible to explain the situation to Litvinov. In addition, Rumania was not prepared to welcome Soviet help, and Bonnet recalled that in 1938 repeated and unsuccessful attempts were made to persuade Poland and Rumania to agree to the passage of Russian troops en-route for Czechoslovakia.

Meanwhile, Litvinov (who was aware that Poland would not participate) made an empty gesture by advising Seeds that the Soviet Union was prepared to sign the British-proposed four power declaration, adding that the Baltic and the Scandinavian countries should be invited to participate.

However, during the night of 22nd-23rd March the Memel question was settled in accordance with Hitler's wishes when Germany occupied this area, and by the end of March Poland seemed to be threatened as much as Rumania. Attention began to be concentrated on Danzig as the main danger spot in Europe, and the British government now feared that Germany could strike suddenly at Poland before a general security system could be organized. British

(1) Ibid, p. 80.
(2) Ibid, p. 79.
(3) Ibid, p. 78.
(4) Ibid, p. 84.
fears were increased by Beck, who was concealing the exact nature of the German demands against Poland, and the British were suspicious that Beck might suddenly give in to Germany, thereby upsetting the European equilibrium altogether. To pacify Poland the British government informed the Soviet leaders that the proposed four power declaration was abandoned, and on 31st March it extended guarantees to Poland "that in the event of any actions which clearly threatened the Polish independence and which the Polish government considered vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's government would feel themselves bound at once to hand the Polish government all support in their power".

Since the Western powers were at this stage mainly concerned with Germany's threat to Polish independence the idea that an alliance with the Soviet Union could be substituted for Polish co-operation was never discussed by the British and French foreign policy makers. Russian suspicions were kindled when no other definite suggestions were made by the Western powers regarding Soviet

(1) Ibid, p. 87.
(2) Ibid, p. 85.
(4) Survey, op cit, p. 80.
co-operation, and they were insulted by not being treated as a power of primary importance. For this reason, Litvinov showed clear signs of annoyance when he saw Seeds on 1st April, after Chamberlain's declaration relating to the Polish guarantees. (1)

In this unfavourable atmosphere, on 15th April Seeds, on instructions from his government, suggested to Litvinov that the U.S.S.R. should make a unilateral declaration promising that Russian assistance would be available, if desired, to any neighbour of the Soviet Union which resisted an act of aggression. (2)

This proposal initiated the talks to be discussed here, and marks the beginning of our story. It would, however, be incomplete without some prior consideration of such factors as the objectives of British foreign policy, interpreted at this particular stage by Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary, Halifax. In the circumstances it must be assumed that the ideas of these two men played a decisive role in the shaping of British foreign relations and they, too, deserve some of our attention. Since no ideas can be translated into practical politics without at least the potential

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(1) Ibid, p. 94.
(2) Ibid, p. 438.
backing of power, we must also look for the main factors governing the British military position, linked so closely in 1939 with that of their French allies. Finally, our framework would be lopsided without a preliminary glance at the Poles (as the main-stay of the British Eastern European alliance) and the Soviet Union (the potential allies and Britain's main counterpart in the talks).

In order to do this we must now pause for a brief discussion of these topics.

The peace treaty of Versailles had satisfied almost every British desire. Germany was totally disarmed and the British government's official policy came to be based on the assumption that there would not be a major war for ten years, with the result that Britain, too, could save on her armament. If this was warranted during the first few post-war years, it was not when, a few years later, a much wider extension of the meaning of this rule was adopted by which the ten years were no longer to be reckoned from any one fixed date, but from a date perpetually moving forward - without a time limit. (1) This attitude did not make it possible to meet the changes taking place outside of Britain which represented a threat to the existing status quo (with uninterrupted trade and commerce on which the Commonwealth thrived).

The consequences of this complete lack of a realistic policy became apparent during the nineteen-thirties, when the shadows of Versailles tended to disappear and the crises of Manchuria, Abyssinia, Rhineland, Spain, Austria and finally Czechoslovakia developed. During every one of these crises the British Foreign Secretary was unable to do more than argue (as he actually did at the Assembly of the League of Nations during the Abyssinian crisis) that "the League of Nations and my country stands with it for the collective maintenance of the covenant in its entirety and particularly for steady collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression".(1) Due to British military weakness these principles were never enforced. This state of affairs, brought about by a wholly irrational tide of pacifist sentiment in Britain, continued after Hitler's rise to power and caused profound damage both at home and abroad. At home it immensely aggravated the difficulty of making the British people appreciate and face the new situation which Hitler was creating, while abroad it served to tempt Hitler and

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Mussolini to presume that in shaping their policies they could disregard Britain. For instance, Ciano noted that "the British do not want to fight, they draw back as slowly as possible, but they do not want to fight." (1)

When Halifax became the Foreign Secretary in this situation in 1938 he felt "like a player invited to stake, when he knew that if the fortune of the game turned against him, he had nothing with which to redeem his pledge". (2) Only appeasement was possible in these circumstances, and this was the policy inherited and pursued by the Chamberlain government until March 1939, when the situation was re-assessed and a new line adopted.

To understand the Chamberlain government's foreign policy making, we must note that Chamberlain himself, in marked contrast with his predecessors, took the closest possible interest in foreign affairs and continually intervened in the making of foreign policy. Surprisingly enough, decisions of the utmost importance, like the one to meet Hitler face to face in September 1938, were made by Chamberlain alone. (3) The actual time for

(1) W. Churchill, op cit, p. 306.
(2) Halifax, op cit, p. 196.
(3) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 357.
meeting Hitler was selected by Chamberlain alone. He
told Cabinet about the forthcoming trip after he had
sent a telegram to Hitler outlining his intentions. Yet,
as Iain Macleod has pointed out, this did not mean that
British foreign policy in 1939 was Chamberlain's own
personal policy, for he was never a dictator of govern-
ment policy. Also, Chamberlain always admired what
he called "a cabinet mind" in his Foreign Secretary,(2)
implying that he himself stood for collective decision
making. Macleod's statement is supported by the fact that
the decision to guarantee Poland was reached only after
three prolonged Cabinet meetings,(3) while Halifax has
stated that the general line of British foreign policy
was usually arrived at after a discussion between himself
and Chamberlain(4) - with the Chief Industrial Adviser to
the British government, Horace Wilson, ensuring that the
Foreign Secretary was fully acquainted with the thoughts
of the Prime Minister and vice versa.(5) Consequently,

(2) K. Peiling, op cit, p. 398.
for our purposes we can conclude that during the period to be considered here British foreign policy was largely initiated and shaped by Chamberlain and Halifax, but their actions, even if only retrospectively, were scrutinized and approved by the Cabinet.

It is apparent that the ideas and attitudes of both these men greatly determined the final shape of the British foreign policy, and therefore they deserve at least some attention.

Chamberlain's basic conviction, stemming from his English Liberal upbringing was that there could be no peace and security, or permanence of happiness for mankind, except under the rule of law and order of reason and good faith. In fact, rightly or wrongly, he felt that the British willingness to uphold these principles accounted for the fact that the British influence in the world was still the most powerful. (1) His very liberalism, of which he was so proud, was based (as he told Parliament) on confidence in the rewarding effect of trust and good faith. (2) Another one of his fundamental beliefs was that life is not worth living under domination of fear, and that Hitler,

(2) Ibid, p. 328.
after he had thrown away all his pledges to himself and the world, was the source of such fear. Therefore, Chamberlain was not prepared to sit by and see the independence of one country after another successfully destroyed. (1)

On the other hand, he was convinced that "war wins nothing, cures nothing and ends nothing". For this reason he hoped that even the Polish guarantees would prove to be the turning point not towards war but towards a more wholesome era, when reason would take the place of force. (2)

Therefore, come what may, he would not accept war as inevitable, and would not do anything at home or abroad that would bring it nearer, nor leave anything undone that might stave it off. On the contrary, he believed war might be stopped if Germany could be convinced not only that her abuse of force would be instantly resisted, but that she would get consideration for any rational demand through peaceful negotiation. (3) In keeping with these assumptions, Chamberlain's policy was to build not an alliance directed against Germany, but a peace front against aggression.

(1) Survey, op cit, p. 208.
(2) I. Macleod, op cit, p. 274.
(3) W. Pelling, op cit, p. 402.
He thought the British would not succeed in such a task if, by ensuring the co-operation of one country, they rendered another country uneasy and unwilling to collaborate with them. (1) Thus Chamberlain's real aim in 1939 was to establish a peace front in Europe and to re-arm at home - but only to give the necessary weight to British foreign policy while simultaneously continuing to advocate the policy of appeasement. This attempt constituted what has been aptly called the double line of British policy of 1939. (2)

Such a policy would have been difficult in the best of circumstances, but Chamberlain also had to face the additional difficulties created by his existing and potential Eastern European allies. These complications began with Poland, and here Chamberlain agreed with Beck that a British-Polish-Soviet alliance would lead to Hitler's making an attack which he hoped could otherwise still be avoided. In addition, he feared that it would make any subsequent discussions with Germany and Italy difficult, if not impossible. (3) This was important to Chamberlain because, with an overwhelming majority of British opinion,

(2) Survey, *op cit*, p. 204.
he continued to repudiate all idea of redividing the world into two armed camps. However, the Soviet Union insisted on the formation of such camps and, as Chamberlain feared, was also pulling strings (for instance in Spain) to get Britain involved in a war with Germany. Russia, being half-Asiatic, was to be excluded from European politics for as long as possible.

Therefore, Chamberlain was reluctant to acquiesce to the opening of negotiations with the Soviet Union, as he distrusted the "Bolsheviks" (as he called them). Chamberlain's biographer, Professor K. Feiling, alleges that Chamberlain's stand against the Russians was not dictated by fear of potential social consequences, but by political fact and suspicion that if the Soviet strength was exhausted by blood-letting it would collapse in war. He also felt that Russia was playing power politics rather than seeking peace. Nevertheless, as the Polish and Rumanian impotence became clearer, Chamberlain was under pressure from the French government and from public opinion at home to open negotiations with the Soviet Union. Later,

(1) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 325.
(2) Ibid, p. 347.
(4) I. Macleod, op cit, p. 273.
(5) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 407.
(6) I. Macleod, op cit, p. 273.
in May, the majority of Cabinet opinion even swung towards a Soviet-proposed triple alliance and Chamberlain was driven to explore the Soviet proposals seriously. (1) Thus, obviously disliking the whole business, he was not elated when the negotiations were going well, cast down when they seemed to be going badly, nor shaken when the Communist preference for accommodation with the Nazis became apparent. (2) If anything, as the negotiations went on Chamberlain came to dislike the Soviet methods of negotiation, in addition to everything else. (3) His deepest objection to the negotiations of the summer of 1939 was based on the fact that the alliance would be an alignment of opposing blocks, and as such would destroy his double line policy. (4)

His objections to the proposed alliance were further reinforced by the uncertainty of Commonwealth opinion, and the definite fear that French Canada would oppose it. As for the rest of Europe, he believed that the Balkan resistance would be divided by such an alliance, and that Spain would be driven into the hands of Germany. Finally,

(1) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 408.
(2) I. Macleod, op cit, p. 273.
(3) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 408.
(4) Ibid. loc. cit.
Chamberlain had faith in the conception that the British government was committed to defend the small European states. (1) Of course, this sounds like moralizing in politics, but it only supports Feiling’s observation that both Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary were attempting to moralize politics, and both were too inelastic in their moral code to adapt themselves to revolutionary situations. (2) We are to deal with precisely such a situation in this thesis.

Dirksen, the German Ambassador in London during the summer of 1939, argued that anti-German elements in the British Foreign Office influenced Halifax (who himself was loyal to Chamberlain) to reorientate British Foreign policy. (3) Furthermore, the German Ambassador argued that the more-determined British Foreign policy of 1939 was actually hatched in the Foreign Office. (4) A somewhat similar view was also shared by one of Halifax’s biographers, who maintained that Halifax carried the Prime Minister, the government and the country with him in a diplomatic restoration in an attempt to revive Britain’s historical role as the balancer of power. (5)

(1) Ibid, loc. cit.
(2) Ibid, p. 398.
(4) Ibid, p. 171.
(5) A.C. Johnson, op. cit, p. 513.
While there may be some truth in these opinions, they do not override the fact which emerges from Halifax's autobiography that Halifax shared all Chamberlain's attitudes regarding the British Foreign policy. The same book contains a revealing summary of Halifax's ideas — from a speech delivered at the Royal Institute of International Affairs at the end of June 1939. He said that "British policy rests on twin foundations of purpose. One is determination to resist force. The other is our recognition of the world's desire to get on with the constructive work of building peace. If we could once be satisfied that the intentions of others were the same as our own and that we all really wanted peaceful solutions — then, I say here definitely, we could discuss the problems that are to-day causing the world anxiety. In such a new atmosphere we could examine the colonial problem, the problem of raw materials, trade barriers, the issue of Lebensraum, the limitations of armaments, and any other issue that affects the lives of all European citizens. But this is not the position which we face today. The threat of military force is holding the world to ransom, and our immediate task is — and here I end as I began — to resist aggression." (1)

Both Chamberlain and Halifax were conscious that in 1939 the dominant feature in British foreign policy was still Britain's status as a leading world power, and as the foremost spokesman for the Western powers. As always, the status of the leading power entailed considerable difficulties in reconciling the often conflicting demands made by various foreign countries. However, basically the two men followed their predecessors and subordinated the British foreign relations to three well-proved fundamental principles: (a) the policy of maintenance of balance of power; (b) consultation with the Commonwealth; and (c) use of the League of Nations for co-operation and reconciliation only, and not for enforcement of any particular policy.

According to these principles at the time when the Anglo-French and Soviet talks commenced, British policy was to reconcile the following considerations: (a) not to forgo the chance of receiving help from the Soviet government in the case of war; (b) not to jeopardize the common front by disregarding the susceptibilities of Poland and Rumania; (c) not to forfeit the sympathy of the world at large by giving a handle to Germany's Anti-Commintern propaganda; and (d) not to jeopardize the cause of peace by provoking violent attack by Germany. (1)

The help sought from the Eastern European powers was badly needed because, militarily speaking, Great Britain combined with France was no longer a match for Germany in 1938-39, and therefore was unable to counterbalance her. For example, with regard to land forces, by August 1939 Britain had only five ill-equipped divisions available. At the same time Germany could immediately mobilize 5,000,000 soldiers, who were matched by 5,000,000 French regulars and reservists. However, German forces were better equipped — for instance during the Battle of France in 1940 they were supported by 3,000 tanks, against 2,200 French tanks reinforced by 600 British machines. (1) The British air force had 1,500 first-rate aircraft, to which the French could add about 1,000 planes. This combined British-French air arm had to meet 3,750 German planes by September 1939, although the Western alliance was producing 1,000 aircraft a month as against the German monthly production of 700. (2) Thus in this regard time was on the side of the Western powers. At sea the British tonnage was more than that of the French, German and Italian fleets combined, and the only branch in which Britain had to fear competition was submarines. (3)

(2) Ibid., pp. 681-2 and 688.
(3) Ibid., loc. cit.
It has been argued that even during the last months of peace British rearmament was hindered by two ideas:
(a) The policy of appeasement continued to prevail and only the original idea of unilateral disarmament was abandoned. This illustrates that for Chamberlain rearmament was only a defensive precaution to make British policy effective. (b) While the idea of laissez faire prevailed, the government was unable to obtain on a voluntary basis the results it wanted so far as industry and military service by the people were concerned. (1) Nevertheless, compulsion was not introduced for a long time because it was felt that while peace lasted compulsion was unnecessary and useless. Interestingly enough, the same was shortly said about the alliances with the neighbours of the Soviet Union, who were not to be forced to abandon their freedom of action. Yet in British internal politics this principle of non-compulsion was abandoned perhaps a little too late when military conscription was introduced on 26th April 1939.

Finally, it must not be overlooked that the guaranteed Eastern European states required immediate British and French military assistance. In this regard, it had been realized before the war that there was little hope

(1) Ibid, p. 695.
of results from anything France and Britain could do to help Poland. According to Liddell Hart, real pressure on Germany could only have been exerted by the slow process of economic and moral blockade. However, if Russia was to make war supplies available to Germany then the prospect of economic pressure, too, would have greatly diminished. (1)

The Finnish-Soviet war of 1939-40 abundantly demonstrated that the Western powers were unable to help the Baltic states while Germany, or for that matter some other unfriendly power, controlled the Baltic sea.

As we have seen, all British military calculations regarding the continent of Europe were based on their cooperation with France, so French attitudes were bound to affect British behaviour. While Chamberlain felt that France was deeply attached to her understanding with Great Britain, he knew that France was in a very weak condition, as it was continually subject to attacks on franc, together with industrial troubles and discontent which seriously affected her production of all kinds of arms and equipment in particular. (2) Above all, Chamberlain feared that Daladier had no confidence in his own position, (3) for Daladier was caught between two forces.

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(2) K. Feiling, *op cit*, p. 322.
the extreme Left and trade unions, which feared and hated the foreign dictators but feared and hated even more the prospect of a home-grown dictator; while the extreme Right sympathized with foreign dictators and feared them less than their own Left-wingers.

France had a mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union (concluded 1935), and military agreements (February 1921), obliging her to give immediate aid and assistance to Poland, including effective and rapid military help. As recently as January 1939 the French Foreign Minister had publicly announced that France regarded these engagements towards Poland as binding. Furthermore, France had associated herself with Britain in Chamberlain's declaration regarding the Polish guarantees.(1)

Until March 1939 the French official policy was to work towards disarmament, and all her Eastern-European alliances were made for the immediate future only, enabling her to speak (presumably to the other great powers) "with the voice of an equal".(2)

(1) Survey, op cit, p. 53.
(2) Ibid, pp. 697 and 699.
The estimate for French defence expenditure for the year 1939 was 142 million pounds sterling and only later was somewhat increased. Nor was there any apparent determination to approach the defence problems in a business-like manner. This was well illustrated by the fact that in Germany, which had almost twice the French population, people worked 60 hours a week preparing for war, while in France only a 45-hour week was permissible.

In the circumstances, it was not surprising to hear from General Gamelin in August 1939 that if Poland should give in, thus enabling Hitler to throw the entire weight of his forces against the West, France could hardly resist. If French generals were tired defeatists, with purely defensive conceptions only, then French diplomats could not keep a secret for very long. All this meant that Britain had a very ineffective partner indeed, and eventually when war was to be declared France hesitated for three days before action was taken.

(1) Ibid, p. 706.
(2) Ibid, p. 707.
(3) L.B. Namier, op cit, p. xiii.
(5) K. Feiling, op cit, p. 323.
This, we can assume, would only have increased the British willingness to find as many allies as possible in Eastern Europe, therefore we shall briefly discuss the situation there.

As indicated above, by 31st March it was an established fact that Poland was to become the mainstay of the Eastern front to be built by Britain for the containment of Germany. To the British government the problem was really two-fold: (a) to make sure immediately that further increase of the German might, by more conquests, did not further aggravate the problem of European balance of power; and (b) Britain wanted to be assured that if war came, Germany would have to fight on two fronts - in the East and in the West. As the real Soviet intentions were uncertain, and as it was obvious that no other Eastern European country wanted close co-operation with the Soviet Union, it was clear that if quick action was to be taken Britain did not have much of a choice in the selection of her Eastern European allies.

The great haste with which the new Anglo-Polish relationship was established probably accounted for mutual suspicions, which continued to cloud the relations between the two countries during the period in question here. No doubt they were the heritage of the immediate past.
for the Polish demands directed against Czechoslovakia in September 1938 were still vividly remembered and, as already mentioned, there was no certainty about the line the Polish Foreign Minister, Beck, had taken in his dealings with Hitler since that date. On the other hand, even after the receipt of the British guarantees it would have often occurred to the Poles that Czechoslovakia, too, had been promised an international guarantee. Nor did the British appear to possess any means to give effective and prompt help to any state lying to the East of Germany.

The military value of Poland was determined by the Polish inability to mobilize more than forty divisions due to lack of material. Even these troops had only three months' supplies and this shortage of material ruled out the use of a further 600,000 trained Polish reservists. On the whole, the British opinion was that the Polish army was fairly well-equipped with modern weapons, but that it was relatively weak in artillery, and that the anti-aircraft defence was inadequate. The Polish air-force, too, was deficient in modern equipment, and (as pointed out by the British Military Attache in Warsaw) was thought to be unable to offer more than a limited resistance.

(1) Survey, op cit, p. 150.
(2) British Documents, op cit, Vol. VI, Appendix pp. 769-70.
(3) Survey, op cit, p. 87.
To make things worse the Polish central industrial district, in which three months' supplies of raw materials were amassed, was potentially vulnerable. (1) It became clear during Ironside's military conversations in Warsaw at the end of May that, once the war had started, great difficulties existed for supplying Poland with additional supplies from outside. (2) For all these reasons the British government shared the point of view expressed by General Gamelin that a prolonged resistance by Poland was inconceivable unless she had Russian help. (3)

Nevertheless, when Halifax asked Beck early in April whether Great Britain and Poland should not try to ascertain how to get the maximum co-operation from the Soviet Union in case of a war, Beck replied that the present efforts were made to maintain the peace. He added that Poland was ready to improve her relations with the U.S.S.R., but not to extend them. (4) Asked what Poland would do if Britain and France made closer relations with the Soviet Union, Beck replied that he would then declare...

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(1) *Ebd.* *Loc. cit.*
(3) *Survey, op cit*, p. 165.
(4) *Polish Documents, op cit*, p. 25.
that this did not extend the Polish liabilities. (1) It was repeatedly stated that the Polish government's policy was not to ask for Soviet help, as it was below Polish dignity to accept anything less than a mutual assistance pact. As the Polish traditional role was to act as a barrier between Germany and the Soviet Union, the Poles said such a pact would bring immediate hostile reactions from Berlin and would probably lead to an immediate declaration of war. (2)

On the other hand, the Poles believed that the Russians would find it in their own interest to help Poland liberally with munitions and war material, if they felt that in peace-time such a request would merely put up the Russian price. (3) Nor did they really place a great deal of value on the Soviet military co-operation, (4) because they thought that the Soviet Union was extremely weak.

In these circumstances, whatever little desire they had for co-operation with the Soviet government was

(2) Ibid, pp. 84, 25 and 548.
(3) Survey, op cit, p. 169.
cancelled out by the Polish mistrust of Soviet motives, due to the Soviet attempts not only to worsen the relations between Poland and Germany, but also to win Poland over to the Soviet political system. (1) These suspicions reached their culmination in August, when Poland was asked to permit the passage of Soviet forces through its territory. They were expressed by Beck, who thought that the mere fact that the Soviet negotiators mentioned only the Vilna gap and Eastern Galicia showed that they lacked good faith, and merely wanted to separate Poland from the Baltic States and Rumania. In fact, he felt that Molotov was attempting to reach by peaceful means what he had attempted to obtain by force of arms in 1920. (2) This idea was shared by the Polish General Staff. (3)

On the other hand, the reapproachment between France, the United Kingdom and the U.S.S.R., with the aim of checking German attempts of territorial expansion, was not opposed by Poland — on condition that it did not mean that the Western powers approved the establishment of Russian hegemony in Eastern Europe. In other words, the Soviet Union was not to be allowed to penetrate the border lands in the name of an anti-German alliance. (4)

(1) Polish Documents, op cit, p. 82.
(2) Ibid, p. 548.
(3) Ibid. Loc. cit.
Therefore, it is safe to conclude that in this regard the Poles felt a community of interest between themselves and the Baltic countries. This Polish interest was recognized by the British government in the Secret Protocol attached to the Anglo-Polish Agreement of Mutual Assistance, signed 25th August 1939. In this protocol the Polish interests in Lithuania were placed on an equal footing with British interests in Belgium and Holland, while the Polish interest in Estonia and Latvia was said to be indirect only, but nevertheless on a par with the interests of the Soviet Union in those two countries. Admittedly, this treaty was signed two days after the Nazi-Soviet pact, which possibly affected British recognition of Polish interests in Baltic lands.

However, for our purposes the important thing is to note that the Poles were not disinterested as to what happened in the Baltic States. This Polish interest was demonstrated even after their own defeat, when their Foreign Minister (after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war) was trying to engage British support to make sure that the Baltic countries had the right of national independence after the withdrawal of Germany.

(1) Ibid, pp. 551-3.
(2) Ibid, p. 553.
All this leads us to believe that during the Anglo-French and Soviet talks the Polish attitude must have had an important bearing upon the problem of the Baltic States.

After World War I the Soviet Union was treated as a political outcast, against whom a cordon sanitaire was established. This and the post-1920 frontiers, as L. Namier has noted, added Russia to the Revisionist powers. However, after Hitler's rise to power, the U.S.S.R. felt immediately threatened and joined the League of Nations, becoming the foremost supporter of the idea of collective security. Litvinov even coined the popular phrase that "peace is indivisible". But the Soviet Union was humiliated when it was not invited to participate at the Munich conference, as it was bound by pacts of Mutual Assistance with France and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet government soon interpreted their isolation as a sign of political agreement between the Munich powers, which could be easily directed against Moscow, in an attempt to start a counter-revolutionary war to retard the further success of socialism. Thus, in a speech

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(1) L.B. Namier, *op cit*, p. 144.
(2) *Survey, op cit*, p. 565.
delivered at the Congress of the Soviet Communist Party on 10th March 1939, Stalin denounced the aggressors, and stated that the Soviet policy must be cautious and peaceful for "... the majority of nonaggressive countries, particularly England and France have rejected the policy of collective security, the policy of collective resistance to the aggressors and have taken up a policy of neutrality". This, he thought, would be particularly valid if the aggressors were to turn against the Soviet Union. (1)

The following day Manuilsky, speaking on behalf of the Comintern, was even more explicit and said that the plan of the reactionary English bourgeoisie was to sacrifice the small states in South-Eastern Europe to fascist Germany, in order to direct Germany eastward - namely against the U.S.S.R. (2) Having heard about Stalin's statement, the former United States Ambassador in U.S.S.R., Davies, noted that Stalin's speech bore the earmarks of a definite warning to the British and French governments that the Soviet Union was getting tired of "unrealistic" opposition to aggressors. (3)

(2) Ibid, p. 428.
(3) Ibid, p. 429.
No doubt, in these circumstances the British government's rejection of the Soviet proposal for an international conference (made on 18th March in response to the first energetic Western demarches) again stirred up in the Russian minds all the remorse and suspicion aroused during the Czechoslovakian crisis. This position was still further aggravated when the British guarantees to Poland were extended and the Soviet Union was not treated as the principal Eastern European power.\(^1\) The following events proved that the Soviet Union expected to hold the leading place in Eastern Europe, which entailed the subordination of the smaller Eastern European states. Later on, when the Soviet Union was given a free hand in this regard by its new allies, the Germans, this freedom immediately resulted in the integration of the Baltic States and parts of Poland and Rumania into the Soviet system.

The Soviet interest in the Baltic States became evident on 29th March when Litvinov saw (separately) both the Estonian and Latvian Ministers in Moscow, informing them that the Soviet Union had been happy to recognize the Latvian and Estonian independence by a treaty of peace. Now it was unwilling to see that independence reduced or

\(^{1}\) Ibid, pp. 429 and 430.
infringed upon, and it could not remain inactive if any attempts were to be made in that direction. Nevertheless, Litvinov did not indicate what sort of action the Soviet Union actually contemplated. (1)

After consultations between the Estonian and Latvian governments, their Ministers in Moscow delivered their replies to Litvinov on 7th April. The Estonian government underlined that it could never consent to any restrictions on its sovereignty, as it alone retained the authority to judge when its rights were infringed, and that it could not share with any other state the obligation to care for its neutrality or independence. The Latvian government stressed that friendly interest was appreciated, but said that Latvia was determined to preserve her independence and integrity, and would not allow any outside influence on her foreign, internal or economic policy. The question of foreign assistance, if it arose, was one which the Latvian government would have to decide. (2)

After these events the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs explained to the British Minister in Riga what had happened, and added that the British initiative to preserve

(2) British Documents, op cit, p. 215.
peace in Europe was generally approved in Riga, as were the particularly friendly relations between the British government and Latvia.\(^{(1)}\)

Speaking about the Baltic States to the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union more than a year later (on 1st August 1940) Molotov proudly commented that "... the fact that the frontier of the Soviet Union will now be shifted to the Baltic coast is of first rate importance to our country. At the same time we shall now have ice free ports in the Baltic of which we stand so much in need. The successes of the Soviet foreign policy are all the more significant, because we have achieved all by peaceful means."\(^{(2)}\)

The Soviet attitude during the Anglo-French and Soviet negotiations of 1939 had been correctly assessed by an astute American diplomatist, who said that the break between Poland and Germany in March 1939, followed by British guarantees to Poland and Rumania, changed the whole international outlook for the Soviet Union. From then on the Soviet Union was no longer in danger of a German-Polish combination nor of a four-power European

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\(^{(1)}\) *Ibid.*\(^{,}\) *loc. cit.*

settlement. As a result of this change the Soviet Union no longer had any deep interest in the policy of collective security, and felt relatively safe from a dangerous European attack while Poland (supported by Great Britain) was at loggerheads with Germany. Consequently, the U.S.S.R. was not anxious to enter any European arrangement, which would have restricted her ability to manoeuvre. (1)

In addition to this consideration the Soviet dealings with Britain and France must have been influenced also by their disbelief that the Western powers would actually come to the aid of Poland, (2) or for that matter of any other Eastern European country about to be crushed by Germany. On the other hand, it was obvious to the Soviet leaders that as soon as the border states were swallowed up by Germany the Soviet Union would be exposed to a direct German threat. Therefore, the Third Soviet Five Years Plan, covering the years 1938-1942 was intended to make the Soviet Union independent economically and technically, as well as to make its defences invulnerable. This plan revealed that the Soviet government gave first priority to defence and, what is most important, that in order to complete the programme the Soviet Union could not afford to become involved in a war before 1942. (3)

(1) Polish Documents, op cit, p. 568.
(2) Ibid, p. 85.
(3) Survey, op cit, p. 425.
On the other hand, by the summer of 1939 Stalin's mechanical method of dealing with his "opponents" had lasted for almost two years and therefore the two Western governments had considerable doubts about the true value of the Russians as allies. Both the British and the French could not help being amazed at the number of changes occurring in government positions, and were aware that there were military regions in the Soviet Union which had had five successive commanders in ten months. All this made many people wonder whether the Soviet state apparatus was not disintegrating altogether and these doubts must have considerably influenced British reactions regarding the Soviet demands relating to the Baltic States and other problems.

The preceding pages have described the setting in which the talks were to take place, so we will now turn to the actual subject matter of this thesis – the talks themselves.

(1) Polish Documents, op cit, pp. 74-5.
CHAPTER 3

TO GUARANTEE OR NOT TO GUARANTEE?

When the original proposals were made to the Soviet government on 14th April, the British intentions were to secure at least some measure of Soviet co-operation "in spite of all the difficulties, real and unreal, which stood in the way of close association with the Soviet government in the system of international collaboration" then being built by the British and French governments. (1)

In this connection, the Russians were simply told that the British government had noted Stalin's recent statement that the Soviet Union stood for the support of nations which were victims of aggression, and which were fighting for their independence. It was then suggested to the Soviet leaders that they should restate this policy, declaring that Soviet help would be available to all the European neighbours of the Soviet Union who desired it in such a manner as would be mutually found most convenient. Such a declaration, it was correctly stressed, would have had a steadying effect upon the international situation then prevalent, and would have been a concrete

(1) British Documents, op cit, p. 205.
application of the general policy which the Soviet Union had stated.\(^{(1)}\) However, the most important British consideration was left unstated. Namely, it was impossible to restore the European balance of power unless the Soviet Union co-operated. This Soviet support was to be secured without antagonizing the border states, and without creating the danger that the Soviet Union could replace Nazi Germany as the main threat to the European balance of power. At the same time the Soviet Ambassador in London, Maisky, argued during an interview with Halifax that in his opinion the British proposal could not prevent war at all. If anything, it would only channel aggression into the directions not protected by the guarantees, in particular such an important direction (for the U.S.S.R.) as the Baltic States.\(^{(2)}\) This attitude was reflected in the Soviet counter proposal made on 17th April, which contained three essential points: (a) The Soviet government proposed to conclude a pact of mutual assistance between the U.S.S.R., Great Britain and France; (b) a military convention was to be concluded to reinforce this pact; and (c) a guarantee of independence of all the states bordering on

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the U.S.S.R., from the Baltic to the Black Sea, was to be provided. (1)

This Soviet proposal placed at the centre of these vital talks the three states of Finland, Estonia and Latvia - countries which until then had been mentioned only in passing and which together with Poland and Rumania were the Soviet Union's Western neighbours.

Apparently sensing the importance of the latest Soviet moves the Baltic States began to exert diplomatic pressure on Great Britain, to ensure that the British government did not start wavering in face of the Soviet proposals. In this connection, the Estonian Assistant Minister of External Affairs was the first to enquire from the British Consul in Tallin whether the discussions going on in Moscow affected the Baltic States. (2)

Evading a direct answer to this question, the British Consul expressed fear that owing to the conversations proceeding between London and Moscow there was a sort of anti-British "whispering campaign" going on in Estonia, the source of which appeared to be Berlin. The Estonian spokesman retorted that indeed there was considerable

(1) British Documents, op cit, pp. 228-9.
(2) Ibid, pp. 349-50.
nervousness among even well-informed Estonians regarding the Anglo-Russian negotiations, because of the fear that the interests of the Baltic States could be overlooked. In general, he said, Estonia was very Anglophile, but he admitted that at this particular stage suspicions could be sedulously encouraged by other countries. Regarding the proposed Soviet assistance he stated that Estonia could never allow Soviet troops to enter her territory. (1)

When the British Minister in Helsinki reported home the Finnish reactions to the Soviet-proposed guarantees, he felt that the Russian offer to assist Finland, however phrased, would be unlikely to have a reassuring effect. In fact he feared the reverse, for the Finns did not trust Russian undertakings. Moreover, a Russian undertaking would pave the way for a similar undertaking to Finland by Germany, which would have been welcomed in certain influential quarters in Finland. Therefore, the main effect of the suggested offer to the Finns would have been the creation of an unfortunate impression, damaging to the British. (2) In addition, the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs declared a few days later that in the

(1) Ibid. loc. cit.
(2) Ibid., p. 223.
Finnish opinion Soviet Russia, presumably in view of her economic and military weakness, was more in need of help than were the Finns. Therefore the Finns considered that Soviet Russia was in no position to give help to anybody. (1)

Only the Latvian Foreign Minister, Munters, did not seem, at this juncture, to have any apprehensions at all. His behaviour was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union had made all the proposals because it only wanted to avoid any real commitments. (2) In other words, Munters must have believed that nothing whatsoever would come out of the negotiations, and that therefore no action on his part was necessary.

Finally, while all this was going on, Lithuania was the only Baltic State which did not care, or dare, to air its views at this stage. This was understandable because: (a) Lithuania did not have a direct border line with the Soviet Union and therefore it was not to be guaranteed anyway; and (b) having already lost Memel to Germany, Lithuania was more apprehensive of the future German plans than were the other Baltic countries.

(2) Ibid, p. 462.
On the other hand, Lithuania was believed to be in imminent danger of German economic penetration. (1) This probably increased the Soviet fears that the border states would not be able to withstand German pressure whenever it came to be applied, and one may suspect considerations of this nature became important when indirect aggression was discussed later on.

All this boiled down to an extremely difficult situation for the makers of British foreign policy, who had to react to both the Soviet proposals and the pressures coming from the Baltic States. On the one hand it was clear to them that by 1939 the old ideas of cordon sanitaire and buffer states had outlived their usefulness, because the small states alone were no longer able to contain Germany. In these circumstances there was every likelihood that they would sooner or later become either German victims or members of the anti-aggression front. To close a co-operation between the initiators of the peace front and the Soviet Union was seen as harmful, because all border states feared the Soviet Union. It was thought by the British that the smaller states could not be coerced into co-operation with the Soviet

government, because this method was associated with the risk that it could push the smaller states into the German camp. There was also the distinct danger that British misunderstandings with other Eastern European powers could affect the thinking of the Poles, who were selected as the mainstay of the Eastern front, but nevertheless did not quite manage to make up their minds whether to trust the British or not. In addition, no one was certain how British public opinion would look upon such enforced alliances, and at this particular time no responsible person in Britain would do anything that would divide British opinion. Nor was anybody certain whether the assistance to be received from Soviet Russia would be substantial enough to outweigh all these disadvantages.

On the other hand, notwithstanding the above reservations, it appeared that to counterbalance Germany, particularly in Eastern Europe, Soviet co-operation was indispensable. Nevertheless, Halifax refused to accept the Soviet proposals as a basis for negotiations, saying that they took little account of political difficulties and would, therefore, require a very long time for negotiation. For this reason the British government was still disposed to think that the primary task was to erect the first essential barrier against aggression in Eastern Europe by making arrangements for the safety
of those states most directly threatened. Only after these arrangements were finalized could the areas of cooperation be extended by including the Soviet Union herself and those small Eastern European states not immediately threatened.\(^1\) Bearing all this in mind, the British government proposed once again that the Soviet government should make a declaration which would steady the situation by showing the willingness of the Soviet government to collaborate. In support of the proposal it was added this time that such a declaration would not disturb the potential beneficiaries of Soviet assistance by requiring them to accede to any arrangement to which the Soviet government was a party. Furthermore, the British argued that in making this proposal the Soviet government would place its help, in whatever form seemed most desirable, at the disposal of states which were victims of aggression and themselves determined to resist.\(^2\)

However, this British attitude was not shared by the Finns, who were apparently determined to maintain their pressure upon the British government.\(^3\) Thus the Finnish Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs, after his return from the Scandinavian conference at Stockholm, told the British

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\(^2\) \textit{Ibid. Lc. cit.}
Minister in Helsingfors on 6th May that if the Soviet guarantee materialized it would, in spite of the qualifications that it would operate only "if desired", be regarded as a menace by all sections of Finnish opinion. When assured that no guarantee to Finland by name was contemplated, he said that this was not good enough, for Finland definitely desired to be excluded from "Rumania, Poland and all that". Therefore the Finns were only asking that they be treated as a member of the Nordic group, to which they belonged, and not as a member of any other group. Then the Finnish Foreign Minister referred to resentment which had been caused by suspicions that the British and Soviet governments had discussed the matter of a Soviet guarantee embracing Finland, but had not thought it worthwhile to consult Finland in the matter first. (1)

Only a day later a similar statement was made by the Finnish Minister in London to Lord Halifax, who told the Finnish spokesman that Finland had not been mentioned in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations and that in any case the British government, appreciating the Finnish position, would never have agreed to a Soviet guarantee for Finland without her consent. Indeed the Soviet government's

(1) Ibid, pp. 495-6.
original plan had involved guarantees to all states from the Baltic to the Black Sea, but the British government had assumed all along that this referred only to the other Baltic countries with Poland and Rumania. In any case, the Soviet plan was not accepted and the British proposals did not involve guarantees to Finland in any form. (1)

But during the next few days, when Soviet reactions to the repeated British proposal that the Soviet Union should make a general declaration only began to crystallize, it became doubtful whether Halifax's promises to the Finnish Minister in London had been made too hastily. The first Soviet reactions became evident when the official Soviet government newspaper Izvestia stated, on 11th May, that England's proposals had passed over the question of mutual pact of assistance between France, England and the U.S.S.R. Izvestia therefore proposed that the three states be bound together on a basis of reciprocity to guarantee the status of the other European powers. The article also stressed that it was not true to say that, by defending Poland and Rumania, England and France would in fact be defending the Western frontiers of U.S.S.R., because the Western frontiers of the Soviet Union were not restricted to Poland and Rumania. (2) No doubt this

(2) Ibid, pp. 520-1.
statement was initiated by the Soviet government, whose point of aim became even more clear when Maisky, in an interview with Halifax, declared bluntly that the Soviet Union might find itself involved in war by virtue of its proposed commitments to the Baltic States, towards whom the British government had no obligation. In his reply to Maisky Halifax avoided the issue by saying that the proposal of the Soviet government to build a system of guarantees on a much wider basis than suggested by the British government, and involving the Baltic States, could not be a good plan. (1) Finally, on 15th May, Molotov officially declared the position of the Soviet government. He stressed that the British proposals could not serve as a basis for the organisation of a front of resistance because they lacked the principle of reciprocity, and left the North-Western frontier of Russia towards Finland, Estonia and Latvia uncovered, which might provoke aggression in the direction of Soviet Union through these countries. In the Soviet view there were at least three indispensable conditions for the creation of an effective barrier against aggression in Europe:

(1) Ibid, p. 528.
(a) The conclusion of a mutual assistance pact between England, France and U.S.S.R.

(b) The guaranteeing by these three great powers of the states of Central and Eastern Europe threatened by aggression, including Finland, Estonia and Latvia.

(c) The conclusion of a concrete agreement outlining the forms and extent of assistance to be rendered.

According to his own report the British Ambassador in Moscow, Seeds, to whom the text of the Soviet reply was handed, perused it carefully in silence. When he came to the paragraph about the Baltic States and Finland he uttered deprecatory noises and tapped the paper with his fingers. He subsequently asked Molotov to note that the British government had never expressed any intention of guaranteeing the Baltic States. At this point Molotov interjected that those states were mentioned by the Soviet side. Seeds replied that none of the states mentioned wanted to be associated with a Soviet guarantee.\(^{(1)}\)

The following day, British and Soviet views relating to their future co-operation and to the Baltic States were further elaborated during a conversation.

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\(^{(1)}\) Ibid, p. 559.

\(^{(2)}\) Ibid, p. 568.
between Maisky and Sir Robert Vansittart, who at this stage no longer had an official position, and was probably therefore expected to consider the Soviet views with more sympathy. The discussion was opened by Maisky, who said that the point had been reached where the British government had to make up its mind whether it wanted the full pact, including guarantees to the Baltic States.

Vansittart replied that as the Baltic States did not want to be covered by a guarantee which was underwritten by the Soviet Union, an attempt to include them would delay and complicate matters. Yet Maisky himself had argued that speed was the essence of the business. Moreover, Vansittart argued that if Germany attempted to attack the Soviet Union through the Baltic States the attitude of these countries could change overnight. On the other hand, he did not think that such an attack was in the least likely, because the front would be too narrow for an effective result.¹

The British Cabinet, having heard from Vansittart that Maisky seemed to be somewhat impressed by Vansittart's arguments, decided that the latter should see Maisky again.

¹ Ibid, p. 56h.
He should ascertain whether the Soviet Ambassador felt that a settlement would be possible if the British government continued to object to the inclusion of the Baltic States within the scope of the proposed arrangements, but undertook to hold staff conversations with the Soviet staff to find the best method for resisting aggression. (1) But Vansittart obviously failed to achieve anything during his next meeting with Maisky and consequently, despite all the British efforts to make sure that the Baltic States were left alone, the Soviet Ambassador continued to demand a tripartite agreement, with guarantees for the Baltic States. (2) In the circumstances, the British government felt obliged to continue its resistance to the extension of guarantees to the Baltic States, and the Estonian Charge d' Affairs, following his enquiry, was informed on 17th May that it had not hitherto been the British intention to enter any three-power arrangement, as demanded by the Soviet government, which included guarantees for Estonia and other Eastern European States. Furthermore, it was underlined that it was unlikely that there would be any change in the British attitude. (3)

(2) Ibid, p. 640.
(3) Ibid, pp. 572-3.
In addition, when the Estonian Minister for External Affairs tried to find out whether, in the British negotiations with Soviet Russia, the possibility had been considered that the British government could, in the case of a general conflagration, exert influence on the Soviet Union to abstain from any aggressive policy against Estonia, (1) Halifax in reply stated that, if an Anglo-Soviet understanding was reached, it would reduce the danger of Soviet aggression against Estonia. Furthermore, if British government had reason to suspect that such aggression was contemplated, it would naturally be interested in dissuading the Soviet government from it. (2)

However, the firmness of the British government relating to the guarantees of the Baltic States was not by any means shared by all sections of British public life. Thus Churchill stressed early in May that "not only must the full co-operation of Russia be accepted, but the three Baltic States ... must be brought in to associate. To these countries of warlike people possessing together armies totalling perhaps twenty divisions of virile troops, a friendly Russia supplying munitions and other aid is

(2) Ibid, p. 590.
essential. There is no means for maintaining the Eastern front against Nazi aggression without Russia."(1) Furthermore, Churchill thought that British participation by giving a joint guarantee to the Baltic States would not increase British responsibilities, because they were already up to the neck. (2) "We have guaranteed Poland and Rumania. Think of that as a military proposition without Russia ...", exclaimed Lloyd George during parliamentary debates on 19th May; (3) while Attlee was of the opinion that "... you cannot separate British interests from the interests of the civilized world. The line taken by the U.S.S.R. is the only realist one ...". (4) Also, The Times leaderwriter expressed the view "that Russia might not sign" until the position of the Baltic States was clarified. (5)

In addition, Daladier stated that, as far as he was concerned, he could not see much objection to guaranteeing the Baltic States. It was clear to him that if Germany should invade the Baltic States Poland would be

obliged to go to their assistance. A guarantee to the Baltic States would therefore add little or nothing to the obligations of France.\(^1\)

In this atmosphere Halifax, too, expressed for the first time the view that he personally felt that in the worst case the Soviet proposals should be accepted. Nevertheless, he still thought that it would be extremely difficult for the Prime Minister to carry public opinion to the length demanded by the Soviet proposals.\(^2\)

In order to overcome this apparent difficulty and to maintain the negotiations, Halifax explained to Maisky on 22nd May a new British formula. This formula foresaw that if the Soviet Union became engaged in war because of an appeal for assistance by either Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland or Rumania following an attack by Germany, Great Britain would bring full and immediate military assistance to the Soviet Union. In return, if Great Britain was involved in war because of an appeal for assistance by any of these states following an attack by Germany, the Soviet Union would render immediate military assistance to Great Britain.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) British Documents, *op cit*, p. 256.
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
The full meaning of this was that the British government was prepared by then to guarantee the Baltic States, but only subject to one very definite proviso - namely, the guarantee would become effective only if the states defended themselves and made a definite request for Soviet and British help.

Having heard of this new plan, Maisky immediately declared that it was not satisfactory from the Soviet point of view because it did not cover the case of a sudden collapse of the states bordering on Russia, and their failure to resist. Furthermore, he felt that the Soviet government would insist on a triple mutual guarantee, including France, against direct aggression on either of the three would-be contracting parties, and during their long conversation Halifax was unable to dislodge Maisky from his position\(^{(1)}\) - a fact proudly recorded by Maisky in his reminiscences.\(^{(2)}\)

From this point onwards, the British Foreign Secretary was convinced that the choice was disagreeably plain between the breakdown of the negotiations and a triple pact of mutual assistance.\(^{(3)}\) This view was shared by

\(^{(3)}\) *British Documents*, *op cit.*, p. 634.
a Foreign Office memorandum on the Anglo-Soviet negotiations dated 22nd May. This lengthy document proves that the Foreign Office had thoroughly considered all the possible alternatives and had posed the question as to what were the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed Anglo-Soviet pact. The conclusion reached was that the pact could be the only means to prevent war and possible German-Soviet rapprochement. It was also feared that without such a pact the Soviet Union could attempt to stay out of the war, if it came, with the distinct possibility that, with England and Germany in ruins, the U.S.S.R. would be able to control the future destinies of Europe. Finally, it was fully realized that Germany had to be fought on two fronts, and that without Russia a stable Eastern front was not possible.\(^{(1)}\)

With these gloomy considerations on his mind, Halifax went to the General Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva, where he had a conversation with the Latvian Foreign Minister, Munters. During this conversation Munters said that Latvia had a treaty of Non-Aggression with the Soviet Union and was in the process of negotiating for a similar treaty with Germany. Should the latter negotiations be successfully concluded,

\(^{(1)}\) Ibid, pp. 639-47.
Latvia would have non-aggression treaties with her two big neighbouring powers. He hoped this would result in the establishment of Latvian neutrality. That being so, he felt that the arrangements reached between Great Britain, France and Russia, if they covered the Baltic States at all, could take the form of some kind of a guarantee of their neutrality. (1) However, he did not wish this proposal to be regarded as official on the part of his government, nor did he know whether the Estonian and Finnish governments would agree with him on this possibility. (2)

Nevertheless, the Latvian Foreign Minister's idea apparently caught Halifax's imagination, and he immediately incorporated it in his latest draft proposals. These proposals, which became known as "Draft F", represented a complete change in the British attitude regarding their future co-operation with the Soviet Union, which the British now suggested should be based on a tripartite treaty of mutual assistance, as proposed by Russia from the very beginning. (3) The co-operation between the three powers against aggression in Europe was to be based on a

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(2) Ibid, p. 649.
system of mutual guarantees in conformity with the principles of the League of Nations, with particular regard to the susceptibilities of the Baltic States.\(^{(1)}\) Munter's proposal was to be taken as a basis for this, and assistance to the three states was to be extended only after a request for help to safeguard their neutrality had been made by them.\(^{(2)}\)

To prevent fears that the Soviet Union could give guarantees to countries not desiring them it was proposed that, if any of the contracting parties desired to give further undertakings to third parties, they must first consult the other two governments and communicate to them the terms of the guarantees to be made.\(^{(3)}\) Moreover, the obligations of mutual assistance did not involve the use of the territory of other powers without their consent,\(^{(4)}\) and the British minister in Riga was advised that there would be no risk of inserting in the formula any unsolicited guarantee for the Baltic States, as they would not be mentioned by name.\(^{(5)}\)

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\(^{(1)}\) Ibid., p. 659.  
\(^{(2)}\) Ibid. loc. cit.  
\(^{(3)}\) Ibid. loc. cit.  
\(^{(4)}\) Ibid. loc. cit.  
\(^{(5)}\) Ibid, p. 669.
For the purposes of assistance to be granted, all Russian border states were divided into two groups - the first group comprising Poland and Rumania, to which assistance was to be extended only in pursuance of an undertaking previously given, and in conformity with the wishes of the state concerned; the second group comprising the Baltic States, which were to be granted help only after a request by the state concerned for resisting a violation of its neutrality. (1)

The British diplomatic representatives at Warsaw, Bucharest, Riga, Tallin and Helsingfors were asked to inform the governments to which they were accredited about all this, and to point out that the British government considered that it had successfully met the wishes of the other governments concerned not to be associated with the Soviet government in the system of guarantees which the British, French and Soviet governments were undertaking. In particular, it was to be noted by the other governments that any government which desired help from the three countries signing the proposed agreement was able to obtain it without being compelled to accept any guarantee from the Soviet government for this purpose. (2)

(1) Ibid, p. 689.
(2) Ibid, loc. cit.
explanations were intended to clear the air and to reassure all the governments of Eastern Europe bordering on Russia that their liberty of action was not to be prejudiced in any way.\(^{(1)}\)

This was successfully achieved in the case of Estonia and Latvia at least. In the Estonian case it became evident when the British Consul in Tallin called on the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Selter, to carry out the abovementioned Foreign Office instructions. Having studied the British note with great care, Selter expressed his gratitude and said that Chamberlain's latest attitude and actions deserved the greatest praise. Then the Estonian Foreign Minister was quick to congratulate the British on their approaching agreement with Russia, saying that it was of great importance for the whole of Europe.\(^{(2)}\)

These expressions of approval of the line adopted by the British government were followed by an interview with The Baltic Times, in which the Estonian Foreign Minister expressed his implicit trust in the British government and said that no one in Estonia had any doubt that Great Britain was fulfilling the hopes which all peace-loving nations had placed in her.\(^{(3)}\)

\(^{(2)}\) *Ibid., pp. 697-8.*
The Secretary General of the Latvian Foreign Ministry also expressed appreciation of Russia's neighbours, and interpreted the latest British communication as indicating that there would be nothing to lead to Russian "help" to the Baltic States, unless they asked for it. However, another Latvian official added that the form of the British agreement with Russia would determine whether the agreement would be welcomed by Latvia. (1)

Thus by the end of May the first stage of the Anglo-French-Soviet talks was completed, with the British government prepared to meet the two cardinal Soviet demands — namely, to conclude a triple alliance and to extend their guarantees to the Baltic States. These guarantees were to be extended for the protection of the Baltic neutrality only, and their operation was dependent on requests for aid, stemming from the government of the state threatened. In other words, the British government was determined to secure the fullest possible Soviet co-operation in their anti-aggression alliance, but in doing this neither the established principle of interstate relations, nor the wishes and fears of the Baltic and other border states, were to be disregarded.

(1) Ibid, p. 700.
CHAPTER 4

TO NAME OR NOT TO NAME

Despite British efforts to make the talks succeed the Soviet attitude remained inflexible, and this became evident during a conversation between Seals and Molotov on 30th May when Molotov, in reference to the latest British proposals, argued that Russia would not be satisfied with a paper delusion, and he underlined that the agreement was made impossible by British insistence on assuming the protection of only the states which desired aid. Take a case such as that of Czechoslovakia, he said, whose President, contrary to the national will, had delivered his country into the hands of Germany. Nominally Czechoslovakia had not asked for assistance against aggression, but in fact not only had it been a victim of aggression, but it would have welcomed aid from outside. Then Molotov asked whether British policy was, as interpreted by the draft treaty, directed to allow such aggression to proceed regardless whether the neighbouring states might find the aggressor on their frontier? He added that the Soviet Union could not view with equanimity the prospect of Germany appearing in such
circumstances within a few miles of Leningrad.\textsuperscript{(1)}

To this enquiry Seeds replied bluntly that neither the British government nor British public opinion were prepared to force guarantees of protection on independent countries that did not desire them; for such unwanted guarantees, he stressed, were menaces and not assurances of protection. Therefore, the British had adhered to that principle from the outset, and he said that any change in that attitude would be repugnant to the fundamental spirit of the British people.\textsuperscript{(2)} Having heard this statement, Molotov retorted that the Englishmen could well argue in that spirit where the Baltic States were concerned, but he was quite convinced that if, for instance, Belgium was selling out to Germany, the British government would not remain aloofly indifferent. Seeds replied that states, which in times of peace were inclined for historical or other reasons to hesitate before asking for Soviet assistance, would take a different attitude when actually menaced by German aggression.\textsuperscript{(3)}

From then on, it was clear that the question of possible German aggression through the Baltic States constituted a fundamental difference between the English

\textsuperscript{(1)} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 726-7.
\textsuperscript{(2)} \textit{Ibid}, p. 727.
\textsuperscript{(3)} \textit{Ibid}, p. 727.
and the Soviet point of view, which, it was said, mere argument might well be unable to remove.\(^1\)

Molotov's address to the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R., delivered on the following day, only confirmed these fears. For Molotov stated that the three countries bordering on the North-Western border of the Soviet Union were not strong enough to preserve their neutrality. Consequently, the Soviet Union could not assume obligations towards other countries unless it first received guarantees in regard to these three countries.\(^2\)

In their official reply to the British proposal the Soviet government proposed that "... France, England and U.S.S.R. undertake to render to each other immediately all effective assistance should one of these states become involved in hostilities with a European power as a result either of (a) aggression by that power against any one of those three states; or (b) aggression by that power against Belgium, Greece, Turkey, Rumania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, whom England, France and U.S.S.R. have agreed to defend against aggression".\(^3\)

On hearing this proposal the French Ambassador in Moscow added that certain delicate points such as the

\(^1\) Ibid, loc. cit.
\(^2\) Ibid, p. 745.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 753.
exclusion of the League of Nations procedures (because the Soviet side feared that the League procedures were too longwinded and complicated) and the insertion of names of countries reluctant to be openly associated with the agreement might be better dealt with in a separate memorandum or document, which would be as valid as the treaty but would not be published.\(^1\) This statement was a good illustration of the French willingness to meet the Soviet demands concerning the border states.

Nevertheless, at least for the moment, there were no noticeable changes in British reactions, because the British government deeply mistrusted their Soviet counterparts and felt that Britain could not possibly pledge to support Russia in any actions she might wish to take under a disguise in an emergency in the Baltic States.\(^2\)

Besides, fear was expressed that the Soviet government was aiming for non-involvement anyway and that, therefore, any further British concessions would not serve a useful purpose, apart from assisting the German propaganda. Above all, Seeds thought, Soviet assistance was not worth purchasing at the price of extra hostility on the part of

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 754.

\(^2\) The Times, 2nd June, 1939.
the Baltic States and other countries, and that the British government's acceptance of Soviet demands to impose compulsory guarantees upon states who violently objected to them would have an adverse effect upon both British and American public opinion. (1)

In the meantime, as was to be expected, the most recent expressions of Soviet views concerning the Baltic States provoked a new wave of nervousness in the three countries. When, in answer to a question in the House of Commons, Chamberlain stated that the Soviet reply to the British proposals was under consideration and that he expected to make a further statement shortly, (2) the Latvian Foreign Minister became apprehensive that the British might begin to give in to the Russian demands. He sent for the British Minister in Riga and expressed to him the earnest hope that nothing would be said which would alter the position regarding the Baltic States. He added that Molotov's last speech seemed to betray bad faith, and that the formula recently communicated by the British government to the Latvian government seemed to be entirely satisfactory from the Latvian point of view. (3)

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(1) British Documents, op cit, p. 736.
(2) Parliamentary Debates, op cit, Fifth Series, Vol. 348, Cols. 11-12.
(3) British Documents, op cit, p. 767.
Latvian displeasure with Molotov's statement was also discussed by the Latvian Minister in Kaunas, Ludvigs Seja, in a conversation with the United States Charge d' Affaires in that city, to whom Seja gave a very clear summary of Baltic views - namely, the Baltic States feared that the mention of their names might imply to the rest of the world that they were associated, or might become associated, with the group mentioning them. Therefore, he hoped 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. On the other hand, Seja said, both Estonia and Latvia had non-aggression pacts with Germany (both pacts with Germany were signed a few days before) and with the Soviet Union, and they would also be very pleased to have the sort of guarantee from the Western powers which he believed Lithuania had had under the British-Polish treaty. He said the Poles would regard an attack by Germany on Lithuania as a move to encircle Poland, and since, under the agreement with Great Britain, Poland had the right to determine when its independence was threatened, the British guarantee was almost certain to be brought into operation by a German attack on Lithuania.\(^{(1)}\) As we now know,

Seja's assumptions regarding Lithuania and the British-Polish treaty were correct, as was his opinion that an implied guarantee of this kind was the finest sort of guarantee that the small countries in Eastern Europe could have. (1) This illustrated that the Baltic States were really not against being guaranteed but only against unasked Soviet guarantees.

Therefore, Molotov's proposed guarantees of the Baltic States were described as unacceptable, and on 6th June this was again repeated by the Finnish Foreign Minister, Erko, who declared in the parliament: "We fully understand the meaning of such an automatic guarantee for the state. It is not in line with the Finnish independence and sovereignty. Finland must treat as an aggressor any state which on the basis of such tailored guarantees intends to render what is called 'assistance' ...". (2) Also, the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs kept repeating that "... Estonia must regard assistance, for which she did not ask, as an attack on her ...". (3)

Finally, when Chamberlain came to make his expected statement on the negotiations in the House of

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(1) Ibid. Loc. c. E.
(2) Quoted by P. Meisner in Die Sowjetunion, die Baltischen Staaten und das Völkerrecht, Cologne, 1956, p. 36.
Representatives, he too still appeared to believe that the Baltic States had a good case, and simply declared that the difficulties to be resolved concerned the position of certain states which did not want to receive a guarantee, on the grounds that it would compromise the strict neutrality which they desired to preserve. In the circumstances, Chamberlain felt that it was manifestly impossible to impose guarantees on a state that did not desire it. \(1\)

Consequently, Halifax wrote to Seeds the same day that the British government was undecided between alternative methods of meeting the problem raised by the Russian proposals for the Baltic States and the British desire to secure the Russian support in the event of an attack by Germany on Holland. \(2\)

A few days afterwards, on 8th June, Halifax invited Maisky to come and discuss with him the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. During their conversation Halifax said that number one of the two principal matters in draft submitted by Molotov which caused difficulties for the British government, was the mentioning by name of states

\(\text{(2)}\) British Documents, \textit{op cit}, p. 793.
which did not want to be mentioned; while the second problem was the question of separate peace making. (1)

The reason why the British Foreign Office thought that there should not be any specific enumeration in the text of the treaty of the countries for whose defence the three contracting powers would collaborate were stated in the Foreign Office memorandum, which was taken to Moscow on 12th June by W. Strang for the use of W. Seeds. To start with, the three Baltic countries themselves were strongly opposed to being the subjects of such guarantees, or indeed to being mentioned in the agreement at all. (2)

Then, although Poland had entered into reciprocal arrangement of mutual assistance with Great Britain and France, and although Belgium and Rumania, for example, had received undertakings of assistance from Great Britain and France, it was clear that for reasons which the British government felt bound to respect (i.e. fear of Russia) these states, too, preferred not to be made a subject of a treaty concluded by the three great powers. (3) Finally, it was observed that because Switzerland and the Netherlands were as reluctant as the Baltic States to be made

(2) Ibid, p. 35.
(3) Ibid, pp. 35-6.
the subject of arrangements by other powers, Great Britain and France had refrained from offering to enter with them any arrangement by which they would be guaranteed against aggression.\(^1\)

On the other hand, the British fully appreciated that the military occupation of one of the Soviet Union’s North-West neighbours, whose resistance might be quickly overborne or who might even acquiesce in the occupation, might be regarded by the Soviet Union as a menace to the security of Russia, to the same extent as a similar situation in Holland or Switzerland would be a menace to the security of Great Britain and France. Therefore, the British government gave much thought to the question how best to meet the difficult situation through common action by the three large powers, while at the same time not forcing a direct guarantee on the Baltic States and provoking undesirable reactions on the part of their governments.\(^2\)

But it was impossible to find the answer, for if the British were not prepared to force guarantees on the

\(^1\) \textit{Ibid}, p. 36.
\(^2\) \textit{Ibid}, p. 37.
countries in which they themselves were directly interested, and which were inaccessible for the Soviet Union, then it was only logical not to give in to Soviet demands regarding the Baltic guarantees either, for in addition to the above considerations the British government was above all very determined to avoid being dragged into war by the Soviet Union over a Baltic State without having a voice in the matter.\footnote{Ibid, p. 40.}

Guided by these assumptions, the British government remained firm on this point even after the French government had pointed out that, if the Western powers hesitated to allow the Soviet Union to be the sole judge of what constituted casus belli in Eastern Baltic, then the West must recognize that the Soviet Union would not allow Britain and France to stand in the same position in Western Europe.\footnote{Ibid, p. 4.} Nor was the British determination, for the time being, weakened by the Russian explanations in Pravda that a guarantee to the Baltic States was a chief obstacle to a successful close of the negotiations - because attack through the Baltic countries was more dangerous to Russia than through Poland or Rumania, and
that therefore the Baltic States, situated in a part of Europe which had no room for neutrality, or states which could not defend themselves, had to be on one side or the other. As their position then, in the Russian eyes, indicated their coming under German influence, Britain was asked to persuade them to collaborate with the Soviet Union. (1)

But the British government continued to maintain its attitude, and only suggested that the three powers of France, the Soviet Union and Great Britain should agree to consult together, if one of them considered that its security was menaced by a threat to the independence or neutrality of any other European power. The other two powers would go to its assistance only if the other two powers agreed that such a threat existed, and if the contracting power was involved in hostilities in consequence. (2)

Having adopted and maintained the attitude that the Western powers, and by all means the Soviet Union, should be prepared only in principle to defend the Baltic States and not to force guarantees upon them in advance, Halifax

(1) The Times, 8th June, 1939.
(2) British Documents, op cit, p. 37.
was full of confidence when he was visited by the Latvian Minister in London, Zarine. The latter explained to Halifax that the Baltic States did not find it possible to meet the points lately raised by Molotov, for the states could not bind themselves in advance or request assistance by a specific country in resisting the violation of, for instance, Latvia's neutrality. For a promise of such assistance would not only make the assistance definite, but would also compromise the country's neutral attitude.\(^1\) Agreeing with all this, Halifax said that the British government was fully conscious of Latvia's desire to maintain her neutrality, and that therefore throughout the present negotiations the British had never agreed to give assurances to countries that did not want them. However, he added that for reasons of security the Soviet government could not disinterest themselves in the independence of their neighbours.\(^2\)

When Maisky called on Halifax the same day, he received an answer couched in the same terms, despite his argument that an indispensable condition for any agreement was that steps be taken to meet indirect menace to the Soviet security, associated with the problem of Latvia, Estonia and Finland. In effect, Halifax again

\(^1\) *Ibid*, p. 49.

said that British government was well aware of the importance of this problem, but that nevertheless it was not the British desire to impose assurances on states who did not want them.\(^{(1)}\)

After this, it was Pravda's turn to argue again that it was nonsense to say that the acceptance of help from the great powers would mean the end of the sovereignty and independence of the three Baltic countries, for all peaceful states were seeking mutual help against aggression. This statement was reinforced by the communist argument, which would now sound far more familiar, that as the people of Estonia, Latvia and Finland were vitally interested in securing the assistance of peaceful states in case of direct or indirect aggression, the refusal by Messrs. Selter and Erko to accept assistance of those powers could only be explained by the underestimation of the threat of aggression, or by the fact that definite foreign influences were at work. A new note altogether was introduced in the Soviet argument when Pravda maintained that it was hard to say whether inspiration for this sort of behaviour had come from the aggressor states, or from the reactionary circles in the democratic states, who sought to restrict aggression in certain areas while not impeding its progress.

\(^{(1)}\) Ibid, p. 50.
in other areas. Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London during the Anglo-French and Soviet talks, maintained in his book published in 1964 that "... our partners in the negotiations - particularly the British - incited (officially or unofficially) the reactionary governments of the Baltic States to make open declarations that they did not want to receive any guarantees of any kind from the three great powers."(1) However, it is doubtful whether this assertion by Maisky can be taken seriously, for he does not give his source of information, and in general is trying to prove that Chamberlain and Halifax really helped Hitler. The Pravda article concluded by stating that from the foregoing it was clear that the attitude of the U.S.S.R. in the question of defence of the three Baltic countries against aggression was the only correct one, and one which fully corresponded with the interests of all peaceful countries, including the interests of Estonia, Latvia and Finland.(2)

The Soviet desire to remain firm was clearly demonstrated when Molotov declared to the British and French Ambassadors and Strang (who had recently arrived in Moscow to assist the British Ambassador there, Seeds,

(1) See I. Maisky, op cit, p. 146.
(2) Ibid, p. 79.
with the negotiations) that if the Western powers continued to justify their refusal to guarantee the Baltic States by the determination of Estonia, Latvia and Finland not to accept such a guarantee, then the Soviet Union was unable to give assistance to Poland, Rumania, Belgium, Greece and Turkey unless it received equal assistance in defence of the Baltic States. Molotov said that the Soviet government consequently felt that the whole question of a triple guarantee to any of the abovementioned eight states, if not ripe for solution, would have to be postponed. (1)

This firm attitude on the part of the Soviet Union was based on the assumption that the Western powers could not afford to fail to make an agreement of some kind, and that British public opinion would force the British leaders to give way. For this reason the Russians were confident that they would be able to get either a treaty that gave them all they wanted in respect of the Baltic States, Poland and Rumania, or else a simple tripartite treaty of mutual assistance which would have given very little to the Western powers, while the Soviet Union would still have continued to benefit from the guarantee which England and France had already given in Eastern Europe. (2)

(1) Ibid, pp. 86 and 89.
(2) Ibid, p. 139.
From Halifax's point of view the Soviet suggestion to stop discussing the guarantees altogether was a reversal of the idea with which the British had started out, and which was to protect Poland and other states which were in immediate danger of aggression.\(^1\) While the Soviet Union was benefiting from the British guarantees to Poland and Rumania, Halifax expected to receive reciprocity from the Soviet Union elsewhere.\(^2\) The fact that the German-Soviet trade negotiations were commenced on 18th June indicated that German-Soviet political co-operation, too, was not impossible and this convinced Halifax that quick action was required. Furthermore, by then Bonnet quite definitely proposed that the three Baltic States should be individually mentioned in a secret protocol to be attached to the treaty, disregarding all their objections.\(^3\)

In this connection it must be noted that the Latvian Minister in Moscow had confided to the United States Charge d'Affaires there that his government had confidence in the intentions of the British government, and that while he was satisfied that the British Ambassador Seeds, and Strang, with whom he had discussed the matter,

\(^{1}\) *Ibid*, p. 104.
\(^{3}\) B. Heisner, *op cit.*, p. 40.
were fully aware of the implications of the Russian demands, he felt less confidence in the French government, which, he feared, might be prepared to sacrifice the interests of the Baltic States to obtain the Soviet inclusion in the non-aggression front. (1)

However, when the British negotiators had to face the possibility of a breakdown of the talks, Halifax, for reasons mentioned above, apparently began to weaken and wrote to Seeds that Molotov must have misunderstood the position, for "... in fact we are perfectly willing to meet the preoccupations of the Soviet government about the Baltic States, provided this is done in a way which does not involve naming them, or giving the appearance of thrusting upon them a guarantee which would be highly distasteful to them. It is because the only proposal, which the Soviet government has so far made, is partly open to this objection that we are unable to accept it; but it does not follow that the result which the Soviet government desires cannot be achieved in any other way." (2)

In line with this mildly heralded change in the British attitude in favour of a compromise, Seeds agreed

(2) British Documents, op. cit., p. 104.
with Molotov on 22nd June that the problem of naming the states to be guaranteed could be possibly overcome, by dealing with this subject in a secret document.\(^1\)

This, of course, implied that the British government was ready to start searching for a new solution, despite its recognition that the Baltic fears were well founded, and despite its own original, long upheld, desire not to compromise the principle of non-interference in the affairs of the border states, whatever their strategic importance. It cannot be doubted that this change of attitude was brought about by fear, caused by Molotov's rigid stand, that otherwise it would not be possible to secure the Soviet alliance demanded by expediency. Realizing that the plan to be undertaken was not only distasteful for themselves, but also potentially harmful for the moral and political standing of the peace front, the British government felt that expediency demanded a return to "secret diplomacy". In the light of British paramount desire to mobilize all potential anti-aggression forces this could be advocated as sound practical politics. When, however, the British new move still did not produce the desired results, Halifax was bewildered by the

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 141.
attitude of Molotov. (1) The British policy makers again began to hesitate, because the Soviet demand to name openly all the states to be guaranteed entailed the danger of alienation of the Baltic and other states, and could possibly even drive them into the arms of Germany, which was not in the interests of Britain or Russia. (2)

The latter danger was illustrated by the continued German activity in the Baltic area, the immediate results of which were the Estonian and Latvian non-aggression pacts signed with Germany early in June giving the Baltic States a false sense of security. As soon as the pacts were signed, the German Minister in Riga reminded the Latvian government that the proposed guarantees were incompatible with the Latvian-German pact. (3) He was promptly reassured by the Latvian Foreign Minister that an Anglo-Russian guarantee would be rejected by Latvia. In the same way, Münters said, Latvia would also dispose of a proposal to guarantee Latvian neutrality unless Germany participated, because to him a guarantee of neutrality by individual countries would be a contradiction of terms. (4)

(1) Ibid, p. 141.
(2) Ibid, loc. cit.
(3) Documents on German Foreign Policy, London, 1956, p. 814.
Obviously, this was not entirely in line with Munter's suggestions to Halifax mentioned above, and indicates that British fears that the Baltic States were prepared to talk business with both sides were not entirely without foundation.

Nevertheless, it appears from Munter's enquiries directed towards the German government that Latvia's preferred solution at this stage would have been to obtain a general guarantee of her neutrality, underwritten not only by Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union, but by Germany as well, on the same lines as that proposed by the Latvian Foreign Minister, Cielens, in 1927. If this plan failed, and it was bound to fail because Germany for one thing was not interested, then a guarantee extended by the Western powers only, perhaps on the Lithuanian pattern as mentioned by the Latvian Minister in Kaunas (see above, page 86), was the second Latvian preference. But as the Soviet demands made this impossible, the final outcome of the situation seemed to depend on whether the Balts feared more the Germans or the Russians, and there were visible signs that the latter was the case, particularly if the German propaganda machine was given more ammunition.

(1) Ibid. Loc. cit.
(2) Ibid. Loc. cit.
Thus a leading German newspaper, speaking about the German-Baltic non-aggression pacts, said that they put a spoke in the East-West talks, which could be removed only by methods of pure power politics. If Soviet Russia continued to press for a military guarantee, and if London surrendered to this wish, it would become clear to the whole world that the Western powers, in concert with Bolshevism, were abusing and breaking the very neutrality which the Baltic States had now decided to maintain in a solemn treaty. (1) These were the very words and this was the very line of propaganda of which the British were so rightly afraid.

In the face of these difficulties, and uncertain whether the British government could make further concessions to the Soviet Union, Halifax asked Maisky point-blank on 23rd June whether the Soviet government wanted a treaty at all. To justify his question he said that throughout the negotiations the Soviet government had not budged a single inch, while the Western powers made all the advances and concessions, and Maisky himself had told him that once the British government accepted the principle of a treaty of mutual guarantee the rest would be easy. (2)

(1) *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, quoted by *The Times*, 8th June, 1939.
(2) *British Documents*, *op cit*, p. 152.
Also, Seeds was convinced by then that all means of conversations with the Russians were exhausted, and feared that the Soviet leaders wanted some international warrant for going to the assistance of the Baltic States, even without their assent. (1) This Russian desire, he felt, was kindled by their suspicions of the Baltic governments in general and the Latvian government (since Hunters' last visit to Berlin) in particular. Their main concern was that the Baltic States might voluntarily, or under pressure, move into the German orbit or accept a kind of German domination, which the Soviet government would regard as a menace to their security. Therefore, they wanted to secure British assistance, or at least apparent connivance, should they ever desire to intervene in the Baltic States on the plea that their ruling classes were about to surrender to Germany. (2)

In Seeds' opinion, the problem was further complicated by what he felt obliged to call "a less praiseworthy motive of the Russians", i.e. their desire for hegemony in Eastern Europe. Finally, he predicted that, if war started, the Baltic States would probably become the object of a race between Germany and Russia, and said that in

(2) Ibid. Loc. Cit.
such a case it was in the British interests to see the Russians win.\(^{(1)}\)

This consideration seems to have eventually triumphed, and soon Halifax was no longer prepared to attempt to restrict the Soviet liberty to intervene, at their own discretion, against aggression designed to threaten or undermine the neutrality or independence of the Baltic States.\(^{(2)}\) This idea was reflected in the new proposals Seeds was asked to discuss with Molotov as a last attempt.

These proposals gave the Soviet Union, for the first time, the right to decide whether any aggression against a Baltic State constituted a threat to the independence or neutrality of that state, and whether the Soviet government felt obliged to assist the victim of aggression by engaging in hostilities with the aggressor. Once engaged in such hostilities the Soviet government would have been entitled to assistance from Great Britain and France.\(^{(3)}\) What is more, Seeds was authorized to tell the Soviet government that as a last resort to secure final agreement the British would agree to publish a list of states guaranteed, as proposed in Molotov's draft of 2nd June.

\(^{(1)}\) Ibid. Loci Cit.

\(^{(2)}\) Ibid, p. 173.

\(^{(3)}\) Ibid, p. 173.
All this was done while Halifax still feared that if the list of the guaranteed countries was to be published it could be expected that Germany would at once ask all the countries concerned whether they welcomed such undertakings. Moreover, he also expected that it was quite likely Germany would elicit the response that none of the countries wanted to be guaranteed. Such a result, he said, would have been an extreme embarrassment to all the contracting parties, as well as very prejudicial to the solidarity of the peace front. (1)

From all this it is quite obvious that during the month of June the British approach to the Baltic problem had undergone, stage by stage, a very profound change indeed. For if early in June the Foreign Office was only reluctantly prepared to guarantee the neutrality of the three states, then by the end of the same month the problem whether to extend a guarantee against aggression and to name the states in the treaty or not had been largely resolved by the British readiness to meet the Soviet demands in this regard.

On the other hand, there is no evidence to support Daladier's contention, accepted as true by the noted

German scholar Boris Meissner, (1) that by the end of June the British were falling over themselves to accede to Russian demands. (2) In fact the contrary is true—namely, from then on the whole British concept was based on the only safeguard still left, *which was the pre-requisite* that the treaty itself would operate only in clear-cut cases of aggression, when everything else would have mattered very little any way. As the next chapters will indicate the British government never surrendered this safeguard. In any case, at this particular stage (the end of June), Seeds still kept suggesting that assistance in cases of definite aggression against the Baltic States should be organized as a joint venture, including the French and British participation, to safeguard against unwarranted actions on the part of the Soviet Union. (3) At the same time Halifax instructed Seeds to make sure that the treaty was not signed unless the Soviet government was prepared to extend its operation to include Holland and Switzerland, whose independence was vital from the British point of view. (4)

(1) B. Meissner, *op cit*, p. 41.
(2) *Foreign Relations of United States*, *op cit*, p. 277.
(3) *British Documents*, *op cit*, p. 179.
This change of British attitude can, to some extent, be attributed to the pressure exercised upon the British government by their French allies, who (as reported by the United States Ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy) were maintaining that the failure to get the Russian agreement would be psychologically bad for England, (1) and who were trying to impress upon the British decision makers that it was essential to conclude the agreement at once. (2)

Agreeing with these French contentions, Halifax was determined to do his utmost to secure the treaty, while trying to avoid driving the Baltic States into the hands of Germany. Yet in the worst case this was a risk to be taken. (3) For the question of guarantees, as we have seen, was extremely complicated, and if, on the one hand, Halifax believed that the Baltic fears were justified, (4) then on the other hand it was obvious to him that far more was at stake than just the Baltic States. Even as far as the future of these states went, Halifax was able to argue that it was dependent on the continued existence of Poland, without which the states would become a German protectorate. Although he realized that the

(1) Foreign Relations of United States, op. cit., p. 276.
(2) British Documents, op. cit., p. 180.
(3) Ibid., p. 225.
Baltic people would have preferred to be under a German rather than a Soviet protectorate, he still believed that independence was their first preference, and he said the British policy was more likely to achieve this in the long run than anything else, because if the Anglo-French and Soviet negotiations failed and Nazi-Soviet rapprochement became a fact, the Baltic situation would become hopeless indeed. (1)

If politics is only the art of the possible, it can not be doubted that this was a sound line of approach on the part of the British government, which, unable to reach the ideal solution, was forced to decide on priorities in the light of the British national interests, not necessarily coinciding with those of the Baltic nations.

For this reason the solution of the guarantee problem decided upon by Halifax was unacceptable to the Baltic States, and this was underlined by the Finnish Minister in London, who said that the Baltic nations remained irrevocably opposed to joint guarantees, due to their well-founded fear of Soviet infiltration, while, on the other hand, they were more than willing to accept guarantees that came from Great Britain and France only. (2) But such a restricted guarantee was impossible so long as the

(1) Ibid. loc. cit.
(2) Ibid. loc. cit.
British main aim was to secure the support of the Soviet Union for the peace front. Therefore the Baltic desires were to be disregarded, despite the argument that such an action would drive the Baltic countries into the arms of Germany.\(^{(1)}\)

However, we are about to see that in the opinion of the Soviet government the British readiness to compromise and to recognize the Soviet interests in the Baltic area in case of aggression was solving only part of the problem. Consequently, there were still other difficulties to be surmounted and these will be dealt with in the next chapter.

\(^{(1)}\) Ibid. loc. cit.
CHAPTER 5
THE PROBLEM OF INDIRECT AGGRESSION

By the time the third and decisive phase of the talks commenced, it had been agreed to enumerate the states to be guaranteed. (1) However, there were at least three more problems to be resolved: (a) which states were to be guaranteed; (b) whether to name the states to be guaranteed in the treaty itself, or only in the annexed secret protocol; and (c) the British were prepared to make the guarantees operative only in cases of direct aggression, while Molotov, having obtained all the other British concessions, started to press earnestly for provisions to be made for cases of indirect aggression as well. (2)

When asked to define this type of aggression, Molotov did not go beyond likening it to the case of President Hacha's surrender to Germany of the previous March, (3) and such a vague declaration, instead of dispelling the British suspicions, only kindled them. When, shortly,

(1) I. Maisky, op cit, p. 154.
(2) British Documents, op cit, p. 231.
(3) Ibid, p. 252.
the Soviet negotiators openly stated that any change in the make up of the government in any of the Baltic States which tended to favour an aggressor must lead to an immediate military action by the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain, the British misgivings reached their high point. For this meant that if the Western powers accepted the Soviet proposals, the Soviet Union would be able to start military action against any Baltic State as soon as it cared to find a pretext, and without any further consultations would enjoy at least British and French nominal support. This in itself would have been enough to make this difficulty overshadow everything else, but, as we have already seen, the British readiness to make concessions regarding the other demands advanced by the Soviet Union was, in the final instance, based on the assumption that the Soviet Union, for as long as the agreement covered only direct aggression by naked force or a threat to use force only, would have been unable to interfere in the affairs of the Baltic States to suit herself, unless Germany used force against the states in question first. As it was felt that in such a case the three Baltic governments would not be able to withstand the German pressure for very long anyway, and that, from the British point of view, it was

better to see the Baltic States become a Soviet protectorate than appendices of Germany, the British government was prepared to put up with this solution as the lesser evil, in the worst case.

In the circumstances Molotov's proposal that the words "direct or indirect" should be inserted in the treaty after the word "aggression" threatened to undermine the very basis of the British position, and therefore had to be resisted. In addition, it was beyond hope that such an action could possibly be defended in the small countries concerned or elsewhere, because it was providing for interference in the internal affairs of other independent states.

Since, surprisingly enough, the European press continued throughout the talks to make fairly accurate guesses as to what was going on behind the scenes (no doubt due to leaks of information), the Baltic leaders were soon extremely alarmed about the latest turn of the events, and, as previously, registered their displeasure. On this occasion the first one to do so was the Finnish Minister in London, who called on Halifax on 5th July and, having quoted Chamberlain's statement that it was manifestly impossible to guarantee the independence of countries which did not desire guarantees, he said he did not believe

(1) British Documents, op cit., p. 231.
reports that the British government would recognize the Soviet government as a guarantor of the independence and neutrality of Finland or as having the right to guarantee and take steps to protect Finland, thus admitting that Finland was in the Soviet sphere of influence. (1)

Speaking about spheres of influence, Mr. Gripenberg said that Molotov's argument putting Finland and the Netherlands on an equal footing was not a sound one because, while the Dutch had complete confidence in the intentions of the British government, all Finns were deeply suspicious of Soviet policy. For this reason, if the treaty became a reality, the important question for Finns would be, who would decide whether the Soviet government was entitled to take action. (2)

It seems evident from this that the Finns still had a great deal of confidence in the British government, and that basically they shared the British view that in the case of real danger they might consider accepting Soviet help after all, provided the whole arrangement did not become a menace to Finnish interests prematurely when no real danger existed.

(1) Ibid, p. 265.
(2) Ibid, pp. 265-6.
When the Finnish Minister enquired whether there would be reference in the treaty to indirect aggression as a result of internal upheavals, Halifax replied somewhat evasively that it would be possible to differentiate between a case such as the summoning of President Haaga to Berlin, which was clearly a case of indirect aggression, and actions merely taken under pressure, which could not be properly classed in any category of aggression. (1)

The next day the Estonian Minister in London visited the Foreign Office and expressed concern that the Russians had worked themselves up to such a state of mind that they saw the hand of Germany in anything then happening in Estonia, Latvia and Finland. Consequently, they might do anything if they were allowed to judge for themselves in any agreement which they would make with the Western powers, whether any given event in the Baltic constituted a threat to their security. Believing that this would be obvious to the British government, too, he expected that the British attitude on this point would not weaken. (2)

One day later, the Latvian Foreign Minister, Hunters, indicated to the newly appointed British Consul General at Moscow, who at this time was passing through Riga, that

(1) Ibid., loc. cit.
(2) Ibid., p. 282.
he preferred the talks to fail. In addition, Munters expressed disbelief in the Soviet government's desire for an agreement, and went on to belittle the value and the likelihood of the Soviet government carrying out any agreement and the value of Soviet help, if it were given. Finally, he expressed the conviction that there was no chance of a Soviet-German agreement, which he presumed the Western powers were trying to forestall. (1)

When, a few days earlier, the British Minister at Riga had asked the Latvian Foreign Minister whether there was any truth in press reports that the German government was sounding the Latvian government as to the acceptability of a Russo-German guarantee, Munters replied in the negative, saying that Germany would not care to enter such an arrangement involving risks and responsibilities out of proportion to benefits it would bring her. However, personally speaking, he added that such an arrangement would be the next best solution from the Latvian point of view. (2)

The full meaning of these statements by Munters became clear from an interview with him published by The Times on 8th July. In this interview Munters stressed

(1) Ibid, p. 301.
(2) Ibid, loc. cit.
that Latvia did not want a guarantee of her independence, because that was a political fact beyond question; nor did she want guarantees of her frontiers, for here again she had treaties freely negotiated establishing her territorial integrity, which had not been disputed by anybody. As Latvia, being small herself, was not in a position to conclude alliances with the great powers after the failure of the League of Nations to safeguard effectively the security of several of its members, the only course open to her was strict neutrality, which she intended to maintain with all the means at her disposal. When asked whether Great Britain could not be trusted to ensure the independence of the Baltic States, Munters replied that the Baltic States would certainly trust Britain, provided that the British government declared that the Baltic independence would be respected. On the other hand, he felt, such a respect also meant that the British government had to consider the sovereign right of the Baltic countries to determine their own attitude regarding the maintenance of their independence. (1)

The Baltic pressure on the British government was maintained during the next few days, and on 10th July the

(1) The Times, 8th July.
Estonian Foreign Minister, Selter, discussed the question of indirect aggression with the British Consul General in Tallin, while the Estonian Minister in London called at the Foreign Office to talk about the same subject. Selter began his exposition by saying that the original British proposals had been quite satisfactory, while the latest Soviet proposals inviting Estonia to accept unmasked protection were completely unacceptable. Furthermore, the Estonians had understood from Soviet declarations that Russia would intervene in the Estonian affairs even if there was just a 'putch', bringing into power an Estonian government with pro-German inclinations. In Selter's opinion this meant that Estonia was not even to be given the same treatment as the other border states. In general, he underlined, it was impossible for Estonia to agree even in theory that a Soviet guarantee could be accepted, for then the Estonian neutrality would disappear, irrespective of whether or not an agreement between England and the Soviet Union was signed. The Estonian behaviour was determined by this consideration, and was misunderstood by many people in England who had the impression that the Estonians were merely being obstructive. In addition, Selter remarked, Soviet Russia had shown aggressive
tendencies towards the Baltic States for some time, whereas there were no such signs from the German side. Nevertheless, Estonia was not becoming pro-German either, because the Estonians (displaying considerably more foresight than the Latvian Foreign Minister did) could not ignore the possibility of a German-Russian understanding, in which case it would not be impossible that Germany could be prepared to give the Baltic States to the Soviet Union for a quid pro quo elsewhere. (1)

As mentioned above, when the Estonian Minister in London called at the Foreign Office he left a memorandum stressing that, in view of the various reports which had recently appeared in the press regarding the Anglo-Soviet negotiations, the Estonian government deemed it advisable to restate their point of view, underlining that "... the Estonian government have decided to adhere to a policy of strict neutrality. They are determined to defend their neutrality with all the means at their disposal. In these circumstances they are compelled to consider any automatic assistance to Estonia, given without her request and consent, as non-consistent with Estonia's neutrality, as well as her sovereignty ... According to press reports

(1) British Documents, op. cit, pp. 325-7.
automatic assistance is also now contemplated in case of 'indirect aggression', a formula which might involve quite unwarranted and inadmissible interference in the internal affairs of another country. The Estonian government, fully cognizant of Estonia's sovereignty, could not admit the right of any foreign country to interfere in her internal affairs...". (1)

The views expressed by the spokesmen representing the Baltic governments were strongly supported in the press, which in the Baltic countries, apart from Finland, was at this stage very largely inspired by the respective governments.

Thus, when The Times (in its leader on 5th July) invited the British government to sign immediately with the Soviet Union and France a tripartite treaty of mutual assistance, leaving British diplomacy to persuade the Baltic States that their truest interests were involved with this alliance, the Finnish paper Uusi Suomi promptly retorted that no French and British diplomacy could make the Finns change their attitude. (2) As The Times had noted that, if the war started, command of the Baltic

(1) Ibid, p. 383.
(2) The Times, 5th and 7th July, 1939.
would be a principal objective and the ports of maritime states would be of incalculable value, Jusi Suomi felt that The Times (which it said was Britain's most authoritative journal) had cynically presumed that in the coming war neutrality would not be respected. (1)

The Latvian and Estonian press, too, attacked the British government for yielding to outside influences which (for the first time in twenty years, it was said) were urging the British to harm the interests and the security of their friendly Baltic States which, though small, were still to be reckoned with. Even in the then prevalent atmosphere of political nihilism, England was advised not to compromise the interests of the three states for the sake of her own interests, for if the interests of the small states were sacrificed the peace front would lose its moral basis. (2)

On 8th July the Estonian daily Paevahiste added that England had forgotten what a foreign occupation meant, because she had last experienced it one thousand years ago, while the Estonian memories of such an event were much fresher. Furthermore, this Estonian paper was convinced that if the Russian troops came to Estonia they would be

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(1) Ibid, 7th July, 1939.
(2) Ibid, loc. cit.
followed by the Soviet political police, which would introduce the communist line of approach, characterised by suppression of nationalism and democracy, and accompanied by a profound change of the social structure. Even if, in the end, the occupation forces left the country, it would no longer be possible to eliminate all the changes introduced by them. Consequently, the Estonian paper concluded, the guarantees envisaged for the Baltic States were only suitable for the extension of the basis of the communist revolution. (1)

From the foregoing it is evident that the three Baltic States of Finland, Estonia and Latvia shared more or less the same views concerning problems brought into existence by the Soviet demands to guarantee the Baltic States. Nevertheless, Lithuania took a different view altogether, and this became apparent when the Lithuanian Minister in Moscow, who had recently returned from the Lithuanian capital and presumably had fresh instructions, called on Seeds in Moscow on 5th July. The Lithuanian Minister wanted to know whether it was true that the Anglo-French and Soviet talks had been practically completed. In particular, he was very anxious to find out whether the Western powers had accepted the Soviet demand to include Lithuania among the states to be guaranteed or else,

(1) Quoted by B. Meissner, op cit, p. 42.
he said, Lithuanian public opinion might feel that Lithuania was in an isolated position if the other Baltic States were included in the Western pact with Russia and Lithuania was not. (1) If this behaviour was hard to reconcile with the wishes of the other Baltic States, then it can possibly be explained by the fact that Lithuania was the only Baltic State to have a common border with Germany, and therefore, particularly since the loss of Memel, probably felt more menaced by the Germans than the other Baltic countries at this stage. On the other hand, Lithuania was the only Baltic country with no direct border to the U.S.S.R., maintaining luke-warm relations with the latter during the preceding years. To make things even more complicated Lithuania was the only Baltic country which, besides non-aggression pacts with Germany and the Soviet Union, had definite Polish assurances that Poland considered Lithuania's independence vital to herself and so would come to Lithuania's assistance in case of aggression. (2)

In the light of the above statements the views and reactions of the Finnish, Estonian and Latvian spokesmen in the summer of 1939 can be summarized by saying that due to historical and empirical reasons they were determined by

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(1) British Documents, op cit, p. 257.
(2) Ibid, p. 256.
fear and mistrust of their two large neighbours, i.e. the
Russians and Germans. For, historically speaking, during
the preceding eight or nine centuries the two nations had
amply demonstrated their desire to be in control of the
Baltic shores and lands. Everyone now knew that neither
the Nazi nor the Communist dictator was to be trusted;
and it was obvious that Germany was bent on expansion, and
that the holy task of the Soviet religion was to export
revolution, thus indicating that, in the best of circum-
stances, the continued Soviet interest in the Baltic
countries would not be entirely selfless.

These considerations ruled out the possibility that
the Baltic States could ever seek the alliance of any one
of their two large neighbours unless this was done for a
price of mortal danger, while, should the chips really
come down, the only really respected Western power —
Great Britain — was unwilling and hardly in a position
to participate in the formation of international relations
in the Baltic area. Thus, unwilling to risk their
national existence by co-operation with either Germany
or Russia, and being realistic enough to appreciate the
impossibility of relying on the League of Nations, the
Baltic States decided to hide behind neutrality, with
the result that their co-operation was lost by the other
European states for the maintenance of the balance of power.

But neutrality, like law, is an empty principle, unless there is someone to give it real meaning by upholding and enforcing it. As the agent for this sort of task must be a trusted one, and out of all the forces participating in the shaping of the European politics the Baltic states had faith only in the British government; in the Baltic eyes it was therefore cast for the role of the guardian of legality in the relations between the European nations. Hence most Baltic appeals for the upholding of their point of view were directed not to the sources of contrary opinions, such as the Soviet government, but to the British Cabinet. On the one hand this situation is proof of the unique standing of the British government in the pre-war context, while on the other hand it is a good illustration of the extreme helplessness of the Baltic nations and their refusal to recognize British weakness in the Baltic.

In addition, the Baltic countries had always had apprehensions concerning their large neighbours, but during the talks here in question they feared that if the Western powers also went so far as to extend a joint guarantee with the Soviet government to the Baltic countries (particularly in response to a Soviet request to do so) then this could
be construed as saying that the Western powers had recognized that the Baltic States were in the Soviet sphere of influence. This sort of admission would have become particularly dangerous if the Soviet argument relating to indirect aggression had been finally accepted by the other governments, because this would have given the Soviet Union the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Baltic States, and, in combination with the right demanded by the Soviet government to be the sole judge of when action against aggression was to be taken, this would have conferred upon the Soviet state the right to act against any one of the Baltic States in the name of the peace front, at any time it felt like doing so.

It cannot be doubted that all these were valid considerations; nevertheless, unable to state them openly, the Baltic States used the legalistic argument that once the states accepted the Soviet guarantee the very idea of their neutrality would disappear. Such an approach promised to be effective, because the peace front was to be built for the sole purpose of maintaining the status quo and upholding legality.

This line of approach was never questioned by the Foreign Office, which really never disputed any of the points raised by the Baltic spokesmen. This was probably
largely due to the fact that the Foreign Office shared the Baltic point of view that a highly probable objective of the Soviet Union with respect to the Baltic States was to establish, in effect, a Russian protectorate over those countries, for which a treaty of guarantee would have afforded a most convenient machinery.\(^{(1)}\)

On the other hand, at this stage Great Britain was a world power number-one, and therefore the problem of the Baltic guarantees was only one of the many difficulties to be resolved by the Foreign Office, which knew full well that all of their solutions could not possibly be ideal. Halifax was trying to explain this to the Finnish Minister in London when he said that throughout the negotiations the British had been aware that Finland and the other Baltic States had a strong claim to recognition, but, on the other hand, had had to keep in mind the possible consequences of failure to reach an agreement.\(^{(2)}\) Recognizing the need to make provisions for the possibility that the independence or neutrality of the small powers might be threatened in such a way as to affect the safety of the signatory powers, Halifax appreciated that the question of indirect aggression was of particular interest to Finland, and he promised

\(^{(1)}\) United States Foreign Relations, *op cit*, p. 285.
\(^{(2)}\) British Documents, *op cit*, p. 265.
that the British government would do their best to take into account the Finnish anxieties on this point. (1)

If large sections of British public opinion seemed to be craving an agreement with the Soviet Union, it also felt (in the words of The Times) that each state must decide what is best for it regarding collaboration with others. This was said to be not a mere convention, but a natural corollary of the British idea of liberty. (2) For this reason, Halifax feared, he would not be able to justify to the British public the Soviet definition of aggression. (3)

The fact that the British were not agreeing with the Baltic States for fear of losing their friendship is indicated by the firmness of the British attitude on other issues. Thus the Estonians were told in no uncertain terms that, while they were attacking Great Britain for having sold them to the Bolsheviks, Britain had been fighting their battles for nearly three months. Also, the Estonian open distrust and dislike of Soviet Russia, and their bitter reproaches that Great Britain was giving them up to destruction, were doing much to justify the Soviet contention that the Baltic States could not be trusted to ask

(1) Ibid. Loc. cit.
(2) The Times, 5th July, 1939.
(3) British Documents, op cit, p. 277.
for help before it was too late.\(^1\) Similarly criticized was the careless if true Estonian statement that they would accept German help to repel a Soviet aggression but would not ask for Soviet help to fight a German aggression, for this was not impartial neutrality.\(^2\) Nor were the British hesitant to express their dissatisfaction when the Chief of the German General Staff visited Tallinn, to be followed shortly by the Chief of the German Intelligence Staff.\(^3\)

The reasoning on which the British attitude was based was carefully laid down by Halifax in a telegram to Seeds, dated 12th July. According to Halifax, the British concern throughout the negotiations had been to avoid anything which would give the impression that the signatories of the proposed treaty claimed the right to intervene in the internal affairs of the countries in whose independence they were interested. For this reason, whenever trying to describe indirect aggression, the British had always applied two tests, namely: (a) that the government of the country concerned should be acting against its will under threat of force by another power; and (b) that the actions should involve the abandonment by

\(^{(1)}\) Ibid, p. 320.
\(^{(2)}\) Ibid. \textit{loc. cit.}
\(^{(3)}\) Ibid, p. 282.
that state of its independence or neutrality. Halifax thought it was self-defeating to carry the definition of indirect aggression beyond this point, for the methods by which a country could be coerced to abandon its independence or neutrality were so manifold that it was impossible to cover all the eventualities within the scope of any formula. Therefore any attempt to do this was bound to lead to nothing but suspicions and misunderstanding, both between the signatories themselves and among the other countries concerned. This would most certainly have undermined the British moral position in Europe, as Halifax rightly feared, and would have given the German and Italian governments an invaluable opportunity for setting the smaller countries against the signatories of the proposed pact. Besides, the Russian tendency to achieve such an over-definition, the British Foreign Secretary was convinced, would have filled the states concerned with most profound suspicions as to the real intentions of the future allies. 

Furthermore, Halifax felt that the incorporation of the words "or without any such threat" in the treaty, in accordance with Soviet proposals, would have allowed each signatory to decide whether any voluntary agreement which the state in question might make with a potential aggressor was to be interpreted as being "for purposes of aggression",

(1) Ibid, p. 333.
even though no aggression had taken place. Such a claim to interpret and to pass judgement upon the actions of an independent state was one to which the British government could not possibly become a party. (1)

Finally, Halifax added that it would be unwise to proceed, even on the assumption that a coup d'etat or a civil war would necessarily deprive the country concerned of its independence or neutrality, merely because at some stage another power had used the territory of the guaranteed state. (2)

Considering all this, Seeds was advised on 6th July that the British government was prepared to agree to the inclusion of the list of states to be guaranteed in the unpublished protocol but not to their inclusion in Article 1 of the published treaty, while the Soviet definition of indirect aggression was said to be completely unacceptable to the British government. (3)

However, this did not mean that the British government wanted to disregard indirect aggression altogether, which would have been unrealistic under the circumstances, but only that the British proposed to use a somewhat narrower definition of this phenomenon, defining as

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(1) Ibid. loc. cit.
(2) Ibid, p. 334.
indirect aggression only those actions committed under threat of force. (1) Accordingly, Seeds was to propose to Molotov that the first paragraph of the unpublished protocol should read: "It is understood between the three contracting governments that Article 1 of the agreement signed between them today will apply to the following European States, and that the word 'aggression' is to be understood as covering action accepted by the state in question under threat of force by another power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality. (List of States.)" (2)

It is important to note that this instruction was given to Seeds despite Halifax's opinion that it was very important to show some result of the protracted negotiations in the near future. (3) This indicates that the British government was definitely determined not to sacrifice the interests of the small Russian border states, while the continued British willingness to compromise in order to reach an agreement at this particular stage was illustrated by their readiness to agree to the omission of Holland and Switzerland from the list of the countries to be

(2) Ibid, loc. cit.
(3) Ibid, p. 278.
guaranteed, provided an agreement on the definition of aggression was achieved. (1) Halifax himself stated that this course of action was taken largely due to the attitude adopted by the Baltic States. (2)

However, the British problem went beyond the need to satisfy the Baltic States, and Molotov was very far from being agreeable when he saw the Western Ambassadors again on 10th July. In fact he continued to demand the acceptance of a slightly altered Soviet version of the definition of indirect aggression, proposing that the term for the purposes of the agreement should cover "action accepted by any of the states that were to be mentioned in the treaty under threat of force by another power, or without any such threat, involving the use of territory and forces of the state in question for purposes of aggression against that state, or against one of the contracting parties, and consequently involving the loss of the threatened states independence or violation of its neutrality". (3)

When the two Western Ambassadors asked Molotov what kind of case the phrase "without any such threat" was designed to cover, Molotov made only an obscure reference

(1) Ibid, p. 278.
(2) Ibid, p. 277.
(3) Ibid, p. 313.
to Danzig, adding that Latvia and Estonia, for example, might make an agreement with Germany which would be inconsistent with their independence or neutrality, without there being any threat of force on Germany's part. (1)

Requested to define the meaning of the phrase "use of the forces of the state in question", Molotov mentioned the possibility of employment of German officers and instructors by the Estonian or the Latvian army, which would entail the transformation of those two armies into instruments of aggression against the Soviet Union. (2)

It is quite obvious that Molotov's definition was intended to cover every possibility of Baltic collaboration with Germany. But the Baltic States were independent, and therefore, in accordance with a well established but often forgotten legal principle of international relations, the choice was to be theirs. From the British definition it was equally clear that in the face of the Baltic representations the British government was not prepared to foresake this principle, even secretly, unless one of the states openly and definitely turned against the nearest member of the peace alliance, i.e. the Soviet Union.

(1) Ibid, p. 311.
(2) Ibid. Loc. cit.
As all such possibilities appeared to have been taken care of by the British proposal regarding aggression, Molotov's repeated demands apparently only strengthened British suspicions of the true motives of the Soviet government, and Halifax decided not to go beyond his earlier formula\(^1\) mentioned above.

As the talks continued Molotov still maintained that the British formula was unacceptable to the Soviet Union because it was too vague and too restricted. Therefore, he said, he had to insist on the inclusion of the words "without threat of force", otherwise the formula would not cover a case like that of President Hacha, who would have denied that he was acting under threat of force\(^2\).

Molotov's argument was met by vain protests from Seeds, who argued that such a formula could be interpreted as empowering one signatory to draw the other signatories into hostilities, if a third government merely exercised its right to decide its own policies\(^3\). While this argument described the actual situation which the acceptance of the Soviet proposals could have created, it revealed the British suspicions of the Soviet government as well.

\(^{(1)}\) *Ibid*, p. 319.
\(^{(2)}\) *Ibid*, p. 375.
\(^{(3)}\) *Ibid*, *loc. cit.*
Furthermore, in line with his government's instructions, (1) 

Seeds stated that anything that could be interpreted as an intention of interfering in another country's internal affairs was to be avoided. Despite the British agreement with the Soviet Union concerning the case where a government under the threat of force from another government took action against its own will, in the sense which entailed loss of independence and neutrality, (2) the British government was convinced that that formula could provide only for cases where there existed a threat of force and where independence or neutrality was thereby imperilled, and so nothing vaguer and more far-reaching could be accepted. (2)

As neither side was prepared to abandon its point of view, the negotiations seemed to be heading for a breakdown. This prospect, as always, alarmed the French far more than anyone else because by then they had definite fears that the Nazi-Soviet trade negotiations would eventually lead to their political accord. (3) In addition, they feared that if the political agreement was not completed before the staff talks commenced points would be raised which would require consultation with Poland and

(1) Ibid, p. 335.
(2) Ibid. ibid. cit.
(3) B. Meissner, op cit, p. 43.
Rumania, who were likely to continue objecting to Soviet co-operation, and so nothing would be signed before the Polish-German relations entered their critical stage (expected to happen in August).\(^1\) Consequently, the French government proposed that the formula relating to indirect aggression introduced by Molotov be accepted, regardless of its provisions.\(^2\)

But by then, the question of indirect aggression was the primary concern of the Baltic States, and a large section of British opinion felt concern for their fate, as seemingly indicated by a string of questions in the House of Commons.\(^3\) Furthermore, account had to be taken of the widespread sympathy in the United States for the small countries on the Baltic Sea which had recently achieved national independence, headed by Finland (the only country which had paid its war debt to the Americans in full).\(^4\)

As these considerations provided the rationale for the approach demanded by Chamberlain's and Halifax's sense of propriety, Chamberlain firmly declared in the House of Commons on 10th July that the British government's policy was to maintain respect for the integrity of all

\(^1\) Survey, op. cit., p. 470.
\(^2\) Ibid, p. 471.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 466.
\(^4\) Ibid, loc. cit.
sovereign states. In particular, he said, the British were aware of the desire of Finland and the Baltic States to preserve their independence and neutrality, and, as this was also the objective of the British government, they would take full account of these considerations in the present negotiations.\(^{(1)}\)

Having reported Chamberlain's statement, the Latvian semi-official paper *Brīva Zemes* stated that it had dispelled all Baltic fears that their independence was the subject of bargaining between great powers, and this opinion was shared by the Estonian press as well.\(^{(2)}\)

Nevertheless, to make sure that the British attitude did not begin to weaken, Finnish pressure on the British government was maintained, and the Finnish Minister in London informed the Foreign Office that German propaganda in Finland was increasing, and that Great Britain was depicted as being ready to barter away the independence and neutrality of Finland, as well as the internal form of Finnish government, for the purpose of reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union.\(^{(3)}\) The note left by the Finnish Minister at the Foreign Office stressed that:

\(^{(1)}\) *Hansard*, Vol. 349, Col. 1784.
\(^{(2)}\) *The Times*, 13th July, 1939.
\(^{(3)}\) *British Documents*, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-4.
(a) Finland would defend its neutrality with all the means at her disposal; (b) the Finnish government could not admit the right of any power to come to their assistance for the alleged purpose of resisting an alleged direct or indirect aggression on Finland in cases other than when they themselves had asked for such assistance; (c) the Finnish government would consider as an aggressor any power who without their consent would attempt to render them armed assistance; (d) the Finnish government hoped that the British government would not, in an international agreement, introduce provisions which in some way could affect their policy of neutrality; and (e) the Finnish government considered that the acceptance of the notion 'indirect aggression' could encourage other powers to inadmissible interference in the internal affairs of Finland. (1)

The Foreign Office officials, having heard the Finnish representative's representations, informed him that the Finnish anxieties were fully appreciated and referred him to the Prime Minister's statement, mentioned above. Furthermore, the Finnish Minister was advised to take a much more positive attitude towards the talks, and

envision as aiming at the same result as the Finnish
government desired. Finally, it was added that the British
government was opposed to any definition of indirect
aggression which would imply any interference in internal
affairs of Finland. (1)

Thus, having resolved to remain firm themselves
regarding the issue of indirect aggression, the British
realized that in order to make the talks succeed they had
to induce the Russians to make a compromise. In this
connection the situation did not appear entirely without
hope, for Seeds advised the Foreign Office that the Soviet
government had shown itself prepared to discuss so many
formulae concerning the definition of indirect aggression
that he believed that, in the end, the British would get
the Soviet leaders to meet them to some extent. (2) To
make the British position clear to the Soviet negotiators,
Halifax warned Maisky on 12th July that, after all the
concessions the British had made, the time was coming when
the Soviet government would have to make their contri-
bution towards the agreement, which both sides desired. (3)

On the other hand, the British policy makers realized
full well that the British need for an agreement was more

(2) Ibid, p. 332.
immediate, for, unlike the Soviet Union, Britain had assumed obligations in Eastern Europe which it could have been asked to fulfil any day. (1) Besides, the British guarantees already protected large sections of the Soviet frontier and, therefore, the Soviet government could afford to bargain with the Western powers to make sure that it did not assume any obligations, unless under the best possible terms for the Soviet Union, on both the political and military sides. (2) Furthermore, it was to be taken into consideration that the only policy open to the British after the Eastern European guarantees was to go on building the peace front, while the Soviet government had at least two more alternatives - namely, the policy of isolation, and the policy of accommodation with Germany. This meant that the Russians were in a position of strength, and therefore, if the British government, driven by the impatience of British public opinion, wanted agreement with the Soviet Union it would have had to pay something pretty near the Russian price. (3)

As a result of all these considerations, Halifax decided to make one more concession, and to give way to

(1) Ibid, p. 422.
(2) Ibid, p. 423.
(3) Ibid, p. 422.
the Soviet demand for signature of military and political agreements simultaneously. *(1)* On the other hand, Seeds was instructed that the matter of indirect aggression was on a wholly different footing, because here a question of principle was said to be involved, and the British government could not be a party to an arrangement whereby they might be placed in the position of becoming accessories to interference in internal affairs of other states. *(2)* This idea was confirmed by Halifax during a conversation with the United States Ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy, to whom Halifax confided on 19th July that the British final word to the Russians was that they would accept a military pact but could not accept the Russian definition of indirect aggression, and that, therefore, if the Russians insisted on it, the English would have to call off the whole deal. *(3)* The following day Chamberlain, too, told Kennedy that he was not inclined to make further compromises, adding that he was sick and disgusted with the Russians. *(4)*

However, when Seeds received his government's authority to tell Molotov about the British agreement to sign both the political and the military pacts simultaneously,

*(3)* United States Foreign Relations, op cit, p. 286.
he decided not to use this authority immediately because he and the French Ambassador believed that Molotov might after all admit modifications of his indirect aggression draft.\(^{(1)}\) However, during the Ambassador's meeting with Molotov on 23rd July, it became evident that it was not possible to get Molotov beyond maintaining that once the military experts had started their indispensable work of defining military obligations of contracting parties, the outstanding political points would be easily settled.\(^{(2)}\)

Therefore, to break the deadlock, the British Ambassador, with the concurrence of his French colleague, told Molotov that their governments accepted the principle that both agreements could be signed and come into force simultaneously.\(^{(3)}\)

Reporting this to the Foreign Office, Seeds said that he was disappointed because of Molotov's attitude regarding indirect aggression. Nevertheless, he hoped that as Molotov was so pleased about the military talks, he would be able to make the Soviet government meet the West on the question of indirect aggression.\(^{(4)}\)

\(^{(1)}\) *British Documents, op cit*, p. 451.
Despite Seeds' expectations, and his own earlier statements, Molotov stated on 28th July that it would be difficult to reach an agreement on the definition of indirect aggression unless the British government was prepared to change its mind about it. (1)

However, the British government was very far from doing this; on the contrary, the same day as Molotov made his above statement, Halifax instructed Seeds to take a somewhat stiffer line regarding the one point to which the British had always attached capital importance - namely, the question of indirect aggression. Because there was no longer any danger after the latest British concessions concerning military negotiations of an imminent breakdown of the talks during the next, possibly critical weeks, Seeds was simply to tell Molotov that the British government was satisfied that their formula did in fact cover all cases that could legitimately be regarded as calling for immediate intervention on the part of the contracting parties. Therefore, the most the British were prepared to do was to agree to a provision whereby, in the event of a case arising which was not covered by the definition, the signatories undertook to consult together to determine what action ought to be taken. (2)

(2) Ibid, p. 525.
As, in these circumstances, no further progress was made towards the solution of the problem of indirect aggression, we must pause here to record in a few sentences where the Anglo-French and Soviet talks stood at the time when it was decided to start military negotiations as well. This is best done by quoting the most relevant parts of the English and French texts of the proposed political agreement, dated 23rd July: "... the United Kingdom, France and U.S.S.R. undertake to give each other immediately all effective assistance if one of these three countries becomes involved in hostilities with a European power as a result either (1) of aggression aimed by that power against one of these three countries, or (2) of aggression, direct or indirect, aimed by that power against any European State whose independence or neutrality the contracting party concerned feels obliged to defend against such aggression." (1)

The paragraph still not agreed to by the Soviet government was most significant, for it determined that "It is agreed by the three contracting governments that the words 'indirect aggression' in paragraph 2 above are to be understood as covering action accepted by the state in question under threat of force by another power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality." (2)

The draft agreement ended with the secret protocol, providing that the three contracting governments agreed that "... Paragraph 2 of Article 1 of the agreement signed by them today shall apply to the following European states: Turkey, Greece, Rumania, Poland, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Finland. ... The foregoing list of states is subject to revision by agreement between the three contracting governments." (1)

It will be noted that in this form the proposed agreement summed up very well indeed the British point of view, as it emerged during the discussions described above. The full importance of the British determination not to meet the Russians on the point of indirect aggression becomes apparent only if it is considered that until this point arose, the British Foreign Office had demonstrated its readiness to co-operate on every other issue.

In this connection it is safe to speculate that the British stand was to some extent influenced by the Polish attitudes. And the Poles, according to Beck, while they had no desire to make the British task more difficult, were against Soviet commitments harmful to themselves or the Baltic States. Furthermore, they argued that their special relationship with Great Britain meant that the

(1) Ibid. loc. cit.
British government had to bear in mind the susceptibilities of both Poland and the Baltic States.\(^1\) Also, the Polish newspaper comments made it evident that Polish opinion sympathized with the attitude of the Baltic States.\(^2\)

No doubt, the British determination to remain firm was still further increased when it became known that the Swedish Foreign Minister, \(\text{tee},\) had said that the Swedish interests would be seriously affected if agreements were arrived at by the great powers, which conflicted with the avowed principle of the Northern countries not to let themselves be objects of power politics.\(^3\) This indicated that fear of power politics openly pursued had become fairly general all over Europe.

In the circumstances, Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons on 31st July, despite the indignant attitude adopted by several members (some of whom belonged to the Prime Minister's own party) \(\text{pressing for an immediate Anglo-Soviet agreement, that} \ldots \text{there is no secret about the fact that the British and French governments combined have not hitherto been able to agree upon a definition, satisfactory to all parties, of the term 'indirect aggression.'} \)

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 545.
\(^2\) Ibid, pp. 440-1.
\(^3\) Hansard, 5th Series, House of Commons, Vol. 349, Col. 2349.
Although all three of us realize that indirect aggression can be just as dangerous as direct aggression, and all three of us desire to find a satisfactory method of providing against it. At the same time we are extremely anxious not even to appear to be desirous of encroaching upon the independence of the other states, and if we have not agreed so far with the Soviet government upon the definition of the indirect aggression, it is because the formula they favoured appeared to us to carry that precise significance."(1)

The importance of the Baltic States in this particular situation was illustrated even more specifically during the same debate by the Parliamentary Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. R. Butler, who said that amongst the still-outstanding difficulties the main question was whether the British government should encroach upon the independence of the Baltic States. As the government was in agreement that this could not be done, the negotiations had been delayed.(2)

Only a few days later Halifax elaborated in the House of Lords the difficulties facing the would-be contracting parties by saying that their problem was complicated by the necessity to provide for the new technique

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(2) Ibid, Cols. 2099-100.
of indirect aggression. All the governments concerned were in full agreement on the need to make such a provision, but the differences which had arisen related to the precise form in which this elusive shadow of indirect aggression could be brought to definition. The common object of the negotiators was to find a formula which might cover what could rightly be regarded as indirect aggression, without in any way encroaching on the independence and neutrality of other states. It was no secret that the British and French governments had made proposals that appeared insufficiently comprehensive to the Soviet government, while the Soviet formula seemed to the British and French governments to go too far in the other direction. (1)

When on August 3 Molotov registered the displeasure of the Soviet government because of these statements, which in his opinion should not have been made public anyway, (2) Seetse remained unmoved, possibly because one purpose of the British statements was to embarrass the Russians. In fact he very firmly clarified once again the British position, saying that it was essential to avoid any word or any phrase in the treaty which would give cause for suspicion in the Baltic States, or give a handle for hostile propaganda against the three contracting parties.

(2) British Documents, op. cit., p. 559.
In particular, the impression was to be avoided that the three powers considered it possible that any parties could intervene in the internal affairs of other states. Also, the British objection was that the Soviet formula could be interpreted in such a sense by suspicions or hostile opinion. The British government was therefore hesitant to agree to the Soviet definition of indirect aggression. Finally, Seeds added that the greatest danger was in the use of words "without such threat" in Soviet formula, because they might be thought to imply that the three powers claimed the right to invoke the treaty in respect of actions freely taken by independent states. (1)

Thus, after more than a month of hard negotiations, the problem of indirect aggression remained unsolved and threatened to make an agreement impossible. In the overall context of the British foreign policy this meant that the policy of building an anti-aggression front was about to fail, due to the obvious impossibility of reconciling the Soviet demands to what amounted to a free hand in Eastern Europe with the legal and moral rights of the Baltic and other Eastern European States, and the British desire not

to let the Soviet Union to replace Germany as the main threat to European balance of power. This failure became inevitable because the British government desired to maintain the status quo and legality even in the face of considerations dictated by the demands of temporary expediency. As this issue is the cardinal problem of the British-Baltic relations of 1939 we will return to it in the concluding chapter, after a brief review of British treatment of the Baltic problem during the short and fruitless Anglo-French and Soviet military talks of August, 1939.
CHAPTER 6

THE BALTIC STATES AND THE ANGLO-FRENCH AND SOVIET MILITARY TALKS OF 1939

As we have seen above, until the later part of July 1939 British policy makers were convinced that the prerequisite for any military talks was a far-reaching political agreement between the nations concerned. Nevertheless, by the end of July the British government was prepared to abandon this vital principle, because, whatever else happened, in the circumstances it was politically expedient, at least outwardly, to keep the Anglo-French and Soviet talks going as a morale booster for the peace front and as a threat to Germany. Besides, there were some faint hopes that such a demonstration of the desire of the Western powers to cooperate with the Soviet Union in the military sphere as well would induce the Soviet government to give a more favourable consideration to the still outstanding political difficulties.

Both of these considerations found their expression in the instructions given to the British military mission to Moscow, which stated in part that "... for some time past it had been clear that the Russians intended to insist upon the conclusion of the military agreement as a prerequisite
to the final acceptance of the political agreement, an idea which did not commend to the British and French governments. Faced with the possibility of the breakdown of the negotiations, however, the two governments have now accepted that staff conversations should be initiated at an early date with a view to meeting the Russian request for military agreement. It is for this purpose that delegations are being sent to Russia." (1)

Thus, created largely for the purpose of carrying out a political manoeuvre, the British Mission consisted of second stringers, who were given no definite advice what to negotiate about and who were instructed to go very slowly, watching the political negotiations and keeping in touch with the British Ambassador in Moscow. (2) To make things even more difficult, the British Mission was not permitted to divulge any confidential military information to the Soviet negotiators, until political agreement was reached, for fear that it might leak out to Germany. (3)

In these circumstances, it was hardly possible to get the military talks off the ground and Seeds hastened to point out to the Foreign Office that Molotov on his part would probably evade coming to any arrangement with the

(1) Ibid, p. 762.
(2) Ibid, p. 763.
(3) Ibid. loc. cit.
British on the outstanding political points until he had reason to believe that the military talks had made very considerable progress.\(^1\) In the absence of such progress, Seeds feared, the military talks would not produce any result beyond arousing, once again, Russian fears that the Western powers were not in earnest, and were not trying to conclude a concrete and definite agreement.\(^2\)

As we know from the published documents, the talks fared even worse than Seeds had predicted, because whilst they progressed the Soviet side repeatedly brought up for discussion the various possibilities concerning the Baltic and other Eastern European states, while the British Mission had strict instructions not to discuss the defence of the Baltic States at all, for Great Britain had not guaranteed these states.\(^3\) Also, the Soviet proposals relating to the defence of Poland and Rumania had to be referred to the British government, before the British Mission was empowered to express its own views.\(^4\) In short, the British Mission was really in no position to react to the very far-reaching Soviet proposals.

If such a situation was perhaps not designed to serve the best interests of the peace front, then from the

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\(^1\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 682.
\(^2\)\textit{Ibid.}, \textit{Loc. cit.}
\(^3\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 764.
\(^4\)\textit{Ibid.}, \textit{Loc. cit.}
Baltic point of view it seemed to be the ideal solution because it ensured that the talks did not progress, and consequently the Western powers were not forced to recognize any possible changes in the Baltic status quo.

Not unnaturally in such a context all the activity during the talks sprang from the Soviet side. The Soviet spokesmen basically wanted to discuss three different propositions regarding their military co-operation with the West. The first Soviet variant envisaged a situation in which the aggressor block attacked Great Britain and France only. In this case the Soviet Union proposed to employ 2,000,000 men against the enemy, while the British and the French governments would have had the task of obtaining from Poland, and possibly Lithuania, permission to move the Soviet forces across their territories. The second alternative provided for the situation if Germany should attack Poland and Rumania, and as we have seen this was the case with which the British government was really concerned. In this situation, again, the Western governments had to ensure that the Polish, Lithuanian and also the Rumanian governments did not object to the passage of Soviet troops across their territories. The third alternative plan

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(2) Ebib. loc. cit.
envisaged the case where the principal aggressor used the
territory of Finland, Estonia and Latvia in order to attack
the U.S.S.R. In this situation France and Britain would
have been expected to enter the war immediately, and secure
right of passage to the Soviet troops through the Vilno
corridor and into Galicia. (1)

In all three cases envisaged by the Russians,
Britain and France would have had to obtain permission from
the governments of the Baltic States for the temporary occu-
pation by the Anglo-French fleets of the Åland Islands,
the Moon-Sund Archipelago with its islands of Ozal, Dago
and Wormsi (all situated off the Baltic coast), and the
Baltic ports of Hango, Parnu, Hapsal, Ainazi and Libau,
with a view to protecting the neutrality and independence
of the Baltic countries against an attack by Germany. (2)
The Russians also proposed that after the occupation by the
Western naval units of these islands and ports belonging to
the Baltic States, the Soviet navy would join the other two
fleets. (3)

Surprisingly enough, even in this situation the
members of the British and French Military Missions con-
tinued to hope that some agreement would be reached with

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(1) Ibid. *Loc. cit.*
(2) Ibid. *Loc. cit.*
(3) Ibid. *Loc. cit.*
the Soviet Union without involving the Baltic States. \(^{(1)}\)

Therefore, in accordance with their instructions to keep
the Soviet troops away from the Polish and Baltic territ-
ories, \(^{(2)}\) the British negotiators proposed to the Russians
that they concentrate their forces in the North for the
defence of the Leningrad area and to resist a possible
German drive through the Baltic States, thus assisting
Poland on her northern flank. \(^{(3)}\)

Having heard this proposition, the senior Soviet
negotiator, Marshall Voroshilov, replied that his front was
always occupied \(^{(4)}\) and said that therefore he was not at all
sure what role the Soviet military forces were to play. \(^{(5)}\)
In this connection it was explained to the Soviet delegates
by the Western representatives that Soviet assistance was
to take the form of the supply of arms as well as other
material and technical aid to the would-be allied powers in
Eastern Europe. Both Poland and Rumania were also thought
to require Soviet assistance in the air. If this assistance
were to come, it was argued, the attacked Eastern European

\(^{(3)}\) \textit{Ibid}, \textit{loc. cit.}
\(^{(4)}\) \textit{Ibid}, p. 571.
\(^{(5)}\) \textit{Ibid}, \textit{loc. cit.}
powers would be able to form a solid and durable front. (1)

From the whole course of the military discussions it appears that the British Military Mission faithfully observed their instructions and continued to avoid even mentioning the Baltic States. The War Office representatives, in keeping with their instructions, seemed to share the Foreign Office suspicions of the true Soviet aims regarding the Baltic territories. For instance General Heywood, the second senior member of the British Mission, wrote on 16th August to the Director of Operations and Intelligence at the War Office that he believed that the Soviet Union really wanted the cover of British and French flags as well as the consent of the Western powers for the utilization of the Baltic ports and territories mentioned. (2)

Furthermore, the members of the British Military Mission soon came to dislike the Russian methods of negotiation, and the leader of the Mission, Admiral Drax, wrote to the War Office "... the way they [meaning the Soviet negotiators] hand us their demands (not requests) is somewhat in the manner of a victorious power dictating terms to a beaten enemy. They make it plain that in their opinion we came here as suppliants, asking them to give us a treaty

of assistance. In consequence any unpleasant jobs to be done must be done by us ..." (1)

However, the British government was not prepared to yield to the Russian demands, and to force the border states to accept Soviet co-operation under any circumstances and against their own better judgement. In this connection it is worthwhile to note the reactions of the Western Military Missions when the Soviet delegates initiated the discussion of the Belgian situation, which was, of course, of utmost importance from the Western point of view. Namely, in the British and French opinion their troops were not to enter Belgium, or for that matter Switzerland, unless and until they were asked to by the government of the country concerned. The Western belief was that it was to be the duty of the armed forces of those countries which lay between Germany and the three contracting parties to defend their own frontiers, while the three large powers were to be ready to help their armies only when they asked for assistance. Meanwhile the three major powers had to ensure that the border states had the use of communications, which were vitally necessary to them. If no help at all was requested then the three powers would have had to hold only their own frontiers. (2)

As always, the Soviet negotiators maintained that such a plan was unrealistic. (1) Nevertheless, the Western powers followed these principles until the German attack on Belgium in May 1940, thereby illustrating that this argument was not introduced merely to frustrate the Russian objectives during the military discussions here under review. This attitude tended to overlook that, in case of a German attack, the small Western European nations were sure to ask for British and French assistance, while this was far from being true in the case of the Baltic States having to ask for Soviet aid in similar circumstances. However, the Western attitude regarding the use of territory belonging to Russian border states was not relaxed even when it began to appear to the British that the Soviet negotiators really meant business. As a result of this discovery, and reinforced by the growing fear of a Nazi-Soviet pact, the British Military Mission in Moscow was instructed to cooperate with its French counterpart to bring the military negotiations to a conclusion as soon as possible, and the restrictions regarding the communications of military information to the Russians were partially lifted. (2)

(1) Ibid. loc. cit.
At the same time Seedo was advised that the military discussions ought not to be retarded pending solution of outstanding political difficulties. (1)

In this atmosphere, on 14th August Voroshilov posed the crucial question whether the Soviet military forces would be able to move across Poland and Rumania to make contact with the enemy. (2) In reply to this blunt question the Western negotiators were only able to express hope that if the U.S.S.R., Britain and France became allies then there could be little doubt that both Poland and Rumania would ask for Soviet help. (3) At the same time it was underlined that it must not be forgotten that Poland and Rumania were sovereign states and that therefore the authority for the Soviet government to act was to come from the two governments. Besides, General Heywood emphasized that such questions were political by nature, and therefore had to be dealt with by the political negotiators.

Obviously dissatisfied with this flow of events, Voroshilov announced on 17th August that the meetings were to be adjourned until the Western powers received replies from Poland and Rumania that they were prepared to let the Soviet troops use their territory. (4)

(3) International Affairs, op cit, p. 121.
(4) British Documents, op cit, Vol. VII, p. 34.
Thus, at this stage, the argument was about Poland and Rumania, and the question of the Baltic States had already become a side issue. Nevertheless, not all activity had ceased in the purely political sphere, and on 17th August Halifax wired Seeds advising the latter that the discussions of the outstanding political questions had to be continued. To facilitate this discussion four new formulae covering the case of indirect aggression were to be submitted to Molotov for Soviet consideration. All new formulae contained a statement that the common purpose of the contracting parties was to secure the border states. According to Halifax these phrases were intended to help to reassure the Baltic States. The formulae, in the order of their preference, determined that "... the expression 'indirect aggression' is to be understood as including such cases as (a) action by a European power, which clearly threatened, directly or indirectly, the independence of the state concerned and was resisted by that state; (b) action involving the abandonment by the state concerned of its independence or neutrality under threat of force, overt or covert, by a European power, this case including circumstances such as those which attended the action against Czechoslovakia in March 1939 ...". Versions (c) and (d)
were mere variations of the above. (1) These formulae prove that the British attitude towards the Baltic States had not changed.

To show the importance of this we must underline that, at the same time, Halifax instructed the British Ambassador in Warsaw to impress upon Beck that from the military point of view it was essential to persuade Poland and Rumania to agree to the use of their territory by Soviet forces, thereby ensuring that the latter were given every facility for rendering assistance and putting their maximum weight on the scales, for by then it was believed that without effective Soviet assistance neither Poland nor Rumania could hope to stand up to a German attack on land or in the air for more than a short time. (2) Furthermore, Halifax thought that the conclusion of an agreement with the Soviet Union was the best way to prevent war, or to secure victory if war came. Unless the required Polish and Rumanian co-operation was secured, he feared, the negotiations for Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement would break down. The effect of this, Halifax said, would be that Russia would share the spoils with Germany at the Polish and

(1) Ibid, p. 44.
(2) Ibid, p. 39.
Rumanian expense, or else remain neutral, and constitute the chief menace to all of Europe when the war was over.\(^{(1)}\)

In any event, the military talks broke down on 21st August, when the Military Missions assembled again, and the Western representatives were still unable to give a definite, positive answer regarding the passage of the Soviet troops through Poland and Rumania.\(^{(2)}\) If this did not become immediately apparent it can be accounted for by the fact that the presence of the Western missions in Moscow gave the Soviet Union additional bargaining power during the Nazi-Soviet negotiations, which reached their culmination in Moscow on 23rd August.

Thus, as we have seen, for all practical intents and purposes the Anglo-French and Soviet talks of 1939 failed on the political side over the issue of indirect aggression, involving mainly the Baltic States, with whose point of view the British government strongly sympathized. Following this first major failure it was attempted to come to some suitable arrangement, or at least to prolong the talks by starting military negotiations even if the situation was not congenial, and the military negotiations broke down because Poland and Rumania, suspecting that

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\(^{(1)}\) Ibid. *loc. cit.*

\(^{(2)}\) *International Affairs, op. cit.*, p. 115.
the Soviet government wanted to become the master of the whole of Eastern Europe, refused Soviet military co-operation despite strong French and British pressure.

The result of the British inability to change the views of the two guaranteed countries, i.e. Poland and Rumania, combined with her unwillingness to disregard the views of the Baltic States, seemingly ensured that the Soviet government finally decided to use its ability to manoeuvre and escape from danger by a pro-German neutrality while sharing the spoils of war with Germany, not only at the Polish and Rumanian expense, as Halifax had feared, but at the Baltic expense as well.

This meant that the British attempt to create and stabilize the peace front in Eastern Europe had failed, resulting in the rapid collapse of Poland when Germany attacked, and the fall of France, which was unable to withstand the onslaught of the full German might, because this onslaught was not shared between East and West. In fact, for almost a year prior to the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the United Kingdom had to fight Germany single-handed. For the Baltic States the German-Russian understanding, facilitated by the failure of the Anglo-French and Soviet talks, meant not only the end of their neutrality but the end of their independence.
as well. Due to her more favourable geographical position only Finland escaped this fate, at the price of two wars.

These facts alone indicate the extreme importance of the Anglo-French-Soviet talks of 1939. Before attempting to establish the true merits of the approaches to the situation of the British and Baltic policy makers, which is to be done in the final chapter, we must return to one more side-light, namely the Anglo-Polish treaty of Mutual Assistance signed on 25th August.

In this treaty Great Britain virtually guaranteed the Baltic States, by placing the Polish interests in Lithuania on an equal footing with the British interests in Belgium and Holland, while recognizing the Polish indirect interests in Estonia and Latvia, (1) and by undertaking to give military aid to any of the three states, from the moment the undertaking of mutual assistance between the United Kingdom and the state concerned came into force. (2) The only prerequisites for such British intervention were:

(a) The state in question had to offer resistance; (b) the state in question asked Poland, and presumably Great Britain, for assistance; and (c) as a result of such a request Poland engaged in hostilities with Germany. (3)

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(1) Polish Documents, op cit, p. 553.
(2) Survey, op cit, p. 174-5, quoting from the Polish White Book.
words the undertaking could become operative only if Poland fought against Germany or a German-led combination. Before the pact was signed the Foreign Office suggested to the Poles that they ought to acquaint their Baltic neighbours with these proposals.\(^1\)

All this is of cardinal importance, because by this action the British government demonstrated that its opposition to the Soviet-proposed guarantees to the Baltic States no longer stemmed from the British policy of non-involvement in the Baltic area, but was due only to the British dislike of the form of Soviet-proposed guarantees and their mistrust of the Soviet motives.

This contention was supported by Halifax in a statement made on 5th December 1939, when in retrospect he pronounced the final judgement of the Chamberlain government relating to this matter, by saying "... by the agreement which he thought would give him a free hand to attack Poland ... Herr Hitler bartered what was not his property to barter - the liberties of the Baltic people. The sequence of events has shown how wide the damage is once the flood gates are opened ... Events have shown that the judgement and the instinct of His Majesty's government in

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 66.
refusing agreement with the Soviet government on the terms of formulae covering cases of indirect aggression in the Baltic States were right. For it is now plain that these formulae might well have been the cloak of ulterior designs. I have little doubt that the people of this country would prefer to face difficulties and embarrassment rather than feel that we had compromised the honour of this country and the Commonwealth on such issues." (1)

Our next and final step is to evaluate all these events against the background set by the demands of the British international situation as it existed in 1939.

This evaluation must begin with a statement, of fundamental importance, to establish our criterion—namely, in 1939, as at all other times, the general character of the British foreign policy was determined by two main factors: (a) the British geographical position; and (b) the machinery devised and employed for the settling of contemporary international disputes.

As noted by Hans Morgenthau, at the time in question here the United Kingdom, geographically speaking, was a small island state with vast overseas colonies.\(^{(1)}\) Europe then was still the undisputed centre of the civilized world, and in the absence of an all-powerful international arbitrator after the obvious failure of the League of Nations, it continued to live in "the state of nature" described by Hobbes in his Leviathan. From this

it followed that states wanting to ensure that their political aspirations were not overlooked had to rely on their own power and the support available from their friends. In other words, the era of power politics continued, indicating that the British policy had to be directed not towards the affirmation of abstract principles of ethics and morality, but towards the protection of the British national interests, employing the only device available - power. Paramount amongst the British interests was the need to ensure the survival of the British Commonwealth.

As the very centre of this Commonwealth was an island close to the European shores, this survival was dependent on the existence of two things: (a) the maintenance of a favourable balance of power on the European continent; and (b) preponderent British sea power, or at least a favourable balance of sea power, enabling the United Kingdom to maintain satisfactory sea communications with all the British territories overseas.

It should be quite evident that the events forming the subject matter of this thesis are related to the first task only, i.e. the maintenance of a favourable European balance of power, which according to the British tradition was always rightly based on the premise that exclusive
control of the European destinies by any one power meant mortal danger to Great Britain. The essence of this attitude was very clearly expounded by Sir Winston Churchill when he said: "Observe that the policy of England takes no account of which nation it is that seeks the overlordship of Europe ... it has nothing to do with rulers or nations, it is concerned solely with whoever is the strongest or potentially dominant tyrant. Therefore, we should not be afraid of being pro-French or anti-German. If the circumstances were reversed we could equally be pro-German and anti-French. It is a law of public policy which we are following and not a mere expedient directed by accidental circumstances, likes or dislikes or any other sentiment."(1)

In any case, from the middle of March 1939 it was clear to both British policy makers in chief, Chamberlain and Halifax, that Hitler presented a grave threat to the European balance of power, and therefore had to be contained and made to face effective opposition not only in the West but in the East as well. For this reason the British government quickly became extremely interested in Eastern European politics, and acted surprisingly fast in an

(1) Ibid, p. 262.
endeavour to save two of Hitler's potential victims - Poland and Rumania.

However, when the Polish and Rumanian guarantees were extended, and there was still time left for reassessing the situation, it became clear that these two states were not powerful enough to form a lasting and coherent Eastern European peace front. In this situation the minds of British statesmen, looking for past precedents, wandered back to 1914, when Russia manned the lines of defence against Germany in the East and no such problems seemingly existed.

But by 1939 the Soviet Union had bled itself white during internal upheavals and, militarily speaking, was therefore an unknown quantity. On the other hand, after World War I it had lost its Western provinces, and was driven by men whose official aim was to export revolution. Therefore, it was really classified as a potential revisionary power, and as such it was unsuitable for the role of the main guardian of the Eastern European status quo.

Consequently, during the negotiations described here, the British spokesmen must have often faced the problem whether to maintain the East-European status quo and abandon all hope of Soviet co-operation, or to secure
Russian co-operation by permitting the Soviet government to rearrange the Eastern European political situation to suit itself. In other words, only two basic courses of action promised success to the British government:

(a) To discard boldly the post-1919 arrangement of Eastern European buffer states which, as we have seen, were given a recognized role in the European concert of powers after some hesitation, because of the then prevalent need to separate the two revolutionary states - Russia and Germany. By 1939 this arrangement was not expedient any longer, for by then the paramount need was to contain Germany, which the border states were clearly unable to do, at the same time separating the former from the Soviet Union and thus eliminating the immediate possibility of bringing the latter into the Eastern-European balancing process. This difficulty was unavoidable unless close co-operation was established between the Soviet government and the border states, which was impossible due to mutual distrust.

(b) The second possible solution was to continue to activise the post World War I co-operation between all of the Eastern European buffer states and
the two Western powers - Great Britain and France - in an effort to ensure that all these states became members of the peace front and subsequently benefitted from Soviet support as well.

It seems that, in the event, Chamberlain's liberalism and Halifax's sense of propriety made impossible the adoption of the first course of action, because it demanded the introduction of very far-going and revolutionary measures indeed. Chamberlain’s aversion to building an alliance directed against Germany (so as not to divide the world into two armed camps) resulted in the establishment of a peace front, which in Eastern Europe consisted of Poland and Rumania only - the two countries thought to be in most immediate danger.

Nevertheless, the first line of approach to these two possibilities was eventually tacitly adopted by the British policy makers when, after the start of the Nazi-Soviet war, the Soviet Union and Germany between them had liquidated the independence of buffer states. Therefore contemporary “realists” continue to argue that this solution should already have been selected by the British government without any hesitation in the summer of 1939; implying that by failing to disregard the Eastern European opinions and yielding to the
pressures of the Baltic States, the Chamberlain government in 1939 did not manage to secure the Soviet alliance, and thus even if the possibility of averting the war was not lost, then at least the chance of winning it rapidly was. However, this sort of speculation which, despite its treatment in an axiom-like manner, as noted by Professor Hans Rothfels, has not been substantiated as yet. (1)

Furthermore, we cannot accept this argument for judging the validity of the British political behaviour during 1939 because it also overlooks the important fact that, when the Soviet government eventually gained a free hand in Eastern Europe, which she had unsuccessfully demanded from the Western powers, then towards the end of the war it simultaneously became the main danger to the European equilibrium, thus replacing Nazi Germany and making the Western victory look hollow indeed. This possibility was already feared by Chamberlain and Halifax during the Anglo-French and Soviet talks, and they were therefore in agreement with the Eastern European governments that the Soviet troops ought to be kept out of their countries. Before the war had ended the father of the British wartime policy, Churchill, also came to fear the

consequences of this.

Rather superficial too is the argument that the establishment of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe has removed a great many sources of potential international conflicts and therefore has created a greater stability, implying therefore that the British government should have disregarded the Baltic and other Eastern European pressures already in 1939. Whatever the true merits of such a stability based on the predominance of one continental power only, it is not favourable from the British point of view in the terms of our definition. Nor can we disregard the truth that whenever such a stability was about to be created, may it be by a Napoleon, a Kaiser or a Hitler, the British nation always took to arms. In the early nineteen-fifties, when the Eastern European states had already disappeared into the Soviet orbit, the United Kingdom and the other Western powers were no longer able to counterbalance the Soviet Union on the European continent, and therefore sought security beyond the NATO shield by securing permanent American participation in the maintenance of European balance of power. Nor is any real political stability on the European continent possible, as the early twentieth century history of the Balkans illustrates,
unless all the European nations, including the Baltic States, are given an opportunity to fulfil their very clearly-expressed national aspirations.

Moreover, these rather general considerations were reinforced by numerous particular and pressing thoughts springing from the actions of the Baltic States, a combination of which hindered in the end the British liberty of action. No doubt the most important of these was the need to realize that if the wishes of the Baltic States were openly and utterly disregarded, then they could decide to ally themselves with Germany, and so instead of weakening the Reich they would merely have increased Hitler's power and prestige. This possibility was eventually demonstrated by Finland only two years later.

If the Western powers were to succeed in their endeavours to build a united peace front, it was important for them to maintain their moral position, at least outwardly, to the rest of the world, as well as for their own public consumption. This position was largely based on the assumption that the British and the French only wanted to maintain the European status quo, and were therefore the natural allies of the small and middle powers, menaced by the modern dictators. This favourable image
would have been destroyed as soon as Britain appeared willing to co-operate with one of the dictators, despite the well-ventilated desires of a group of nations. This difficulty, of course, was the heritage of the early post World War I years, when the Baltic States so vividly demonstrated their will to be independent, and the great powers eventually agreed that they had a role to play (cordon sanitaire) and admitted them to the family of nations. Even if Britain, as we have seen in our introductory chapter, was not very enthusiastic then about the whole business, by 1939 the independence of these three countries was a well-established fact which, if disregarded by Britain and her potential allies, would have placed the morality of their actions on a par with those of the revisionary powers and would have undermined the British status as guarantors of status quo and legality.

The Anglo-Saxon countries overseas too were very conscious of the rights of the small nations. In particular, this applied to the British Dominions, which were small themselves and still sheltered behind the idea that the United Kingdom would not lack the moral and physical strength to protect them whatever might come. Once this idea was undermined, their restlessness was well
demonstrated by Australia's Dr. H.V. Evatt during the middle nineteen-forties.

Even before the war began, the British felt rather dependent on the moral support of the United States; and the United States' population contained large groups of people originating from Eastern Europe, and still concerned with the fortunes of those countries.

The British government was not at all certain of the possible reactions by British public opinion should the government decide to play power politics quite openly, even if it promised long-term success. This feeling of uncertainty was maintained by the members of the British Parliament who, throughout the negotiations, continued to ask the government questions relating to the rights of the small countries. Naturally enough, the government would have held it very disadvantageous to obtain the co-operation of the Soviet government at the cost of splitting the British unity of purpose.

The mainstay of the Eastern front then being built by the British was to be Poland, which understood and sympathized with the fears of the Baltic nations. Therefore, if these fears were completely disregarded, it was not beyond the possible that even Poland would decide to
compromise with Germany, practically becoming a German satellite. This ability to compromise once the pressure was really on was illustrated in 1940 by Rumania, which was one of the important members of the proposed eastern anti-German grouping during our period of discussion.

Furthermore, states like Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and even Sweden, all sheltering behind the cloak of neutrality, showed signs of being frightened that if the Western powers met the Soviet Union's demands regarding the Baltic States, then the very idea of neutrality would disappear. In this case they would have been inclined to succumb to their stronger neighbours as soon as they appeared to be determined to strike in their direction; and the centrally-situated, well-armed and expansionist Germany was sure to be this particular neighbour.

All these considerations add up to a strong case against the idea that the British should have disregarded the Baltic States altogether, and attempted to conclude the all important agreement with the Soviet Union regardless of all other considerations.

Thus, having eliminated choice (a), we must now consider possibility (b). In this regard it must be noted that in 1939, as in 1919, the British government
really did not have a clear-cut and positive policy covering the Baltic area. As in the face of the Soviet proposals it was no longer possible to separate the Baltic States from the other Russian border countries, this alone must have amounted to a severe handicap for the British negotiators. Therefore, they were unable to do more than merely react to the Soviet moves involving the Baltic States.

In such circumstances the Baltic States, despite their potential willingness to co-operate with Great Britain and France, had to seek their security in neutrality, even if this solution was far from being ideal. This becomes quite obvious on considering the four choices open to the Baltic States in the summer of 1939.

(a) It was possible for the Baltic States to decide to become German allies, thus averting, at least for a time, the danger of sovietisation, feared more than anything else. However, it was known that Hitler's long-term aim was to germanize this area and thus to dismember the Baltic national entities. Furthermore, again largely due to the British and French prestige in the area, the Baltic people were not at all convinced that Hitler would carry the day in the end. Consequently, it was commonsense not to become too deeply involved with him.
(b) On the other hand, the Baltic States were able to choose voluntary co-operation with Soviet Russia. This was eventually done by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, not voluntarily however, but under extreme pressure from the Soviet Union, in October 1939. As was previously feared, this brought not only the loss of national independence, but also far-going social changes and the worst kind of Stalinism, characterized by mass deportations, persecutions and unbelievable social hardship, while the danger of national extinction continues to prevail during the post-Stalin era as well.

(c) The next possibility was neutrality, which was the means of survival originally selected by the Baltic States, conscious that the League of Nations had failed and uncertain whether the large powers would go to war to protect one of the smaller states. This attitude of disillusionment was shared by such other European countries as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland. As neutrality must be protected just as much as freedom, this approach only helped the aggressors to isolate the small countries and to overrun most of them in the end. Yet with their will-power paralysed by fear, and in the absence of more definite signs from the West of determination to uphold the European status quo, the Baltic States
failed to do anything really constructive.

From the Baltic viewpoint this was an extremely dangerous line of approach, because they were placed between Germany and the Soviet Union - both bent on expansion. Once this line was adopted, the only hope lay in the continuation of the German-Russian checkmate, which by the summer of 1939 was no longer a certainty. Finally, when the Nazi-Soviet pact became a reality, there was no more room for manoeuvring and the Baltic countries had either to fight or to accept the Soviet demands. With Poland already in ruins, only Finland decided to remain faithful to her previous declarations and to fight, while the other three Baltic countries accepted the terms made by the Soviet Union, pretending that nothing of cardinal importance had really happened and maintaining that they continued to uphold their neutrality even with the Soviet military units on their soil.

(a) These disastrous results of the short-lived Baltic neutrality policy clearly demonstrate its unreality. Combined with the impossibility of co-operating either with Germany or the Soviet Union, this seemed to warrant a speculation that the Baltic States themselves should have explored more closely the possibility of close co-operation with the other border states, all this group of
Eastern European nations in turn maintaining a very intimate relationship with Great Britain and France. It must be noted that the broad outline of such a plan was already laid down by the first Latvian Foreign Minister, Z. Neirovics, in the early nineteen-twenties, when purely local disputes nullified his efforts in this regard. However, in 1939, in the face of mortal danger, another attempt could have been made to establish close co-operation between all border states. If this was not done then at least some of the blame for this lies with the Baltic leaders of 1939, who apparently badly underestimated the danger, and paid for it with the loss of their national independence.

Assuming that in 1939 (due to her own weakness) the Soviet Union wanted to stay out of any possible European conflicts, it becomes possible to argue that, at this particular stage, the Soviet government would not have been anxious to make territorial gains in Eastern Europe, provided her European border states were definitely prepared to fight Germany and under no circumstances could be used for military adventures against the Soviet Union. This indicates that if Great Britain had welded the Baltic States together with the two other Soviet European neighbours of Poland and Rumania in a determined anti-aggression front,
the Soviet government would have been inclined to support the latter, because the buffer states, for as long as they were determined to play their proper role, really represented the first zone of defence for their large neighbours.

Given the difficult position of the Baltic States, as discussed above, plus Polish traditional interest in the Baltic area and need for help, this line of approach would have been at least worth exploring; particularly because success in this direction would have been the only way to ensure the creation of a coherent and (provided Soviet help was forthcoming) viable Eastern front against Germany, without allowing the Soviet Union to move its forces in the neighbouring lands and to distort the Eastern European equilibrium.

It is pretty safe to say that Chamberlain's aversion to splitting Europe into two hostile camps, combined with the British inability to employ their power in the Baltic area while the Baltic Sea was controlled by Germany, were the two main reasons why this line of thought was never exploited. Thus it seems that in this regard Chamberlain's misapplied idealism and the limitations of British power hampered the birth of a positive approach to the problem of
the Baltic States during the Anglo-French and Soviet talks of 1939. Lack of such an approach only increased the Soviet government's suspicions that the attitude of both the Baltic States and Great Britain lacked realism, and did not come to grips with the real problem. These suspicions were reflected in the Soviet behaviour during the talks dealt with here, and finally helped to ensure their failure, resulting in the Nazi-Soviet deal eventually destroying the eastern link of the anti-aggression front and distorting the Eastern European status quo to such an extent that no one has since been able to restore it.

For the Baltic States this has meant the end of their independent existence, and danger to their survival as distinct national entities, while for Great Britain the chain of events that followed has resulted in a lasting unfavourable balance of power on the European continent.
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