

# SOVIET UNION'S FOREIGN RELATIONS FROM BEGINNING UNTIL END OF SECOND WORLD WAR (1917-1945)

Prof. Dr. Yılmaz ALTUĞ

## 1. THE DETERMINATION OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

Russian foreign policy has been determined by two basic geographic facts:

- (1) Russia has no ice-free ports giving direct access to the maritime highways of the world; the outlets of the Baltic and the Black Sea (leading to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean) do not lie under Russian control;
- (2) Russia is most vulnerable to military attack

- a. across the North European plain (East Germany and Poland), and
- b. through the Caucasus;

Russia has always tried to control the Baltic and the Black Sea which border these two principal invasion routes. "Soviet foreign policy is indeed bent upon extending communist influence and Russian power; but it is also deeply affected by the fear of 'encirclement' by those who distrust its intentions and oppose its aims... (One) solution is to build up such striking power as to neutralise their opponent's positions. The Lunin has confirmed that the Russians are a step ahead in the ballistic race... The Russians may... drive towards their penultimate objective, which... (is) isolation of the United States to an extent that some American theoretician would have to invent the doctrine of 'capitalism in a single state.'<sup>1</sup>

"The strategy of protracted conflict postpones the decisive battle and calibrates its challenges to a calculus of risks-until the balance of power has shifted overwhelmingly to the side of the revolutionary forces... the strategy of the Russian and Chinese Communists who have been able not only to accept but even to thrive upon conflict as the normal condition of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Economist*, London, 31.1.1959

<sup>2</sup> Robert Strausz-Hupe & Associates, "Protracted Conflict, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959, page 2.

"The Soviets have annexed since (WORLD WAR II)...264.200 square miles of territory with 23.496.000 people, including three independent states and areas from six other nations, and have subjugated in Europe alone six nations and part of another totaling 394.000 square miles and 89.347.000 people."<sup>3</sup>

European countries which are or were under Soviet occupation:

ESTONIA (annexed July 21, 1940)

LATVIA (annexed July 21, 1940)

LITHUANIA (annexed July 21, 1940)

EAST GERMANY (under Soviet military occupation until September 20, 1955, when Soviet Union grants "sovereignty")

CZECHOSLOVAKIA (Soviet Army leaves November 22, 1945; Communist coup d'etat February 26, 1948)

NORTH EASTERN AUSTRIA (Soviet forces leave Austria on October 15, 1955)

BULGARIA (Soviet military units leave in April 1945; Yugoslav Communists expelled from COMINFORM on June 28, 1948, at which time Yugoslavia ceases to be a Soviet satellite.)

All these countries became and remained satellites of the Soviet Union with the exception of the:

Baltic States, which have been annexed;

Austria, whose Government was never under direct Soviet control;

Yugoslavia, which ceased to be a Soviet satellite in 1948.

"...never since the 1920s have the professions of faith in the eventual triumph of world Communism over capitalism resounded from Moscow with as much inherent conviction and strength as they do now... Having broken the... American monopoly in atomic and hydrogen weapons, the Soviet leaders plan to use the time at their disposal for breaking another, equally decisive, monopoly the west has enjoyed so far-the monopoly of a high standard of living."<sup>4</sup> - "The slogan remains 'to catch up with America.'"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> New York Times, 29.11.1958

<sup>4</sup> London Times, 29.2.1958

<sup>5</sup> Economist, London, 31.1.1959

In Khrushchev's "opinion, the Soviet successes of tomorrow will not really be prepared in chanceries or even in foreign (Communist) Party headquarters but essentially through an economic drive to transform the Soviet bloc into a centre of attraction. The truce (i.e., peaceful coexistence) will be used to cure the (Soviet Unions's) agricultural crisis, to harness atomic energy and the technological revolution to close the gap still separating the two (Eastern and Western) blocs...<sup>6</sup>

"Soviet-bloc economic aid to other countries has acquired large proportions since 1955; it has been one of the specifically Khrushchevian innovations... Up to the end of 1957, Soviet military aid to foreign countries amounted to nearly \$400 million... Finally, on a much bigger scale, there have been Russian loans and grants to the Soviet satellites. Solely within the twelve months following the Hungarian Revolution, Soviet credits to European satellites amounted to over a billion dollars. The largest Soviet credits and loans have gone to Communist China... Khrushchev's policy of 'renouncing war' does not indicate reconciliation with the non-Soviet world.<sup>7</sup>

"While the European nations are actively liquidating their once-great colonial empires in Africa... (the) Soviet-sponsored Afro-Asian Solidarity Council in Cairo is carrying forward the Russian grand design for the subversion of Africa by a new brand of imperialism as harsh as any known to history.<sup>8</sup> "The long-cherished Russian dream of obtaining a foothold in Negro Africa appears to be becoming a reality.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY

1917 March 11 Revolution broke in Russia.

1917 November 7 Bolshevik coup d'état took place.

1918 March 3; Soviets signed separate peace treaty with Germany and Turkey (in Brest Litovsk). Soviets gave up Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Eastern Poland, the Ukraine, and Transcaucasia.

1918-1920 Counter-revolution in Russia, supported by US, Britain and France.

1919 March 12 COMINTERN (Third International) founded by Soviets.

<sup>6</sup> *Economist*, London, 25.2.1956

<sup>7</sup> David J. Dallin: *Russia Five Years after Stalin: Foreign Policy; in New Leader* 24.3.1958

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, 14.9.1958

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 7.1.1959

1920 April 25 Polish-Russian war began. (Ended October 12, 1920. Peace treaty signed March 18, 1921, restored borders of 1793).

1921 February 26 Iranian-Soviet Treaty signed.

1921 March 16 Agreement between Turkey and the Soviet Union marking the beginning of the Turkish-Soviet Entente. (After World War I both Turkey and the Soviets are isolated and feel threatened by the West. The Turkish-Soviet Entente, limited to international affairs, last until World War II when Turkey begins to collaborate with Britain and France. In 1921 agreement the Soviets gave up Russian claims to Kars and Ardahan (in North-Eastern Turkey); Turkey restored Batum to the Soviets.

1922 April 16 Rapallo Pact between Germany and the Soviets. ("Rapallo policy" becomes synonymous with "German-Russian collaboration.")

Russian-German Pacts were :

1. 1812 December 30 Neutrality Convention between Prussia and Russia
2. 1813 February 28 Alliance of Prussia and Russia against Napoleon
3. 1873 May 6 Mutual Assistance Treaty
4. 1881 June 18 "Three Emperors" Alliance (between Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary to maintain the balance of power in the Balkans).
5. 1887 June 18 Bismarck's "Reinsurance" Treaty
6. 1922 April 16 Rapallo Treaty
7. 1926 April 24 Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality
8. 1939 August 23 Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact
9. 1939 September 28 4<sup>th</sup> division of Poland, between Germany and the Soviet Union.

1924 January 21 Lenin died.

1925 December 17 Turkish-Soviet Entente confirmed by "Treaty of Neutrality" (denounced by Soviet Union March 19, 1945.)

1933 January 30 Hitler came to power in Germany.

1933 July 3 Convention for Definition of Aggression (suggested on February 8, 1933 at Disarmament Conference by Politis, chief delegate of

Greece; proposal formally submitted by Soviet Foreign Commissar Litvinov). The convention is signed (on July 3) by the Soviet Union, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Rumania, Turkey, Afganistan; and (on July 5) by Art. 2, the aggressor is that state which declares war upon, attacks or blockades, another state, or is guilty of "Provision of support to armed bands formed on its territory which have invaded the territory of another state, or refusal, notwithstanding the request of the invaded state, to take on its own territory all the measures in its power to deprive those bands of all assistance or protection."

1933 November 16 US-Soviet diplomatic relations established.

1934 September 17 Soviet Union admitted to the League of Nations.

1935 May 2 French-Soviet mutual assistance treaty signed.

1935 July 25-August 20 COMINTERN Conference (in Moscow) ordered Communists in Western countries to collaborate with Leftist non-Communist parties, and to form Popular Fronts with them. After the Hitler-Stalin pact, in 1939, August 23, the Comintern ordered sabotage of war effort in countries at war with Germany.)

1936 July 18 Civil war in Spain began, It ended March 28, 1939. Italy and Germany aided General Franco; Soviet Union supported Madrid Government.

1936 July 20 MONTREUX CONVENTION on Turkish Straits signed.

1936 November 25 Anti-Comintern Pact signed by Germany and Japan. (Italy joined on November 6, 1937; Spain on April 7, 1939.)

1937 July: Japan's "undeclared war" on China began.

1938 March 12: Hitler invaded Austria.

1938 September 29 MUNICH PACT. (British+French appeasement of the Rome+Berlin Axis.)

1939 March 14 Stalin (at 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Soviet Communist Party) intimated his willingness to negotiate with Hitler by saying in a speech that "the British, French and North American press (tries) to raise the ire of the Soviet Union against Germany without any visible grounds for it."

1939 April 17: Soviet Ambassador in Berlin approached German Foreign Office for friendly exchange of views.

1939 May 3 : Maxim Litvinov (Foreign Commissar since 1930) dismissed. Vyacheslav Molotov (Premier since 1930) also takes over the Foreign Commisariat.

1939 March 31 : Britain promised to defend Poland. Britain and France asked the Soviet Union to join them in a guarantee of Poland and Rumania. Soviet counter-proposal were:

- a) all states on the Soviet Union's European borders should be guaranteed; and
- b) the Soviet Union should have the right to send military forces to those countries, if in the opinion of the Soviet Union, there should be danger of direct or "indirect" German attack against them.

(The Baltic States, i.e., Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and Poland, suspicious of Soviet intentions, protested against this type of "protection." As a result, Britain and France declined the Soviet counter-proposal.)

1939 August 23 : Hitler-Stalin pact concluded.

1939 September 1 : Germany invaded Poland, World War II began.

1939 September 17 : Soviet Union invaded Poland.

1939 September 28 : 4<sup>th</sup> division of Poland; secret protocol (signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop) for cooperation between Nazi Gestapo and Soviet Political Police.

1939 September 29 : Soviet Union compeled Estonia to grant military bases to Soviet forces under the disguise of a "mutual assistance" treaty. (Annexation by Soviet Union followed on July 21, 1940.)

1939 October 5 : Latvia is forced to grant military bases to the Soviet Union.

1939 October 10 : Lithuania is forced to grant military bases to the Soviet Union.

1939 October 19 : Turkish-British French alliance signed.

1939 November 26 : Similar Soviet proposal declined by Finland. Finland invaded by Soviet Union on November 30.

1939 December 14 : Soviet Union is expelled from the League of Nations because of its invasion of Finland.

1940 March 12 : After a heroic war Finland ceded southern territories to Soviet Union.

1940 June 22 : French Armistice concluded.

1940 June 26 : Soviet Union demanded from Rumania cession of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Soviet occupation began on June 28, 1940.

1940 July 21 : Soviet Union annexed the three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

1940 September 27 : Germany, Italy and Japan signed Tripartite Pact.

1940 November 12-13 : Soviet Premier and Foreign Minister Molotov visited Hitler in Berlin. Molotov asked for free hand in Finland and Turkey. Hitler refused.

1941 April 13 : Japanese-Soviet non-aggression pact concluded (Denounced by Soviet Union on April 5, 1945)

1941 May 6 : Stalin took over premiership from Molotov, who retained his post as Foreign Commissar. Soviet Government made efforts to appease Hitler: Soviets urge Western Communists to sabotage the Western war effort against Germany; Soviets handed over many German Jews and German Communists to the Nazi Gestapo.

Soviet efforts to gain Hitler's favor were :

1939 October 31 : Molotov (Premier and Foreign Commissar) in Supreme Soviet: "It is not only senseless, it is criminal to wage a war to destroy Hitlerism, camouflaged as a fight for democracy."

1940 February 11 : German Soviet agreement to exchange goods valued at over one billion marks; Soviet Union to supply oil and grain to Germany.

1941 January 10 : New German-Soviet agreement substantially increased trade. Soviet Union to ship oil, grain and also industrial raw materials to Germany.

1941 March 25 : Yugoslavia adhered to German-Italian-Japanese pact of September 27, 1940.

1941 April 5 : Soviet Union signed pact of friendship with Yugoslavia.

1941 April 6 : Hitler invaded Yugoslavia and Greece.

1941 May 6 : Stalin becomes Premier.

1941 May 9 : Soviet Union severed diplomatic relations with three

countries invaded by Hitler: Yugoslavia, Belgium and Norway. (It resumed relations on July 20, after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union.)

1941 June 3: Soviet Union severed diplomatic relations with Greece which was invaded by Hitler on April 6.

1941 June 22: Germany invaded the Soviet Union. "While the (Soviet-Nazi) honeymoon lasted the Soviet leaders had been sweetly subservient. As Molotov remarked on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941 (after the Nazi attack), 'we had not deserved this.'<sup>10</sup>

German troops are welcomed at many places as liberators from the Communists, but Nazi terror provoked underground resistance behind the German front.

1941 August 25: British and Soviet troops occupied Iran to secure a supply line for aid to the Soviet Union.

1942 January 29: Britain and the Soviet Union promised to leave Iran within 6 months after the end of hostilities.

1941 November 6: US grants \$1 billion in Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union. (By the end of the war it amounted to \$8.8 billion.)

1941 December 7: Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

1942 May 26: British-Soviet mutual assistance treaty for 20 years signed. (It was annulled by Soviet Union on May 7, 1955).

1941 November 8: Allied started landing in North Africa.

1942 February 2: German forces under General Paulus surrendered at Stalingrad.

1943 April 27: Soviet Union severed relations with Polish Government-in-exile in London.

1943 May 15: COMINTERN (Third International) is dissolved by the Soviet Government in order to diminish Western fear of Communist subversion. (It is revived after the war as the COMINFORM.)

1943 September 3: Italian Armistice signed.

1943 November 28-December 1 Teheran Conference took place. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin concerted their war plans:

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *From, Lenin to Malenkov*, Fredrick A. Praeger, New York, 1953



- \* no invasion of Central Europe from Italy or the Balkans;
- \* the Second Front to be in Western Europe in May or June, 1944;
- \* division of Germany into zones;
- \* possibility of dividing Eastern Europe into (Soviet and British spheres of influence emerges.

1944 June 6 : Allied invasion of Western Europe began in Normandy.

1944 July 29 : Soviet Army reached outskirts of Warsaw. Moscow-controlled Polish-language "Radio Kosciuszko" called on anti-Nazi Polish underground to rise against German troops.

1944 August 1 : Uprising starts; Soviet Army failed to intervene, and allowed insurgent Poles to be massacred by the Germans.

1944 August 23 : Rumanian Armistice signed.

1944 August 24 : Bulgarian Government informed Soviet Legation in Sofia that Bulgaria will ask US and Britain for armistice terms. (The Soviet Union and Bulgaria were not at war.)

1944 August 26 : Bulgarian Government announced that Bulgaria withdrew from war and has already demanded that German troops evacuate her territory.

1944 August 31 : Bulgarian armistice delegates in Cairo asked US and Britain to send troops into Bulgaria to protect her against German reprisals.

1944 September 5 : Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria and immediately began.

1945 Februar 7-12 : Yalta Conference. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin

- a. have reached basic basic agreement on UN;
- b. have layed down principles for democracy and national independence in liberated and occupied European countries;
- c. have agreed that within 3 months after VE-Day the Soviet Union would declare war on Japan and would get, as a reward, Southern Sakhalin, the Kurile Island, Habomai and Shikopan islands, half plus interest in Manchurian railways and Port Dairen.

signed April 13, 1941.

1945 April 5 : Soviet Union abrogated non-aggression pact with Japan

1945 May 7 : Germany surrendered.

1945 June 22 : Soviet Union demanded from Turkey bases in the Turkish Straits and cession of two northeastern provinces.

1945 July 17-August 2 : Potsdam Conference (Truman, Churchill, later Attlee, and Stalin). Principles laid down for

- \* the administration of Germany
- \* control of the Austrian Government.

1945 August 6 : First atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima.

1945 August 8 : Soviet Union declares war on Japan and invades Manchuria.

1945 August 14 : Japan surrendered (Armistice signed on Sep 2 ). Soviet armies occupied Manchuria, Southern Sakhalin, Kurile Islands, and two small islands of Hokkaido: Habomai and Shikotan. On the day of Japan's surrender, a Treaty of Alliance is signed by the Soviet Union and the Nationalist Government of China.-The Soviet Union "was taken by surprise when the Chinese Communist did at last snowball their way into power... it is a historic fact that Stalin went on recognizing the Natinonalists for some time after they were doomed." (Economist, London, 10-24-53)