***THE SOVIET-NAZI ALLIANCE (WORLD WAR II AND THE FATE OF THE EUROPEAN NATIONS, 1939-1941)***

**(a preview)**

**INTRODUCTION**

And further by these, my son,

be admonished: of making

many books there is no end;

and much study is

a weariness of the flesh.

(Eccl. 12: 12)

What was exactly the Second World War? When did it start? At first sight these are simple questions, but they have an astonishingly great variety of answers. In comparison with the First World War the second one has raised much more irreconcilable assessments both among the public and among scholars. Seven decades since the end of the Second World War are obviously not enough to work out a generally accepted viewpoint. There is no unanimity even about the start of World War II. In Chinese and Japanese eyes it broke out on July 7, 1937, when Japan launched a large-scale invasion of China. For their part, Europeans associate the beginning of the conflict with the German assault on Poland on September 1, 1939. For the Americans the Second World War started with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, perpetrated on December 7, 1941. There is some truth in each of these viewpoints, but there is too many distortion, subjectivity and deliberate concealment of crucial facts.

Practically everybody agrees that the First World War started with the war declaration of Austria-Hungary to Serbia on July 28, 1914, and the bombardment of Belgrade by the Austro-Hungarians the following day and that it ended with the surrender of Germany under the Compiegne armistice on November 11, 1918. There were continuous battles during the entire period from July 29, 1914 to November 11, 1918, and for this reason the conflict was known also as the All-European War. Even the participation of the United States, which was decisive for the outcome, was predominantly in Europe, on the Franco-German front. The battles in Africa, the Middle and the Far East, as well as all over the oceans played an auxiliary rather than a central role. The most important thing, though, is that the armed clashes had a clear beginning and not a less clear end.

Things are far from clear as far as the Second World War is concerned. There were a continuous warfare solely between the Japanese and the Chinese, but China declared war on Japan only on December 9, 1941. Moreover the war between Japan and China was a regional rather than a world conflagration without as direct connection with developments in other parts of Earth. True enough, Hitler tended to support Japan, whereas Stalin gave assistance to the Chinese, but this continued even after the conclusion of an alliance between Communist Russia and National Socialist Germany. The Russo-Japanese Neutrality and Friendship Treaty was concluded only on April 13, 1941, but two months later the German “Wehrmacht” invaded Russia, which marked the end of the Soviet-Nazi Alliance. The two belligerent coalitions were in fact formed only after the Japanese blow to Pearl Harbor. It was only then that the United Nations, headed by the United States, Russia and Britain faced the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis, but Stalin agreed to denounce the Neutrality Pact with Japan and to take part in the operations against the Japanese only after the liquidation of the Third Reich in May 1945.

We may talk about a continuous warfare in Europe only after April-May 1940, when Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway, overran Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg and France, and made a supreme effort to defeat Britain. The battle became even more “real” and devastating after June 22, 1941, when Hitler and Stalin fell into each other’s grips for the conquest of the planet. Until that moment there had been relatively short campaigns, often with no serious clashes. From September 1 to September 28, 1939, National Socialist Germany and Communist Russia conquered and partitioned Poland. From November 26, 1939, to March 12, 1940, Stalin made an attempt to conquer Finland. The next campaign was launched by Hitler, who overran Denmark and invaded Norway on April 9. The Norwegians offered a tough and efficient resistance and the Germans completed their invasion of the country only in June 1940, when they had already occupied Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg and eliminated France, but they had to start the battle for England. Battles were waged also in North Africa, while Communist Russia was engulfing Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and annexing Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. However, both Russian operations had a “peaceful” character, if we do not consider the hundreds of thousands and even millions of victims, thrown by the repressive services of Lavrenti Beria into the Siberian death camps.

One may assume, with some reservations, that in Europe the Second World War began in September 1939. However, the events from September 1, 1939, to June 22, 1941, are also distinguished by a number of inconvenient truths. For instance, scholars and observers rarely indicate that the Second World War, whatever it means, started not with the German invasion of Poland, but with the joint German-Russian invasion of Poland. True enough, on September 1, 1939, the German “Wehrmacht” invaded Poland from the west, the north and the south, but it is not less important that on September 17 Poland was assaulted from the east by units of the Russian “Red Army”. This fact is often concealed because of guilty conscience, still existing Great Russian jingoism and Communist fanaticism, or simply in exchange for a good amount of money.

There are still attempts to underestimate the alliance character of the relationship between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union from August 23, 1939, to June 22, 1941. A growing number of publications indicate, though, that during this period Hitler and Stalin were allies. Interesting in this regard is the conclusion of the British historian Lawrence Rees about the Soviet-Nazi alliance “*all but in name*”, while some of his colleagues name it an “*Unholy Alliance*”, hinting with black humor at the Holy Alliance of Russia, Austria and Prussian in the first half of the 19th century. According to the British scholar Adam Tooze it was precisely the alliance of Berlin with Moscow that gave the Reich a second breath in a suffocating blockade, imposed by Britain and France.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The dominant stereotype is still about the primordial and extreme aggressiveness of Germany, whereas Russia’s aggressive ambitions are concealed or underestimated and this applies both to the Fist and the Second World War. However, during the last couple of decades there appeared a number of publications that break up this preconceived view, including by Russian authors like Viktor Suvorov and Igor Bunich. Indeed, Bunich and Suvorov make to some extent a not quite serious impression, since their books are not entirely in conformity with academic standards, but their arguments are, none the less, quite convincing. According to Suvorov, in particular, Stalin followed strictly Lenin’s testament and threw all his energy to carry out the conquest and Sovietization of the entire world. The Russian dictator was presumably well prepared even for the war against Finland in the winter of 1939 to 1940. As a matter of fact, the “red Army” succeeded in breaking through the Finnish defense, which amounted to a miracle, bearing in mind the Arctic cold and the famous “Mannerheim Line”. The question remains, nevertheless, for what reasons Stalin did not conquer Finland and did not transform the country into a “Soviet Republic”, although he intended to do that, since he had patched up a “government” under the Comintern apparatchik Kuusinen. Suvorov thinks that after the exhausting campaign Stalin found it more reasonable to avoid being dragged into a guerilla war.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Indeed the Soviet war machine suffered from setbacks in Finland in 1939-1940 in a way similar to the 1979-1985 developments in Afghanistan. Was Stalin aware of that, though? For the time being we have to born ourselves with the assumption that from January to June 1940 an important change occurred in the course of the war, because in June 1940 Stalin dealt with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in precisely the same way, by annexing them to the “great” USSR. The fact that the three Baltic countries were an incomparably easier prey is not sufficient, because after the break through the Finnish defense Finland could be also occupied and Sovietized accordingly. Moreover, a secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact Finland, Latvia and Estonia had been ceded to the Soviet “zone of influence”, whereas under the Treaty for Friendship and for the Border, concluded at the end of September 1939 Hitler gave over to Stalin Lithuania as well. In April 1940 the threat of a possible British landing on the Norwegian coast made the Third Reich occupy Denmark and Norway, and in June and July of the same year, when the German National Socialists ran over France, the Russian Communists annihilated Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and, by the way, they justified their action also by the “menace” of “British imperialism”.

Suvorov’s chief opponent is the professional historian of Israel Gabriel Gorodetsky, but it should be noted that the Russian authorities granted him a special stipend in order to write his book “*The Icebreaker Myth*”. It should be also mentioned that in a tested Soviet manner Gorodetsky often conceals important aspects of a particular fact and even flatly denies the evidence. Such is, for instance, his claim that the loudly proclaimed intention of Hitler to conquer the entire world was the actual ultimate goal of his regime, whereas the constantly announced aspiration of Russian Communism to subjugate and Sovietize the planet was mere propaganda.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Gorodetsky’s ideas are not very original in this regard, since the US author Patrick Buchanan claims exactly the opposite, namely, that Stalin wanted to conquer the world, whereas Hitler sought for superiority “only” in continental Europe. At first sight Buchanan sounds more convincing, because the German dictator actually didn’t want a world conflict, but intended to achieve his aims by a series of small “blitzkriegs”. The fact remains, though, that both Hitler’s and Stalin’s ultimate goal was the conquest and subjugation of the entire human race. It is quite another matter that not only Germany, as Buchanan claims, but also Russia lacks the resources for conquering the planet.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Under a totalitarian regime propaganda is one of the most powerful instruments of brainwashing. It is impossible that several generations of Soviet subjects are raised with the dogma of the inevitable victory of Communism all over the world and then, all of a sudden, tell the same people that the whole thing has been just dust in their eyes. Back in the second half of the 1920s the military command of Communist Russia had worked out detailed plans for the conquest and Sovietization of ever larger territories until the Bolshevik system would be forced upon the entire human race. These plans provided for such details as to whom to entrust with the Sovietization of a particular country. It was explicitly stated that local elements had to be given a most modest auxiliary role, higher positions had to be reserved to Soviet subjects of the respective ethnic origin, whereas the most important work had to be done by the repressive services of the Bolshevik state.[[5]](#footnote-5)

There are numerous testimonies indicating that the entire mechanism of ideological brainwash of Stalin’s soldiers was based on the same foundation. In 1939 a “red Army” soldier subconsciously excluded any other possibility than that of taking very soon the field for the “liberation” of Europe from “fascism and capitalism”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Russian Communism didn’t abandon its mania for the conquest of the world even at the time of Mikhail Gorbachev, whereas under Brezhnev all subjects of the Soviet Empire had to learn as a mandatory ideological discipline “scientific communism”, which was indeed a science about the means, methods and possible allies of Moscow’s strife for the subjugation and Sovietization of Earth. Stalin, obviously, could be no exception. As indicated by Suvorov too, the first reaction of each totalitarian regime is to seal completely the state borders in order to deprive its subjects of any information about the possibility of another way of life. However, this wouldn’t do, because the very thought that there are beyond the border societies, offering a different choice, could eventually lead to a general rejection of the official ideology, of the unique Party and its leader. In the eyes of Lenin, Stalin and their successors a truly permanent solution would be to achieve such a situation that there is nowhere to run away, which meant to conquer the entire world and to destroy all the other social and political systems.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Quite significantly, more and more are the authors, including Russian scholars, who share the views of Suvorov. True enough, a historian like V.A.Nevezhin criticizes not very correctly Suvorov for his viewpoint that Stalin prepared a preventive war against Hitler. In fact, as Nevezhin stresses out, “*Stalin and his entourage, as indicated by the documents at the disposal of historians, imagined this war not as a preventive, but as an offensive one*”. As a matter of fact, though, this is precisely what Suvorov proves and there are no substantial differences between him and Nevezhin. However, Nevezhin is more cautious in his conclusions. He is right in complaining about the fact that Stalin’s archives are still inaccessible, but he is wrong in considering that the reason for the inevitability of the clash between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union is not the ambition of both Hitler and Stalin to rule over the world and looks for it in a would-be “ideological irreconcilability” between National Socialism and Communism.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Of great value are the testimonies to Stalin’s intentions during World War II, born by politicians and statesmen of small European countries like Lithuania, Bulgaria, etc. Readers will have the opportunity to find out themselves that Moscow considered the annihilation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia merely as an episode toward the conquest and Sovietization of Europe which, according to the Russian dictator and his associates, was the objective of the Second World War, whereas the Third World War had to lead the Bolshevization of the entire planet. Against the background of this irrefutable evidence, it is amazing how Gorodetsky tries to convince us that the engulfment of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia by Stalin’s Russia in June 1940 had been in response to the fall of France under Hitler and that it was not the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that opened the door to the Sovietization of the three Baltic countries.[[9]](#footnote-9) The general impression of Gorodetsky's work is that in fact he repeats with seemingly more “intelligent” phrases the outdated propaganda themes of the Communist regime.

Of course, a number of authors from the developed democracies are also to blame for such interpretations, because they close deliberately their eyes to the fundamental aggressiveness of the Soviet state in order to justify the alliance of their countries with Stalin during World War II. Such distortions are noticeable even in the work of the US journalist William Shirer “*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*”, appreciated as a classical study of the history of German National Socialism. As a whole, Shirer’s account is well founded and detailed. He analyzes the logic of Hitler’s steps toward the Great War, but in examining the decision of the German dictator to attack Communist Russia Shirer seems to abandon his logic and assigns this fatal move to some delirious self-confidence and hurt vanity because of Stalin’s successes. This view is deeply rooted in the historiography about the Second World War but it cannot find a plausible answer to the question as to why the German military feared a two-front war during the 1938 Czechoslovak crisis but did not object at all to Hitler’s decision to attack the Soviet Union before eliminating Britain. There were obviously very serious and urgent reasons for Hitler and his generals to engage in such an adventure, but Shirer doesn’t say in fact a word about that.[[10]](#footnote-10)

When dealing with the assault that National Socialist Germany perpetrated on Communist Russia on June 22, 1941, historians from both West and East usually present Hitler as the aggressor and Stalin as the victim, although a not entirely innocent one. Again Suvorov and Bunich are among the first authors who broke up this legend and indicated that Stalin never prepared for defense but solely for aggression at the moment, chosen by him and that he was simply forestalled by Hitler. By the way, for many authors in the West, this was not a secret. As far back as the early 1960s the British historian A.J.P.Taylor formulated the view that the Soviet military doctrine was entirely offensive but not defensive and he was not the first one to claim that, since about a decade earlier his French colleague M.Maurice wrote that National Socialist Germany had preferred “*accelerating the assault on the USSR before the USSR itself would be ready to strike*”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

It was in the 1960s too that a number of Finnish historians revealed the aggression of Communist Russia, but they had to publish their findings abroad (mostly in Switzerland) in order to avoid giving a pretext for new Soviet ultimatums to Finland. It is worth noting that even in their foreign publications the Finns are quite cautious in their assessments, but this conceals by no means the fact that Moscow had concrete intentions to launch a campaign to the west through the corpse of Finland and the other small Eastern European countries that still existed by June 22, 1941. Thus, for instance, Heikki Jalanti writes cautiously about the “impression” that Moscow prepared a new aggression. In this way he hinted in fact at the panic, created in Helsinki by Stalin’s firm intention to annihilate Finland even after the end of the Winter War in March 1940.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Nevertheless, authors like Gabriel Gorodetsky seem to be by no means embarrassed by all that. Faithful to his style, Gorodetsky frequently distorts facts and resorts to apparently innocent attributes, but this reproduces radically different surroundings of a particular event. Thus, in examining the two military games on maps, played by the Soviet command in early 1941, he claims that both had an entirely defensive character[[13]](#footnote-13), which is simply not true. As one may see plainly from a study by the Russian author Vl.Karpov, in one of the games the “Red Army” had indeed to repulse an attack of the “Wehrmacht”, but in the other game the Soviet military forces attacked the Germans.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the same vein, when he deals with Stalin’s proposal of a mutual assistance pact with Bulgaria, Gorodetsky considers that the Russian dictator was highly concerned about the aggressive intentions of Hitler with regard to the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. This claim is based on the diary of Georgi Dimitrov that was not yet published at the time when Gorodetsky wrote his book. However, quotations from the diary are selected in such a way as to leave the readers in complete ignorance of the fact that the Russian dictator was not “concerned”, but in fact irritated. Moreover, Stalin’s anger was due not to the German and Italian aspirations to the Straits, but to the fact that not only Germany and Italy, but also Britain had claims to a zone that Russia had considered for centuries as reserved for herself.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In a similar way Gorodetsky thinks that Stalin’s intention to dissolve the Comintern as early as in April 1941 proves how the Russian dictator was afraid of Hitler and this fear made him give up the idea of conquering and Sovietizing the whole world.[[16]](#footnote-16) Gorodetsky fails to mention, though, that Stalin decided to dissolve the Comintern after a number of governments, including that of the United States, took special legislative measures for banning the respective local communist party as an organization under the command of foreign headquarters.

It is inevitable to have also reservations as to Gorodetsky’s method to prove his claims by selecting all sorts of declarations of diplomats, politicians and statesmen with no regard to the moment when these statements have been made. Such quotations are obviously put in this way out of the context of the respective events and it is easy to provide them with an entirely different meaning. By the way, events and developments in this book are examined in a strict chronological order to avoid precisely distorted interpretations of what has actually happened. In reality, the more Gorodetsky is honest about the evidence, the less convincing are his efforts to refute Viktor Suvorov and thus Gorodetsky reaffirms in fact Suvorov’s conclusions.

The book “*Hitler and Stalin before the Clash*” by Lev Bezymenskij is of a somewhat different character. The author has given up the efforts of the Soviet propaganda to conceal the crucial moments of the creation and action of the Soviet-Nazi Alliance from August 23-September 28, 1939, to June 22, 1941. He quotes abundantly the texts of the Non-Aggression Pact of August 23, 1939, of the Treaty for Friendship and for the Border of September 18, 1939, as well as some self-exposing statements of Stalin in a relatively smaller circle. However, Bezymenskij fails to free himself completely from basic Communist legends, such as those about the attempt of Britain and France to direct the Nazi aggression against Bolshevik Russia and about the primordial “peacefulness” of Stalin’s foreign policy. Neither is he able to overcome the quite popular belief that in 1939-1941 the “Red Army” was unprepared and weak. Within this context Bezymenskij also conceals a number of “inconvenient” facts, such as the sinister “detail” that the “Red Army” soldiers Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were forced to admit to their territory in October 1939 outnumbered by far their own troops. Quite unconvincing is also the attempt to underestimate the smashing superiority the “Red Army” had by June 22, 1941, in tanks, planes and all sorts of combat equipment with regard to the “Wehrmacht”.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Bezymenskij is also one of the authors who tend to overestimate the impact of France’s catastrophe in June 1940 on Stalin. According to Bezymenskij the surrender of the Third Republic presumably destroyed Stalin’s hopes for a continuous and exhaustive war on the western front and made him accelerate the engulfment of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, assessment in a scandalously euphemistic way as “*the entrance of Estonia, Lithuania and Estonia into the USSR as union republics*”. However, Hitler failed to eliminate Britain, although in the summer and fall of 1940 he made a supreme effort to this effect. Even Gorodetsky has to admit that the leader of German National Socialism decided to inflict, as soon as possible, a preemptive strike against Stalin only after Molotov’s visit to Berlin from November 12 to 14, 1940. Hitler’s irreversible decision was due both to the British resistance and to the flat refusal of Moscow to cede the Balkans and Finland to Berlin. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that Stalin had decided to engulf the Baltic states long before the surrender of France, which is witnessed by Stalin’s revelations to the Soviet apparatchik Georgi Dimitrov, as well as by an order of the Russian war minister Semen Timoshenko of July 3, 1940 about the status of the “Red Army” units in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It’s quite another matter that even after the surrender of France the Russian dictator couldn’t believe that his German “colleague” would attack him before eliminating Britain and would throw in this way Germany into a two-front war without having prepared his army for the harsh conditions of Russia.[[18]](#footnote-18)

To some extent Bezymenskij reminds of Gorodetsky by his underestimation of the views of Suvorov, but Bezymenskij goes further by accusing Suvorov of reviving the propaganda of Goebbels and by assigning him thoughts that Suvorov has never uttered. More than once Bezymenskij repeats in his book that in Suvorov’s opinion not Hitler intended to assault Russia and that Hitler did not even assault Russia, but only Stalin prepared an attack on Germany.[[19]](#footnote-19) In fact Suvorov denies by no means the aggressive schemes of Hitler against Stalin, abundantly documented for long years in the scholarly literature. Suvorov simply claims that not only Hitler intended to attack Russia, but that Stalin planned an aggression upon Germany, and not only upon Germany, but upon the whole of Europe.

Similarly to Gorodetsky, Bezymenskij hastily rejects the testimony about Stalin’s aggressive intentions toward Hitler as “*boast*” and “*bragging*”. The same terms are used for the speech that Stalin made on May 5, 1941, although the Russian dictator clearly revealed in that speech his intention to attack Germany as soon as possible. If Stalin really overestimated the combat capacities of the “Red Army” in order to discourage Hitler, as Bezymenskij claims, then why this speech was not only kept in deep secrecy, but a deliberately false version was tossed to the Germans, making the impression that the Soviet leader was ready for peace and for new compromises with the Third Reich?[[20]](#footnote-20)

As a science, or at least as a humanity, history is based on primary sources and in modern and recent times primary sources means archives. Not knowing archives may easily lead experts to entirely wrong conclusions and this applies even more to those who have lived through the events and developments, dealt with in this book. Such is, for instance, the fatal self-deception, shared even by Hitler and Mussolini, that Stalin presumably abandoned the idea of a “world revolution”. Apart from the unquestionable achievements of scholars in the field of World War II, the present work is based on an abundant quantity of primary sources, both published and unpublished. This includes the documents of the German and Swiss foreign policy[[21]](#footnote-21), the already published diaries of Georgi Dimitrov[[22]](#footnote-22), Franz Halder[[23]](#footnote-23), Galeazzo Ciano[[24]](#footnote-24) and Bogdan Filov[[25]](#footnote-25), the published and unpublished Hungarian diplomatic papers[[26]](#footnote-26), the diplomatic and royal archives of Romania[[27]](#footnote-27), Churchill’s memoirs[[28]](#footnote-28), etc.

There can be hardly any doubt that the Second World War resulted to a great extent from the First one, but not because of the irreconcilability between winners and losers, as it is usually claimed. There were a lot of events in the interwar period, indicating quite persuasively that it was possible to overcome the antagonism between the victorious and the defeated powers. For instance, the 1925 Locarno Agreements created a regional collective security system of Germany, on the one hand, and France and Belgium, on the other, with Britain and Italy as guarantors. For its part, the 1932 Lausanne Conference annulled the reparations that the defeated countries had to pay to the winners.

As a matter of fact, the First World War made the Second one inevitable above all by creating the conditions and premises for totalitarianism. On November 7, 1917, the Russian Bolsheviks under Lenin took power by a coup d’état in an atmosphere that favored immensely extremism because of the economic catastrophe, caused by the war. The diktat, forced upon Germany by the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty, gave in its turn a chance to the National Socialists under Hitler who, unlike Lenin, came to power in conformity with the constitutional and parliamentary rules, since he was the leader of the largest party in parliament. Lenin repeatedly proclaimed that his ultimate goal was the Bolshevization of the whole world and he explicitly and plainly formulated the tactics the Soviet state had to follow until the moment was ripe for that: “*We should use the contrasts and contradictions between the two imperialisms, between the two groups of capitalist powers… As long as we have not conquered the entire world, as long as we are weaker than the remaining capitalist world, we should observe the rule: we should be able to use the contradictions and contrasts between the imperialists.*”[[29]](#footnote-29)

After defeating his opponents in the struggle for Lenin’s succession, Stalin strictly followed this testament and made everything possible to provoke a new conflict between the winners and the losers of World War I. Precisely for that reason the Russian dictator rejected abruptly the efforts of Britain and France for an alliance with Communist Russia in the summer of 1939. The refusal of the British and the French to throw the small Eastern European countries under the feet of Stalin played only an auxiliary part. It should be obvious that, in the face of a bloc between Russia, Britain and France, Hitler would have never had the courage to assault Poland and to throw in this way Germany into a two-front war that would have inevitably ended even with a more dreadful catastrophe for the Germans. Moreover, even in the absence of a British-French-Russian alliance, Hitler would have never moved against Poland without a preliminary agreement with Stalin, at least because Russia was the eastern neighbor of the Poles and a traditional pretender to their territory. The key to the Second World War was, therefore, in the hands of Stalin and the only way of setting fire to a new world conflict was by achieving a friendly, if not an alliance agreement with Hitler. The Non-Aggression Pact, signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939, by the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Russian colleague Vyacheslav Molotov, marked the beginning of the Soviet-Nazi alliance. Without that alliance the outbreak of a new war in Europe would have been impossible. After that pact there was nothing any more that could prevent Hitler from starting his expansion program with the complicity of Stalin. According to a secret protocol to the Non-Aggression Pact the western part Poland together with Lithuania were assigned to National Socialist Germany, while the eastern part of Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Bessarabia (then within the borders of Romania) were handed over to Communist Russia.

The entire strategy of Stalin aimed at the transformation of Russia into an infallible machine for the conquest of the planet. That was the objective of industrialization and collectivization, as well as of the 1936-1938 “Great Terror”, when the extermination of millions of loyal subjects of the dictator created such an atmosphere that if some even dreamed about participating in a plot against the “Father”, the next day that same person would give himself or herself to the authorities. Stalin imposed even more cruel changes in the High Treason Act that was draconian anyway. According to the new texts each “Red Army” soldier, who happened to be captured by the enemy, was to be immediately shot and his property was to be confiscated. Moreover, the indictment for “treason” was to be brought not only against the prisoner-of-war, but also against all adult members of his or her family. “Severe punishment” awaited also those, who had known that someone could be captured, but who “*haven’t reported on that to the agencies of Soviet power*”. In 1939 these cannibalistic clauses were included in the oath of every “Red Army” recruit, while being sworn in.[[30]](#footnote-30)

It goes without saying that Stalin and Hitler would have hardly acted in such an unpunished way if the United States did not refused to assume the responsibility of the superpower it had become by the end of the 19th century. After World War I the American society sank into an insane and shortsighted isolationism and Europe was left alone to the mercy of Lenin, Stalin and Hitler. Despite their large colonial possessions, Britain and France turned out to be helpless in front of the Nazi and Soviet aggression. Their “appeasement” policy only enhanced Hitler’s and Stalin’s belief that the two Western European democracies were hopelessly weak. Britain and France met with suicidal indifference the offensive of various authoritarian regimes, established in most European countries in the 1920s and in the 1930s as the last and only efficient barrier against Russian Communism and German National Socialism. As early as in 1922 Italy fell under the rule of the Fascists, headed by Benito Mussolini, who banned in 1926 all political parties and imposed the monopoly of his own Fascist Party. A similar, although a milder one-party system was forced upon Spain by Franco after his victory in the 1936-1939 civil war against the more and more Bolshevized “Popular Front” regime, by Salazar in Portugal after 1932, and by Konstantin Paets in Estonia and Karlis Ulmanis in Latvia after the respective coups d’état in 1934. Of a one-party character was also the “enlightened despotism” of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey and the same system was preserved after his death in 1938 by his close associate and successor Ismet Inönü, who had distinguished himself in the national revolution and in the war against the Entente. After the coup of February 1938 King Carol II of Romania imposed his own personal regime and tried to create a unique state party too. In a number of European countries the multiparty system seemingly remained, but the opposition was in fact barred from access to the government. That was the case of Hungary’s Regent Miklos Horthy after the country’s liberation from the Bolshevik terror in 1919, of the Yugoslav King Alexander Karageorgevich, who was succeeded by Paul as regent, of the “Sanation Regime”, forced upon by Jozef Pilsudski and reaffirmed after his death by a quadrumvirate, including the Inspector-General of the Polish Army Edward Rydz-Smigly, President Ignacy Moscicki, Prime Minister Felicjan Skladkowski-Slawoj and Foreign Minister Jozef Beck. After the 1926 coup d’état the Lithuanian leader Antanas Smetona followed initially a similar pattern, but in 1934 he decided also to ban all political parties except his own. For his part, King Boris III of Bulgaria removed in 1935 the perpetrators of the coup d’état of May 19, 1934, only to reaffirm the ban of all political parties and to rule as an absolute monarch, although he allowed a limited form of legal opposition activity. To some extent the military dictator of Greece Ioannis Metaxas ruled in a similar way after the 1936 coup, whereas Slovakia under Monsignor Jozef Tiso had a seemingly multi-party system, but these parties were resolutely pro-Nazi and ever more obedient to Hitler. By September 1, 1939, only 11 European countries enjoyed a stable multi-party representative democracy: Britain, France, Ireland, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. BY that time as many as three sovereign European states had been “peacefully destroyed: Austria in March 1938, Czechoslovakia in March 1939, and Albania in April 1939. Austria and Bohemia were engulfed by the Third Reich. Slovakia became formally independent, but strictly controlled by Berlin, whereas Albania was in fact annexed to Fascist Italy.

**I.THE SOVIET-NAZI ALLIANCE IN ACTION**

A wise man’s heart is

at his right hand, but

a fool’s heart at his left.

(Eccl. 10: 2)

On September 1, 1939, at 4:15 AM sixty-two German divisions, amounting to 1,700,000 men, assaulted a poorly equipped Polish army, consisting of only thirty-six divisions and 600,000 men. The invasion of Poland by the “Wehrmacht” started simultaneously from west, north and south. The Nazi regime didn’t even bother to address an official war declaration on Poland. The very aggression was represented by the National Socialist propaganda as a response to a Polish attack on a German radio station at Gleiwitz (today Gliwice in Poland). A group of secret German agents, dressed in Polish uniforms, actually had staged an attack on that station, which served as an excuse for the Nazi encroachment.[[31]](#footnote-31)

For the time being Russia refrained from joining the German forces in the assault, but as early as in the morning hours the Nazis enjoyed the logistic assistance of the Bolsheviks, whose radio station at Minsk began to broadcast a special coded signal for the orientation of the German bombers. Yet too many people thought that peace could be still rescued. To that effect the Swedish businessman Birger Dahlerus tried to mediate between Germany and Britain, using his personal friendship with Hermann Goering, who was considered to be the second most important man in the Third Reich after Hitler himself. Italy’s Fascist dictator Mussolini asked Hitler for a derogation from the May 1939 German-Italian alliance treaty and kept on hoping for an international conference of the type held in Munich back in September 1938, when Britain and France had surrendered under Hitler’s diktat.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Hitler gave his accord to what amounted to Italy’s neutrality, but the leader of National Socialist Germany didn’t need Mussolini’s assistance anyway. All the other European countries hurried to proclaim their neutrality as well. Switzerland did this as far back as August 31, 1939, when the Swiss parliament chose Henri Guisan for general and supreme commander of the armed forces, but Guisan contacted the French military command for working out joint defense plans against a possible German attack. Neutrality was proclaimed also by the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, although his victory in the 1936-1939 civil war against the pro-Soviet “People’s Front” regime had become possible only thanks to Hitler’s and Mussolini’s military help.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Hitler was not at all enthusiastic about the neutrality of Italy and Spain and he angrily warned Hungary, which had profited from the partition of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, to refrain from neutrality declarations. The German leader did not expect any active participation of the Hungarians, but he was furious at the refusal of Budapest to allow free passage to some German troops for Poland. Even the Slovaks sympathized with the Poles, although they owed their very existence as a sovereign state to the Third Reich. In any case a neutrality of Slovakia was out of the question. On the other hand, though, the Fuehrer was quite pleased with the neutrality of Romania, since Bucharest made it thus clear that it would not come to the assistance of Poland despite the 1921 alliance treaty, directed by the way against Russia, but not against Germany.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Hitler had enough reasons to believe that this time again the two leading western European democracies, namely Britain and France, would fail to fulfill their obligations toward Poland under the alliance treaty that had been just concluded. Indeed, in the name of peace British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had abandoned Czechoslovakia to Hitler. France had sided actively with Britain in Chamberlain’s “appeasement” strategy, because the Third Republic was fatally weakened by a demographic collapse, as well as by the subversive activity of Communist and National Socialist agents. Finally, the United States was not only far away, but it still found itself in a deep isolationist dream and President Franklin D. Roosevelt could hardly do anything more than to issue from time to time purely moral and completely inefficient peace appeals.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Apparently Stalin also was not quite sure whether Britain and France would intervene or look for a “peaceful” solution this time again, which would frustrate his expectations for a war between Germany and the two western European powers. The French section of the Comintern (the “French Communist Party”) was therefore instructed to struggle for a new government, which would unite the nation, because the cabinet of ministers under Edouard Daladier could not be entrusted with the defense of the country.[[36]](#footnote-36)

However, British public opinion had radically changed as a result of the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, when Hitler flatly broke the promises he had made at the September 1938 Munich conference. Any further expansion of Nazi Germany to the east would threaten not only the British colonial empire, but the very existence of the United Kingdom. So London responded to the peace efforts of Mussolini and Dahlerus by pointing out that any negotiation had to be preceded by the withdrawal of all German troops from Poland. In the meantime the German aviation had made several air raids on Warsaw and other Polish cities and the Polish army was retreating everywhere except at Westerplatte in front of Danzig (Gdansk) on the Baltic Sea, where a small unit resisted heroically all German attacks.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Meanwhile Britain addressed an ultimatum to Germany, exacting the withdrawal of the German troops from Poland. France followed suit, but quite reluctantly. Hitler refused even to discuss the matter and on September 3, at 11 AM the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. The French ambassador to Berlin Robert Coulondre handed over to the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop a similar declaration somewhat later, but Ribbentrop deliberately humiliated Coulondre, by making him wait until after the reception of the new Russian ambassador Alexander Shkvartsev, who had come to present his credentials.[[38]](#footnote-38)

That was the moment when Eire hurried to proclaim her own neutrality, which greatly embarrassed London, since the British could not use the Irish ports, although a German attack by sea seemed highly probable. Moreover, Irish Prime Minister Eamon de Valera was a strong opponent to the 1921 compromise, which left Ulster to Britain after the proclamation of the Free Irish State. In 1936 Ireland severed all ties with the English Crown and became a sovereign republic, but remained in the British Commonwealth of Nations in order to make easier the union with the North. De Valera repeatedly declared his firm belief in the inevitable restoration of Eire’s unity and vehemently protested against the infractions of the Irish air space by British planes.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Nazi, as well as Soviet aggression was no doubt greatly facilitated by the deep divisions and hatreds among many of the smaller countries, especially in Southeastern Europe. Hungary, for instance, had lost two thirds of her territory as a result of World War II and thought that with the German-Russian “Nonaggression” Pact the time had come for getting back Transylvania. To that effect the Hungarians concentrated several divisions on the Romanian border, whereas the Bulgarian minister to Moscow Nikola Antonov whose Russophilia amounted in fact to high treason, sought for Soviet intervention against Turkey because of the 11 Turkish divisions, amassed on the Bulgarian border.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Among Hitler’s first reactions to the British and French war declaration was sending special envoys to Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark to warn them to preserve entirely their trade with Germany and to resist British pressures to decrease their exports to the Reich. At the same time the German ambassador to Moscow Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg was instructed to secure the military intervention of Russia in conformity with the Molotov-Ribbentrop “Nonaggression” Pact of August 23. Last but not least, Berlin made it clear to Budapest that Germany opposed any Hungarian action against Romania.[[41]](#footnote-41)

As a matter of fact, though, British and French military planning relied heavily on the experience of World War I, which meant that Britain and France waited for a German attack and expected to exhaust the Reich in another attrition war. In other words, the United Kingdom and the Third Republic were practically unable to launch a large scale offensive and were not even ready to provide the Poles with an effective aid, which meant, among other things, that Poland was doomed to spend at least some time under totalitarian occupation that eventually lasted half a century. The immediate result of these tactics was that the French army stood idle at the German border, although the British started to land an expeditionary corps in France. However, the so called “Funny War” became quite real in the high seas, where Hitler launched a series of U-boat assaults on all sorts of British ships.[[42]](#footnote-42)

For their part, Britain and France succeeded in imposing a strict sea blockade, but this measure affected quite painfully most European countries, whereas the Germans could secure the needed food and raw materials by rapidly growing imports from Russia. Moreover, all German nonmilitary vessels that happened to be out of Germany’s territorial waters were ordered to leave for the Far North and to seek for refuge in the Russian port of Murmansk on the Arctic Ocean. Thus, thanks to the Russians, the Germans could save a number of their passenger liners such as “Bremen”, “New York”, “Schwaben”, “Stuttgart”, “Cordilera”, and “Sankt Louis”, as well as many cargo ships and tankers.[[43]](#footnote-43)

In the night of September 3 to September 4 the Germans didn’t have major difficulties in conquering Poland’s outlet to the Baltic Sea. Later on September 4 units of the “Wehrmacht” landed near Warsaw. At this moment the Polish government had already gave the order to the chief government institutions to evacuate the capital. The problem was that the Nazis landed very close to a village where the President of Poland Ignacy Moscicki had just found refuge.[[44]](#footnote-44)

All the medium and small European countries that had proclaimed their neutrality hastened also to carry out a general mobilization. All of them wanted to keep themselves out of the war, but some of them, like Hungary and Bulgaria, had the impossible ambition of both avoiding bloodshed and achieving a revision of the peace treaties, forced upon them as a result of the First World War. This attitude had no doubt resulted from the bitterness of an often horrible ethnic cleansing of the elements that had had the misfortune to fall under modern foreign rule, but the revisionist response obviously made the countries, defeated in World War II, considerably more vulnerable to Hitler’s and Stalin’s blackmail.

On September 5 Stalin’s right hand and Russian prime and foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov declared to the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg that Russia would by all means engage in a military action against Poland, but the appropriate moment for that had not yet come. However, he warned explicitly von der Schulenburg that the “Wehrmacht” should not occupy any Polish territory, assigned to Russia under the “Nonaggression” Pact of August 23. At the same time Molotov agreed that both the Soviet Union and the Third Reich had to exercise all their influence to make Turkey abide by a “*complete neutrality*”.[[45]](#footnote-45)

At this particular moment the Polish government and high command, as well as the foreign diplomatic missions had to leave Warsaw. The commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces Marshall Edward Rydz-Smigly decided to move his headquarters to Lublin in the east, but actually he lost control of the overall military situation, although various Polish units continued to offer an incredible resistance to an overwhelming invader. Nevertheless, on September 6 the Germans took the ancient Polish capital Cracow.[[46]](#footnote-46)

One of the reasons for the delay of Russia’s intervention against the Poles was Stalin’s desire to wait for the outcome of the battle in the Far East, where the Russians under the command of general G.Zhukov were about to annihilate an entire Japanese army. On the other hand, though, the Soviet media reflected exclusively the Nazi viewpoint of the conflict. All anti-German literature was confiscated from the bookstores, people were sent to concentration camps for expressing some anti-Nazi opinion albeit in the mildest form and even the use of the word “Fascist” as an insult became punishable.[[47]](#footnote-47)

In the night of September 6 to September 7 some French border units at Saarbrücken undertook the first and only land offensive against the Germans, but the Poles waited in vain for at least some British and French air raids on the Nazi troops, advancing rapidly in Poland. Moreover, on September 7 the Romanians published an official neutrality declaration, as required by the Germans. At 9:30 AM of the same day the defenders of Westerplatte at Danzig (Gdansk) had to raise the white flag. The Poles had lost only 15 dead and 50 wounded, whereas the same battle took the life of as many as 400 to 500 Germans. Nevertheless, that was the first and only time during the war, when the surviving Poles were treated by the Germans as prisoners of war with all due honors.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Even at this moment the British War Cabinet had no clear idea about the way to respond to the German invasion of Poland. Prime Minister Chamberlain was fully aware that the United Kingdom could not offer the Poles any real assistance but he and his colleagues nourished the insane hope that once the Germans reached the Polish-Russian border this might cause a growing tension in the relationship between Berlin and Moscow. On the other hand, it was expected that after the destruction of Poland the Nazis might direct their aggression toward the Near East across the Balkans and Turkey and it was thought that Britain should encourage Turkey, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia to form a neutral Balkan bloc. The problem was that these four countries had founded in 1934 the Balkan Entente against any revision of the post-World War I status quo, which was directed not against the great revisionist powers like Germany and Italy, but solely against Bulgaria and Hungary, disarmed and weak anyway.[[49]](#footnote-49)

By September 7 the Germans had already destroyed two Polish armies. Moreover, the US ambassador to Paris William Bullitt reported to the State Department about a warning of the French Foreign Ministry that the Russians might invade Eastern Poland. For their part, Hitler and his generals thought that France had no real intention to fight and the Fuehrer planned to force Poland to sever all ties with Britain and France and to reduce this country to the regions of Warsaw and Cracow. In any case the Polish campaign was considered almost finished and the German command began preparations for transferring troops from Poland to the west.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Hitler had the wrong impression that even Britain’s reaction was “moderate” rather than intransigent, whereas, thanks to his spy network, Stalin was certain that the United Kingdom would fight by all available means. The outbreak of the war suited perfectly his strategy, inherited from Lenin, to provoke a war of attrition among the major European powers and to intervene at the most favorable moment. The Russian dictator was pleased that Hitler was in fact “*undermining the capitalist system*” and that the Soviet Union would be soon able to impose its regime “*upon new territories and people*”. Under his instruction the Secretary General of the Comintern G.Dimitrov ordered the communists to support by no means “*Fascist Poland*” and to struggle “*decisively against their governments and against the war*”.[[51]](#footnote-51)

On September 10 the Russian authorities began an open mobilization, while the German minister to Bucharest Wilhelm Fabricius warned that the Romanians should by no means grant refuge to the Polish government, but the Romanians made it clear that they could not prevent the Polish ministers from coming to Romania as private persons. However, Molotov announced to German Ambassador von der Schulenburg that the Russians needed some time for attacking the Poles from the east and that they intended to justify the intervention by claiming that they had to rescue the Polish Ukrainians and Byelorussians as “*Slavic brethren*” from German occupation, which was an unacceptable excuse in the eyes of Berlin.[[52]](#footnote-52)

On September 11, when the Nazi invaders began to massacre representatives of the Polish elite, as well as Polish Jews, the Romanians allowed the transit of the Polish gold reserves for the United Kingdom, despite strong German protests. The Polish commander-in-chief Rydz-Smigly, President Moscicki, Prime Minister Skladkowski-Slawoj and Foreign Minister Beck decided to move the central government offices to a place near the Romanian border.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The French command had refused to stage even air raids in assistance to the Poles, but it planned an offensive from the Near East through the Balkans, which the British rightfully considered inappropriate. The British Foreign Secretary Edward Frederick Halifax preferred the idea of a neutral Balkan bloc with the participation of Bulgaria. This seemed to be more realistic, since Turkey and Greece made everything possible to keep themselves out of the war. The same applied to Yugoslavia, where a last-minute Serb-Croat compromise for the autonomy of Croatia had caused in fact a fatal state crisis. For the sake of a neutral Balkan bloc British diplomacy began to suggest to the representatives of Yugoslavia and other countries of the region that in exchange for a reaffirmed neutrality of Sofia Bulgaria could regain Southern Dobruja, ceded to Romania as a result of World War I. The neutrality project found a favorable echo also in Italy since Mussolini saw in it an opportunity for heading such a bloc.[[54]](#footnote-54)

In the evening hours of September 15 von Ribbentrop instructed von der Schulenburg to declare to Molotov that if the Russians did not intervene soon to take their part of the Polish booty there might emerge “new states” in the area. Apart from that the German foreign minister proposed that the Russians excuse their assault by the “*disintegration of the previously existing form of government in Poland*”. Somewhat later Molotov stated in response that the Soviet attack on Poland would be justified by the disintegration of the Polish state. On the following day the Japanese asked the Russians in the Far East for a cease-fire. The disaster was of such a dimension that Tokyo abandoned the dream of conquering Siberia and concentrated the expansionist endeavors against China and the colonies of the European powers in the region.[[55]](#footnote-55)

At 2 AM on September 17 Stalin summoned personally von der Schulenburg to the Kremlin to inform him that within four hours the “Red Army” would cross the Polish border. The Soviet boss went so far as to acquaint the German ambassador with text of the note to the Poles and obligingly removed any hint at a possible anti-German connotation of the move, but at the same time he announced that the Turks had proposed a “*mutual assistance pact concerning the Straits and the Balkans*”. In fact Turkey had started negotiations with Russia to that effect before August 23, when there still seemed to be prospects for an alliance between the Soviet Union, Britain and France, directed against the Third Reich. With the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact these prospects came to nil, but the Turks kept on hoping that a formal alliance was the most efficient way of declining the Soviet thrust upon Constantinople, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.[[56]](#footnote-56)

At 3 AM it was the turn of the Polish ambassador to Moscow Waclaw Grzybowski to be summoned to the Russsian Foreign Ministry, where Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Potemkin red out a note, stating that the Polish state and the Polish government had ceased to exist and by that token all treaties and agreements between the Soviet Union and Poland had lost their validity. Under these circumstances, continued the note, the “Red Army” had to cross the Polish border in order to protect the life and property of the “*consanguine Ukrainians and Byelorussians, living on Poland’s territory*”. The Polish ambassador refused to accept the note and pointed out that as long as an army fought, the state of that army existed too. He stressed also the fact that the Ukrainians and Byelorussians, as well as Czech and Slovak legions waged battles against the Germans together with the Poles and asked “*what happened with the Slavic solidarity*” of the Russians. Later Grzybowski was to be punished severely for reminding the Bolsheviks about the “*Slavic solidarity*”.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Copies of the Soviet note to Poland were handed over to all foreign diplomatic representatives in Moscow, including British Ambassador William Seeds, who declared that he did not acknowledge the Soviet explanations, but he expressed at the same time the hope that the USSR would keep further its neutrality with regard to the United Kingdom. At 6 AM 600,000 Russian soldiers invaded Poland from the east, according to a plan worked out back in 1938, while another 200,000 to 250,000 “Red Army” soldiers were concentrated on the borders of Estonia and Latvia. Significantly, the local command of Russian armed forces there was duly equipped with maps, designating these two Baltic countries, together with Lithuania, as “*Soviet Socialist Republics*”.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Marshall Rydz-Smigly responded to the Soviet invasion by preparing the withdrawal of most Polish forces to Hungary and Romania. Nevertheless, he ordered that everywhere the remaining garrisons should fight against the Nazis to the very end, whereas “*war with the Soviets may occur only in case of offensive actions on their part*”, but the Polish units had to reject any Russian demand for disarmament. All units which happened to be in a territory, occupied by the “Red Army”, had to cross also the Romanian border. Rydz-Smigly and Foreign Minister Beck hoped that Romania would permit free passage to the government and the armed forces for France, where a new Polish army would be formed to continue the war against Germany.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Despite this desperate situation Polish units opposed resistance to the Russians in a number of places. At Przemysl troops under the command of General Wladislaw Anders even succeeded in destroying two Soviet infantry regiments, but the German minister to Bucharest Fabricius warned the Romanian foreign minister Grigore Gafencu that in case the Polish government found refuge in Romania they had to be immediately arrested. Otherwise the Third Reich would come to “*definitive conclusions*” as to the attitude of Romania. Eventually the Romanian government decided to grant “*hospitality*” to the Poles, but to retain them in Romania.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Meanwhile the Russians and the Germans engaged in joint actions against the Poles, although the Soviet Union still claimed to be neutral with regard both to Germany and to Britain and France. This “neutrality” didn’t prevent “Red Army” and “Wehrmacht” troops from besieging and taking the city of Brzesc (Brest) and from celebrating together their victory. The Nazi-Soviet “Nonaggression” Pact assigned this city to Russia and units of the sinister Interior People’s Commissariat began immediately to arrest all Polish officers, priests, and intellectuals. Moreover, the Russians took as many as 240,000 prisoners, many of whom were immediately massacred, whereas the rest were deported to the death camps in Siberia.[[61]](#footnote-61)

In the night of September 17 to September 18, when the Russians were rapidly taking over the checkpoints on the Polish-Romanian border, President Moscicki, Prime Minister Skladkowski Slawoj, and Foreign Minister Beck managed to escape from Soviet imprisonment only to be put under luxurious arrest in Romania. Rydz-Smigly crossed the border somewhat later, but the Romanian authorities confined him to a remote place, where he could not initially contact the other members of the quadrumvirate.[[62]](#footnote-62)

On the following day the Russians took also the ancient capital of Lithuania Vilnius, whose capture by the Poles back in 1921 had constantly poisoned the Polish-Lithuanian relations during the entire interwar period. Under the new circumstances, though, the authoritarian Lithuanian government under Antanas Smetona granted asylum to some 40,000 Polish civilians and 13,500 military, fleeing from Soviet and Nazi occupation and acknowledged further the Polish legation in Kaunas (the country’s new capital). Another Baltic country, namely Estonia, did not hesitate to give refuge to the Polish submarine “Orzel” (“Eagle”), which had operated until that moment in the Baltic Sea, causing not negligible problems to the Nazis.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Although the abandonment of Poland was very counterproductive as to the reliability of Britain’s and France’s guarantees, the commander-in-chief of the Eastern Mediterranean French forces General Maxime Weygand and his British counterpart in the same area General Archibald Wavell flew to Ankara to persuade the Turks to lend their armed forces and territory for joint operations of Britain, Turkey and the other Balkan countries against possible German or Russian aggression in the Balkans or in the Caucasus. However, President Ismet Inönü and his Chief of Staff Marshall Fevzi Çakmak rejected the plan out of fear of Stalin, the more so as the Turkish foreign minister Şükrü Saraçoglu was planning a long stay in Russia. Berlin was ready to accept a Russian-Turkish Mutual Assistance Treaty provided that it would not be directed against Germany, Italy and Bulgaria.[[64]](#footnote-64)

The prospects of a Russian-Turkish pact didn’t prevent the French Premier Edouard Daladier from suggesting a naval operation in the Baltic region. In the night of September 18 to September 19 the Polish submarine “*Orzel*” succeeded in escaping from the port of the Estonian capital Tallinn. Stalin used the incident for putting strong pressure on the Baltic countries, while the repression services of both Communist Russia and Nazi Germany were preparing the genocide of the Poles. The National Socialists put the stress on the cleansing of the Jews, the intelligentsia, the clergy and the Polish nobility, whereas the Russian Interior Ministry began the deportation of officers, landowners, priests, and policemen to the Siberian death camps.[[65]](#footnote-65)

At the same time the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill proposed to the British cabinet under Neville Chamberlain the mining of the Norwegian territorial waters. The reason for the proposal was the fact that the Germans profited from that extremely large coast with too many fiords to transport iron ore from Sweden to the Third Reich, without risking an attack by the naval forces of the United Kingdom. However, the action would infringe drastically upon Norway’s neutrality and British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax succeeded, at least for the time being, to persuade his colleagues to refrain from such an initiative, pointing out that it could be carried out only with the agreement of the Norwegian government. Halifax was confident that Germany would be defeated soon, since by that time the British had managed to install in France their First Expeditionary Corps.[[66]](#footnote-66)

In any case, most European countries didn’t seem to be worried excessively by the aggression of the totalitarian powers. Some Bulgarian representatives even went so far as to rely on Russian assistance for the foreign policy goals of Sofia. So the Bulgarian minister to Moscow Nikola Antonov entreated the Russian Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vladimir Dekanozov to make the Russian government intervene diplomatically against the concentration of powerful Turkish armed forces on the border with Bulgaria. Dekanozov apparently interpreted this as a direct invitation of the Bulgarians to be eaten up by the Russians and promptly proposed a mutual assistance pact between the Soviet Union and Bulgaria.[[67]](#footnote-67)

At the same time the rapid advance of the “Red Army” toward the Polish-Romanian border made King Carol II of Romania decree a general mobilization. For his part the Russian Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars (Prime Minister) and People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs Molotov declared to the German Ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg that Stalin had abandoned in the meantime the idea of a mutilated Polish state and considered that Poland should be partitioned between Russia and Germany. A couple of minutes later Molotov summoned the Estonian minister to Moscow August Rei to protest vehemently against the escape of the Polish submarine “*Orzel*” and to state that from that moment on the Soviet Union would take over the “defense” of Estonia’s territorial waters.[[68]](#footnote-68)

In a speech to the House of Commons Prime Minister Chamberlain carefully refrained from promising any concrete assistance to the Poles against the Russian invaders, although the British command had some plans for intervention in the Baltic region, provided that Russia would not join Germany, but this assumption was obviously fatally outdated. In the afternoon of September 20 the Soviet navy entered the Estonian territorial waters and occupied some coastal areas, while Russian planes began to fly over the territory of the country at a low level. The only thing the Estonian Government could do was to order the troops to oppose no resistance to the Russians.[[69]](#footnote-69)

On the other hand, Russia joined Germany in the pressure on Romania for having granted an asylum to the Polish government, but the First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill was ready to satisfy Stalin’s appetites for Bessarabia. In a note to the British War Cabinet he claimed that Romania had to cede Bessarabia to Russia and Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria which, in his opinion, would enable the formation of a Balkan Bloc.[[70]](#footnote-70)

The problem was that the undemocratic personal rule of Carol II in Romania lacked stability and the political crisis in this country culminated in the assassination of Prime Minister Armand Calinescu in the evening hours of September 21, 1939. The coup was organized by the activists of the totalitarian and pro-Nazi Legion of Archangel Michael, who revenged in this way the assassination of their leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu on November 30, 1938, at the King’s order. It might be that the Legionnaires hoped to provoke the intervention of the German troops, concentrated on the Polish-Romanian border, and to come to power with their help.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Carol II hurried to appoint General Gheorghe Argeșanu to the premiership and the new government ordered the shooting of several hundred Legionnaires who were serving various sentences in jail. However, their new leader Horia Sima managed to escape from Romania and to find refuge in Germany, where Hitler intended to use him as an additional means of pressure and blackmail on Romania.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Europe, as a whole, was no doubt increasingly helpless in front of the totalitarian powers and US President Roosevelt proposed to the two houses of Congress to revise the 1936 Neutrality Act, which banned the export of arms and ammunition to all belligerent countries, including Britain and France. The President’s idea was to amend the act in such a way as to allow the export of war materials to any power, able to pay in cash. Germany was in great need of hard currency and it was thought that such an amendment would be beneficial above all to the two Western European democracies. The opposition of the isolationists, though, delayed the implementation of the Cash and Carry Act for another two months.[[73]](#footnote-73)

On September 22, 1939, Stalin decreed a general mobilization in the western parts of Russia because of the “*special situation abroad*”. At the same time Russian and German units made a joint “Victory Parade” in the Polish city of Brest. The troops were reviewed by General Heinz Guderian on behalf of the Third Reich and by Sergej Krivoshein on behalf of the Soviet Union. The General Staff of the Romanian armed forces reacted by issuing new instructions for the country’s defense against a possible Russian attack, expected to come from the north and the northeast.[[74]](#footnote-74)

On the following day the Russians invited the Estonian foreign minister Kaarel Selter to Moscow to sign a new commercial treaty, as if nothing had happened. Selter left almost immediately for the Russian capital, hoping to find out what exactly the Soviets intended to do. While he was travelling in a night train to Moscow “The Sunday Times” claimed in an article, published on September 24, that the problems, cause by Russia’s action in Poland, would have diplomatic rather than military character. Without any touch with reality was also Italy’s plan for a neutral bloc of Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary under Italian leadership.[[75]](#footnote-75)

As a matter of fact Hungary decided to renew the diplomatic relations Russia had cut off in response to Hungary’s accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact back in February 1939. The pact itself had been formed by Germany, Japan and Italy in 1936-1937, officially not against the Soviet state, but against the subversive activity of the world Communist network, although the Comintern was clearly a Russian party and state body. After the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop “Non-Aggression Pact” on August 23, 1939, Japan had left the Anti-Comintern Pact, which actually resulted in its disintegration. Stalin apparently thought that there were no more obstacles to the renewal of diplomatic relations with Hungary, whereas the Hungarians were alarmed by the menacing presence of “Red Army” troops on the Polish-Hungarian border and hurried to send an official representative to Moscow.[[76]](#footnote-76)

The Italian idea of a neutral Balkan bloc was supported by Romania, but Russia and Germany didn’t conceal their skepticism, if not hostility, to the project. It was under these circumstances that the Turkish foreign minister Şükrü Saraçoglu left for Moscow, hoping to persuade the Russians to conclude a mutual assistance pact with Turkey. To that effect he was going to acquaint them with the text of the forthcoming alliance treaty with Britain and France. His impossible hope was to attract somehow the Soviet Union into an alliance system, linked indirectly with the two Western European democracies despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Meanwhile, having just arrived in Moscow, the Estonian foreign minister Selter was taken directly from the railway station to the Kremlin where, instead of completing the talks about a commercial treaty, Molotov demanded military bases in Estonia, notably in Tallinn and in the country’s second largest city on the Baltic coast Pernu. According to Molotov the whole thing could be arranged by a mutual assistance pact. He explicitly stated that Germany would not object to such an agreement. The only concession Stalin’s second man in the Politburo made was to allow the Estonian government to think over the proposal within the next couple of days but in case of rejection, he pointed out, the Soviet Union would carry out its designs no matter of Tallinn’s position. Selter could at least take immediately the train from Moscow to Tallinn on the following morning.[[78]](#footnote-78)

By that time the Russian troops had gone as far as 200 to 300 kilometers in Polish territory. Brainwashed by an intense propaganda against any kind of ownership, the Soviet soldiers plundered everything they could take and carry with them. They had lived in such a misery that they could not even understand the use of one or another item they found in the stores, frequently putting brassieres on their ears for protection from the cold. For their part, Stalin’s officers took with them everything they liked from the houses they chose for their lodging, namely garments, kitchen vessels, clocks and watches, possibly jewels, etc. Incomparably more sinister were the rapidly growing number of people, killed as “unreliable” or simply “wealthy” people even before Stalin’s repressive services began the systematic extermination of the political, economic and intellectual elite. Rapes became also widespread, although such practices were officially forbidden, but the Soviet command simply closed their eyes. Even ordinary people, who were not affected directly by the killings, rapes and plunders, felt that they were in fact liberated from bread, salt and shoes and that the “Red Army” delivered Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine not from misery and injustice, but from a good life.[[79]](#footnote-79)

On September 25 the Estonian foreign minister Selter returned from Moscow and hurried to meet the German diplomatic representative in Tallinn Frohwein, only to hear from the latter that the Estonians could not rely on the support of Berlin in their dealings with Russia. As a matter of fact Hitler already planned an offensive to the west and the High Command of the “Wehrmacht” indicated in a special instruction that after the “pacification” of Poland the German troops had to be transferred westward against France.[[80]](#footnote-80)

At 8 PM Stalin and Molotov summoned German Ambassador von der Schulenburg to the Kremlin and declared that it would be a “*mistake*” to preserve a sovereign Polish state even on some part of Poland. The Russian dictator generously offered the Germans new Polish territories, including the regions of Lublin and Warsaw, in exchange for Lithuania that had been initially assigned to the Soviet Union. Stalin explicitly stated that he relied on the support of the German Government for “*solving the problem*” with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but he failed to mention Finland, although Hitler had promised him Finland too.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The cabinet of Chamberlain in London resented Soviet brutality toward the Poles and the Baltic nations, but the First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill was confident that the antagonism between Russia and Germany was inevitable. In Churchill’s opinion the common border with the Soviet Union prevented the Germans from exposing their eastern front. He even thought that Russia’s interest in the Balkan “Slavs” and even the annexation of Bessarabia to the USSR were not detrimental to the strategy of Britain and France, since a German military presence on the Black Sea would pose a mortal threat to Russia. He erroneously assumed, though, that after the Polish campaign Germany would attack the Balkans.[[82]](#footnote-82)

On September 27 the “Wehrmacht” finally captured Warsaw, whereas the “Red Army” had taken by that time 230,000 Polish prisoners of war, only 82,000 of whom were going to survive until the summer of 1941. Only 2599 Russians had died in the campaign, but the Soviet authorities arrested the prominent activists of all Ukrainian national organizations with the obvious purpose of destroying completely any expression of Ukrainian identity. The Polish school system was also systematically destroyed and only a very limited number of teachers had the chance to preserve their position. Moreover, the Soviets addressed an ultimatum to Latvia to hand them over her naval and air bases and to admit 50,000 Russian soldiers on her territory.[[83]](#footnote-83)

It was only at this moment that France decided to take some measures against the Soviet agents, who had made quite a lot for the demoralization of the Third Republic. The French National Assembly banned the local section of the Comintern and proclaimed that the so-called French Communist Party was dissolved. The party secretary-general Maurice Thorez hurried to desert from the army and to find refuge in the Soviet Union, which was a relatively low risk since, as a deserter, he was to be sentenced to death and shot. However, the prohibition of the French Communist Party was far from diminishing its subversive activity, which included the publication of a black list of “*provocateurs, thieves, crooks, Trotskyites, traitors, driven out from the workers’ organizations in France*”. These comprised also those Communists, who rejected the alliance between Hitler and Stalin and many of whom were liquidated by the French Communist Party “police”.[[84]](#footnote-84)

For his part, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Georgi Kjoseivanov summoned the Bulgarian minister in Moscow Antonov back to Sofia to report about the Soviet proposal for a mutual assistance pact. Apparently Sofia was frightened by Moscow’s intention to treat Bulgaria in the same way as Estonia and Latvia. In any case, the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop learned about the Soviet ultimatums to Estonia and Latvia only when his plane landed at the airport of Moscow at 6 PM. Yet he didn’t know that Russia pressed also the Finns to cede two islands in the Gulf of Finland, which would put the entire eastern part of the Baltic Sea under Soviet control.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Ribbentrop’s mission was to conclude a closer alliance with Stalin, but before meeting his German counterpart Molotov preferred submitting the Estonian delegation under Selter, who arrived in Moscow at 10 PM, to a new round of psychological torture, by demanding military bases not only on the islands, but all over Estonia. At the same moment Stalin obligingly offered von Ribbentrop a naval base near Murmansk on the Arctic Ocean, but on September 28 the daily of the Belgian Communist Party openly declared that sooner or later the war would end with the crash of Hitler, Chamberlain and Daladier and with the establishment of “*peace and socialism*” in France.[[86]](#footnote-86)

For the time being, though, the joint Soviet-Nazi pressure made King Carol II of Romania replace General Gheorghe Argeșanu with Constantin Argetoianu as Prime Minister. Argetoianu was both more liberal and more pro-German. He hurried to sign a new agreement for the monthly delivery of 130,000 tons of petroleum to Germany. Moreover, the Polish commander-in-chief Rydz-Smigly in Craiova was deprived of his phone connection and put in an almost complete isolation.[[87]](#footnote-87)

At 3 PM von Ribbentrop resumed his talks with Stalin and Molotov and a couple of hours later they agreed that Germany would take 188,000 square kilometers of Polish territory with about 22 million inhabitants, whereas Russia was going to annex 200,000 square kilometers of Polish territory with about 13 million people, but this included also Western Galicia with the city of Lemberg (Lwow or Lviv) that had never been until then under Russian rule. The deal was celebrated at an exuberant dinner with many drinks and von Ribbentrop noticed that, contrary to the official Nazi propaganda, there were practically no Jews among the Soviet leaders and that the only Jewish member of the Politburo was Lazar Kaganovich. The German foreign minister had to admit to himself that there wasn’t any action of the “*international Jewry*” and that there was no coordination whatsoever between the “*Jewish circles*” of Moscow, Paris, London and New York.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Shortly before midnight Stalin and Molotov left their guests to force upon the Estonian delegates a mutual assistance treaty, providing for the admission of “Red Army” units to Estonia, amounting to 25,000 soldiers, which was far more than the Estonian armed forces, consisting of 16,000 people in all. The pact was directed against any great power, which meant that Estonia could be involved in a war against Germany as well. Moreover, the Estonian foreign minister Selter had to sign also a trade agreement for the gradual integration of his country within the Soviet economy.[[89]](#footnote-89)

On September 29, at 5 AM, after another round of talks and bargaining, the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars and People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs Molotov and the Foreign Minister of the German Reich von Ribbentrop signed a *Treaty for Friendship and for the Border*, whose first article delineated the border between the two totalitarian powers in Poland. The two governments gave each other a complete freedom for the administrative restructuration of the respective Polish territories, which was defined as a reliable foundation for the further development of the friendly relationship between the two peoples. A confidential protocol committed Russia to create no obstacles to the resettlement of citizens of the Third Reich and of ethnic Germans from the territories under Soviet administration to the territories in possession of Germany. Under another secret protocol Lithuania which, according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, had belonged until then to the German “sphere of interests”, was given over to the Russian “sphere of interests”. A third secret protocol engaged the two powers to annihilate all sources of Polish agitation. Last but not least, an official declaration proclaimed that the collapse of the Polish state had removed all reasons for the war and that the German Reich and the Soviet Union would consult each other about the measures to be taken in case England and France decided to continue the conflict.[[90]](#footnote-90)

By the end of September the Polish campaign had cost the Germans 10,572 dead, 30,322 injured and 3,400 missing, whereas the Russians had much less casualties. The Soviet command began to work out concrete plans for a war on Finland. For their part, Nazi journals proclaimed that Russia, Germany and Italy would coordinate their action in Southeastern Europe and would not allow the interference of “*any alien power*” in the region, and not only that: “*Eighty million Germans and one hundred and eighty million Russians! Their union represents a bloc, possessing the greatest military and industrial power in the world and an empire, stretching in Europe and Asia over a huge territory, greater than never before.*”[[91]](#footnote-91)

For the time being, though, the Soviets concentrated their efforts on Lithuania. The day of the signature of the Russian-German Treaty for Friendship and for the Border Molotov summoned the Lithuanian foreign minister Juozas Urbšys to the Kremlin with the attractive proposal to discuss about the return of Vilnius and the Vilnius region to Lithuania.[[92]](#footnote-92)

This was no doubt at the expense of Poland, whose president in Romanian captivity Ignacy Moscicki had hardly any choice, but to sign a decree for transferring his powers to Wladislaw Raczkiewicz. Raczkiewicz had found refuge in France and seemed to be a more convenient figure in the eyes of the French and the British, because he had been less connected with the “Sanation” regime. He immediately proclaimed the dissolution of the Polish parliament and appointed a provisional national council with consultative functions. A government in exile was formed under the premiership of General Wladislaw Sikorski, who was a renowned opponent of the undemocratic prewar system but who was careful enough to preserve some continuity, by choosing for foreign minister August Zaleski, even though Zaleski had headed the Foreign Ministry for a while under Pilsudski. The problem was that influential British circles of the British government were ready to satisfy a lot of Stalin’s claims on Poland.[[93]](#footnote-93)

The Soviet press commented quite vehemently the Polish government in exile, but Stalin was apparently more interested in the Balkan developments. On October 1, at 6 PM, he finally received together with Molotov the Turkish foreign minister Saraçoglu. In those times Stalin did not hold any official state position, but Saraçoglu knew too well who was the real master and explicitly expressed his pleasure that Stalin also attended the talks. As it might be expected, this prevented by no means Stalin and Molotov from trying to dissuade the Turks from concluding an alliance with Britain and France. After quite long talks the Russian dictator apparently didn’t reject altogether the idea of a Russian-Turkish mutual assistance pact, provided that the forthcoming mutual assistance pact of Turkey with Britain and France would be directed by no means against Russia. Saraçoglu readily agreed with these terms.[[94]](#footnote-94)

The Soviet action for neutralizing Turkey was coordinated with the Nazis, who put at the same time under pressure Bucharest for having allowed the Polish president Moscicky to transfer his powers to Raczkiewicz. Moscicki did not feel, therefore secure in Romania and he asked the Swiss government for asylum, the more so as he had become citizen of Switzerland back in 1908. Bern saw no alternative but to admit him into the Confederation, provided that he did not engage in political activity.[[95]](#footnote-95)

On October 2 the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop instructed the ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg to suggest to the Russians to prevent Turkey from concluding any pact at all with Britain and France. Von Ribbentrop thought that this could be achieved by a treaty between Russia and Turkey. However, the Russian war minster Kliment Voroshilov and the foreign trade minister Anastas Mikoyan tried to lay down to Saraçoglu such terms that would have threatened the very existence of Turkey as a sovereign country. Both Voroshilov and Mikoyan were members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), which under the Soviet system was above the state, and they obviously acted at Stalin’s instruction. The two Soviet dignitaries declared that if Turkey wanted to conclude a mutual assistance pact with Russia, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles had to be closed for alien military vessels. Moreover, units of the “Red Army” had to be allowed to establish bases in the zone of the Straits. The Turkish foreign minister saw no other choice but to reject these demands.[[96]](#footnote-96)

This didn’t prevent the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs from exacting a reply from the Bulgaria minister to Moscow Antonov a reply about the proposal of a mutual assistance pact. Antonov succeeded in avoiding a concrete declaration on the ground that he had to go to Sofia for consultation, whereas the Latvian foreign minister Vilhelms Munters didn’t have such an opportunity. He was simply told by Stalin and Molotov that Latvia had to admit 50,000 “Red Army” soldiers on her territory, which was far more than the Latvian armed forces. The Russian dictator made it clear that Hitler had handed over Latvia to the Soviet “sphere of interests” and that Latvia might disappear like Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The amazing thing was that Stalin hinted at the possibility of a clash between Russia and Germany. On the other hand, the Romanian diplomatic representative to Riga Grigore Niculescu-Buzesti reported to his government that the visit of Munters to Moscow was accompanied by a significant intensification of the Communist propaganda in Latvia.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Munters hurried back to Riga, while Polish units under the command of General Franciszek Kleeberg were delivering the last battle against the Germans at Klock, which was at 130 kilometers to the southeast of Warsaw and at approximately 60 kilometers to the west of the new Soviet-Nazi border. Munters tried in vain to get some support from the German minister to Riga Ulrich von Kotze and eventually returned to Moscow, happy enough that he could at least reduce the Russian army presence to 25,000 men, which was also far more than the Latvian armed forces. Quite significantly, the Latvian government proclaimed at the same moment that it could not tolerate anymore the presence of a Polish legation in Riga, although practically all the European governments, including the Italian one, had preserved their diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Mussolini was fully aware that Germany would not support his idea of a neutral bloc under Italian leadership. Nevertheless, he decided to keep his neutral position further and, similarly to Stalin, he hoped that the European powers would exhaust each other in the war. His expectation were apparently reaffirmed by the fact that approximately at the same time the British completed the transfer of their Second Expeditionary Corps in France.[[99]](#footnote-99)

In the eyes of the Spanish dictator Franco, though, the war was above all a Soviet intrusion upon Europe and he saw peace in the West as the only means of stopping Russia. In a similar way the Portuguese dictator and prime minister Antonio de Oliveira Salazar openly declared his sympathies with the “*heroic self-sacrifice of Poland*”, his loyalty to the alliance with Britain and his concern that the Latin and Christian civilization of Europe was at stake.[[100]](#footnote-100)

The fears of Franco and Salazar were confirmed by Stalin’s intention to occupy also Catholic Lithuania together with the tiny region of Mariampole, although the Russian dictator had promised this strategic territory to Hitler. At 10 PM the Lithuanian foreign minister Urbšys landed at Moscow and was taken directly from the airport to the Kremlin, where Stalin and Molotov told him that Lithuania could regain Vilnius and the surrounding area only in exchange for a mutual assistance pact. Molotov explicitly stated that “*every imperialistic power could take possession of Lithuania*”. When Urbšys heard that this implied the introduction of 50,000 “Red Army” troops, he exclaimed that this was “*an occupation of Lithuania*”. In response Stalin “generously” agreed to reduce the Soviet military presence to 35,000 men but this was also far more than the Lithuanian army. At 8 AM on October 4 Urbšys left back for Kaunas to consult his government.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Stalin had revealed to him too that Hitler had handed over Lithuania to the Soviet “sphere of interests” and in the night of October 4 to October 5 the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop decided to inform discreetly the Lithuanians, the Latvians and the Estonians about the deal. On October 5 it was the turn of Latvia to sign a mutual assistance pact with Communist Russia. Under the terms of the pact Latvia had to admit 30,000 “red Army” soldiers on her territory, whereas the Latvian armed forces amounted to only 20,000 men.[[102]](#footnote-102)

The same day the Russians invited the Finns to send a delegation to Moscow to discuss “*concrete political problems*”, while Russian army units were joining the Germans in order to smash the last Polish forces that still opposed resistance under General Kleeberg. That was the end of the Polish campaign and the beginning of the guerrilla war of the Poles against Nazi and Soviet occupation. For the time being, though, the only thing Kleeberg could do was to order his soldiers to retreat in small groups toward the Hungarian border.[[103]](#footnote-103)

At 2 PM Hitler could proclaim the end of the Polish state, but in his speech he failed to mention anything about Estonia. Latvia, and Lithuania. He explicitly stressed, though, that there were no obstacles to “*the close cooperation*” between Germany and Russia. In his words the “*difference of the regimes*” could not prevent them from a joint struggle for peace. The Fuehrer promised to respect the neutrality of Belgium and the Netherlands. He announced also a vast program for resettling the ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe to Germany, which clearly indicated that he had abandoned his plans for the Germanization of Eastern Europe and the European part of Russia. On the other hand, the National Socialist leader pleaded for peace and understanding with Britain and even pointed out that he had given up to mention the problem of Alsace and Lorraine with France. Hitler went so far as to propose an international conference for an arrangement of the “*Jewish question*”, for the cession of colonies to Germany and for the renewal of international trade, but less than an hour after his speech he told his generals that the operation for the conquest of Belgium and the Netherlands before the assault on France could not be postponed any more.[[104]](#footnote-104)

The French premier Edouard Daladier reacted to Hitler’s “peace proposal” by declaring that France would not lay down her arms before getting guarantees for real peace and general security, whereas the German military tried in vain to persuade Hitler that the Reich was not prepared for an immediate offensive to the west. On October 7 the Fuehrer issued a decree for the deportation of the Poles and the Jews from the Polish territories, annexed directly to Germany, to the General Government of Warsaw and for their replacement with ethnic Germans.[[105]](#footnote-105)

The same evening a Lithuanian delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Urbšys arrived again in Moscow for a new round of psychological torture under the form of midnight “negotiations”. The next morning the Russian newspapers were full of reports about “spontaneous” demonstrations in Vilnius for the inclusion of the city in the so-called “Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic”, which was a mere province of Communist Russia. Moreover the Nazi and Soviet occupation authorities in Poland continued with the extermination of the Polish national elite. Silesia, Poznan and the Baltic outlet were annexed directly to Germany and within a short time the Nazis liquidated about 60,000 Polish professors, lawyers, priests, landowners, and peasant and workers’ leaders. For their part, the services under the command of Beria worked on preliminary “black lists” of people who were to be exterminated immediately. “Enemies of the people” were not only the landowners and the middle class, but also the professors, the priests, the lawyers and the leaders of political parties and nongovernment organizations.[[106]](#footnote-106)

On October 8 the Lithuanian deputy premier Kazys Bizauskas and the commander-in-chief Stasys Raštikis hurried to Moscow to reinforce the delegation there, while the Finns were expecting that the Russians would demand four islands in the Gulf of Finland and a base in some Finnish port. The government in Helsinki was ready to yield to these demands, but “*without crossing the border line*”. Finnish troops were concentrated on the Soviet frontier to meet any eventuality. For his part, the Finnish minister to Berlin Aarne Vuorimaa asked the State Secretary of the German Foreign Ministry Ernst von Weizsaecker whether the Reich would remain indifferent to the Soviet advance in the Baltic region, but von Weizsaecker replied coldly that Germany was in no position to interfere in the forthcoming Finnish-Russian talks.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Two days later, after a generous dinner, offered by Stalin to the Lithuanian delegates despite their reticence and fatigue, Foreign Minister Urbšys had to sign a mutual assistance treaty that gave Vilnius and the Vilnius region to Lithuania, but engaged the Lithuanians in a possible war against any European power. The USSR was given the right to install land and naval forces in determined areas of Lithuania’s territory. Moreover, Russia had the right to inundate Lithuania with an unlimited number of “Red Army” troops in case of “*threat of attack through Lithuania’s territory*”. According to a bitter joke on the occasion, Vilnius became in this way Lithuanian, but Lithuania as a whole became Russian. Similarly to Estonia and Latvia, the Lithuanian authorities could control by no means the exact number of Soviet troops on their territory. The “Red Army” units showed no intention of leaving Vilnius after the “unification” and the Lithuanian government preferred remaining further in Kaunas.[[108]](#footnote-108)

On October 11 the Russian war minister Voroshilov issued an order for the concentration of as many as seven Russian armies on the boundary with Germany, Romania and Hungary. On the other hand, though, the Russian made it even easier for the Germans to create and use a naval base on the Arctic Ocean near Murmansk. This was accompanied by a new series of extermination actions in Poland. By a special order Beria included in the extermination lists also the state employees, the nongovernment and religious activists, as well as the members of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Polish cultural and sports societies. This resulted in the deportation of as many as 1.5 million people in the Siberian death camps, whereas the Nazi occupation authorities managed to deport “only” 426,820 human beings. Only the Ukrainians who were liquidated or thrown to concentration camps, amounted to 3.5 million human beings. Significantly enough, the same order of Beria provided for the eradication of “*all anti-Soviet and antisocial elements*” in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, although these three countries were still considered sovereign states.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Now it was the turn of Finland. On October 12 a Finnish delegation under the veteran statesman and diplomat Juho Paasikivi arrived in Moscow. The Fins were immediately taken to the Kremlin, where Stalin personally demanded a naval base at Hanko at the entrance of the Gulf of Finland, as well as the cession of the city of Hanko itself together with five islands in the same gulf. Moreover, the Russian dictator claimed the cession of Finland’s outlet to the Barents Sea on the Arctic Ocean and another 3,000 square kilometers of the Karelian Isthmus. Last, but by no means least, the Finns had to dismantle all their defense systems against Russia and to reject all treaties with possible enemies of the Soviet Union. The Finns didn’t know that Stalin had already told the Comintern apparatchik of Finnish descent Otto Kuusinen that he wanted to see Finland moving along the Baltic scenario, but this didn’t prevent Paasikivi and his fellow countrymen from remaining immune to Stalin’s blackmail. They were probably encouraged by the cautious hope, expressed by Denmark, Norway and Sweden through their diplomatic envoys to Moscow, that the Russian-Finnish talks would lead to nothing that could prevent Finland from enjoying “*her neutral position in peace and freedom*”. According to some diplomatic reports this humble Scandinavian initiative was coordinated with the US government.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Significantly enough, at that same moment the Bulgarian minister to Berlin Pûrvan Draganov informed von Weizsaecker that Sofia had rejected a Soviet proposal for a mutual assistance pact, while Chamberlain was announcing to the House of Commons that Hitler’s peace initiative deserved no confidence. Shortly before his speech in parliament Chamberlain had made it clear to the Polish foreign minister Zaleski that Britain expected from the Poles to fight against Germany, but Zaleski was unable to change the British attitude toward Stalin. For his part, Mussolini suddenly decided that Chamberlain’s firmness with regard to Hitler gave Italy the opportunity to strike a blow to Yugoslavia.[[111]](#footnote-111)

On October 13 King Boris III of Bulgaria repeated to his brother Prince Kiril and to his close advisers that he had decided to reject the Russian proposal and to replace the minister to Moscow Antonov with someone else because, according to the King, Antonov had become an excessive Russophile. However, the Bulgarian monarch couldn’t even guess that at precisely the same moment the Russian military presented to Stalin an updated version of the plan for war on Germany. According to this new version the Soviet Union had to wait for the complete exhaustion of Britain, France and Germany and then the “Red Army” would be able to launch an assault for the conquest of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Constantinople with the Straits and at least the eastern part of Germany.[[112]](#footnote-112)

The Finns couldn’t have any knowledge about this plan either, but on October 16 a Finnish daily rightfully pointed out that by the mutual assistance treaties with the USSR Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had lost their independence. However, the First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill saw in the occupation of the three Baltic countries by the “Red Army” advantages for Britain. He declared to Prime Minister Chamberlain and the other colleagues in the Cabinet that the United Kingdom had an interest in the increase of Soviet power in the Baltic region since this would limit, in his view, the risk of German hegemony in the same area.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Churchill made this statement at the time of two smashing German air raids on the British navy in Scapa Flow, whose situation off the northern shores of Britain apparently didn’t secure a reliable protection. Moreover, despite his preparations for an assault on the Third Reich, Stalin obligingly enabled the Germans to enlarge and equip further their naval base to the northeast of Murmansk. A German U-boat was even able to depart from another Russian port and to sink the “Courageous” aircraft carrier, but Churchill’s only reaction to the German raids was to express again his discontent with Eire’s neutrality.[[114]](#footnote-114)

For his part, Hitler told his frightened generals that the English would be ready for negotiations only in case of defeat and that Germany had to invade Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg and then attack France and Britain by mid-November. The chief-of-staff of the land forces Franz Halder and State Secretary von Weizsaecker even thought to stage a coup d’état against Hitler but in fact they were helpless.[[115]](#footnote-115)

On the other hand, though, the German dictator began to realize that the Soviet occupation in the Baltic countries could be directed only against the Reich. On October 18 he told his most faithful general Wilhelm Keitel that the Polish territory was important for a strategic concentration of German troops. He even proposed the installment of military defenses on the new border line with Russia. To that effect Hitler accepted entirely Stalin’s view against any form of restoration of the Polish state and planned to assign to the Poles the role of “*cheap slaves*”.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Despite his doubts about Stalin Hitler didn’t have the slightest intention to support the Finns in their negotiations with the Russians. The problem was that Sweden, Norway and Denmark couldn’t offer the Finns any assistance either. The Swedish prime minister Per Albin Hansson refrained from any reassurances in this regard. Hardly more efficient was the “friendly” intervention of US President Franklin Roosevelt, whose representative asked about the talks between Finland and Russia and was told that these talks were conducted in conformity with the sovereignty of Finland. These Soviet declarations didn’t sound very convincing, since the same day it was the turn of the Latvians and the Lithuanians to conclude binding commercial treaties with Russia. The aim was to consolidate economically the Soviet occupation. Thus, in the near future, Russia had to take 15 per cent of the entire foreign trade of Lithuania, although until that moment Britain had been the main trading partner of the three Baltic countries.[[117]](#footnote-117)

On the other hand, the Turkish foreign minister Saraçoglu, whose long visit to Moscow turned out to be a complete failure, returned to Ankara with the feeling that Russia had changed her Balkan strategy and that the most threatened country in the region was Romania. He assured the Romanian ambassador to Ankara Vasile Stoica that the existence of Romania was of capital importance for Turkey and he declared to the Russian ambassador Aleksej Terentiev that his government would respect the guarantees, given by Britain and France to Romania.[[118]](#footnote-118)

On October 19 Turkey concluded a mutual assistance pact with Britain and France for 15 years. However, the British and the French had to give their assistance to the Turks only in case of war in the Mediterranean, caused by the aggression of some European power. It was only in such a situation that Turkey had to provide help for Greece and Romania, whereas in case of some conflict out of the Mediterranean the three powers were ready only to consult each other. Moreover, in a special additional protocol Turkey explicitly declared her refusal to take part in any military operations against Communist Russia.[[119]](#footnote-119)

In this way Turkey intended to remain neutral in case of a conflict between the two leading Western European democracies, but London seemed to be more preoccupied by the neutrality of Eire. Asked by the British representative John Maffey for granting the United Kingdom a permission to use Irish ports for a better protection of the Royal Navy from German U-boats, Prime Minister de Valera pointed out that Dublin would agree to such a cooperation only in exchange for the unification of Ulster with Eire. For the time being, though, de Valera went on, Ireland would observe strict neutrality, despite his personal sympathies with the British and the French in their war against Germany.[[120]](#footnote-120)

The British-French-Turkish alliance created hardly any serious problems to Stalin, who intensified his pressure on Finland. In the night of October 21 to October 22 an enlarged Finnish delegation left for Moscow for a new round of painful talks with the Russians. The delegation included also Finance Minister Väinö Tanner, who was a Social Democrat. According to the Romanian diplomatic representative to Helsinki George Lecca in this way the Finns wanted that all political parties be represented in the delegation.[[121]](#footnote-121)

The following day, as if to demonstrate what fate awaited Finland as well, the Soviet occupation authorities staged a vote in the Russian part of Poland for a “People’s Assembly of Western Ukraine”. There was a single list candidates, carefully selected by the authorities often among the least literate individuals. Those who refused to take part in the voting, were declared deserters and even ill people were taken from their beds to the polling stations. Any attempt at secret voting was punishable as a “counterrevolutionary activity”, which meant death. Nevertheless, there was a quite strong resistance, since the regime couldn’t claim more than 91 per cent of ballots in favor of its candidates.[[122]](#footnote-122)

This was accompanied by new friendly gestures of Stalin toward Hitler. On October 23 the German battle ship “Deutschland” dragged into a Soviet port the SS “City of Flint”, which was the first American freighter, captured by the Nazis. The United States was still a neutral power and the capturing of American citizens was a scandal in itself. The US government even thought for a moment of severing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, but the Russians hurried to explain to the Germans that they could not stay any longer in one of their ports with American prisoners.[[123]](#footnote-123)

The impossible choice between Hitler and Stalin made the countries of Central and Eastern Europe demonstrate their preference for Hitler as a lesser evil. Boris III of Bulgaria included in the government the representative of a militantly anti-Semite and pro-Nazi organization. On October 24 the King dissolved the parliament ahead of schedule in order to secure for himself an even more obedient National Assembly and more freedom of action in the field of foreign policy. The elections were to be held during a whole month constituency by constituency, which made government pressure on the voters much easier.[[124]](#footnote-124)

In fact the very existence of the small European countries was at stake, as proven by the dreadful fate of Poland. On October 26 the “People’s Assemblies” of “Western Ukraine” and “Western Byelorussia” appealed for admission into the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics”, which was the official name of Communist Russia. Berlin was deeply concerned about the ethnic Germans in the Russian part of Poland and a delegation of 400 people was dispatched to Moscow to negotiate their exchange with Ukrainians and Jews from the Nazi occupation zone of Poland. This didn’t prevent British Foreign Secretary Halifax from reiterating in the House of Commons that the guarantees, given by the United Kingdom to Poland before the war, were valid only for a Nazi, but not for a Soviet aggression.[[125]](#footnote-125)

For his part, Hitler made it ever clearer that he had abandoned the Baltic countries to Stalin. This was indicated, among other things, by the agreements that Germany concluded with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for the repatriation of the ethnic Germans from the Baltic countries to the Third Reich. Under these agreements some 70,000 people resettled to Germany, which put an end to the German ethnic presence in the Baltic region.[[126]](#footnote-126)

Stalin could be hardly more encouraged in his further aggression. On October 29 the Russian war minister and Politburo member Voroshilov was acquainted with a plan for the “*annihilation of the land and naval forces of the Finnish army*”. According to the plan the “Red Army” had to invade Finland from everywhere and to defeat the Finnish armed forces with the help of the aviation. To that effect the region of Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) was reinforced with fresh formations.[[127]](#footnote-127)

Two days later the Supreme Soviet, which was a sort of rubberstamp “parliament” of Communist Russia, approved unanimously and solemnly the admission of “Western Ukraine” and “Western Byelorussia” to the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics”. In a speech on that occasion Stalin’s second man, Molotov, announced that a restoration of the previous Polish state was out of the question. He vehemently blamed Britain and France for their “aggression” against Germany and claimed at the same time that Russia was neutral and that “*the entrance of our troops in ex-Poland was by no means in contradiction*” with that “neutrality”. In the same vein he boasted that the Soviet Union had gained a territory, “*equal to the territory of a large European state*” and he threatened directly Finland by stating that the Soviet Union had provided Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with a “*reliable defense*” and that the Finns were outnumbered even by the inhabitants of Leningrad (Saint Petersburg). As it might be expected Molotov put entirely on his Turkish colleague Saraçoglu the blame for the failure of the negotiations and accused Turkey, although in somewhat softer terms, of having abandoned her policy of careful neutrality by her treaties with Britain and France.[[128]](#footnote-128)

In the night of October 31 to November 1, while still in the train from Helsinki to Moscow, the Finnish delegation learned about Molotov’s speech, and stopped in the middle of the journey to ask for new instructions. After a midnight session the Council of Ministers ordered the delegates to continue for Moscow, because the Finnish government had the impression that Molotov had given up the idea of a mutual assistance pact. The Finns were even ready to grant to the Russians a naval base, although this would threaten the country’s sovereignty and would mean the abandonment of neutrality.[[129]](#footnote-129)

Molotov’s pronouncements were immediately repeated by the press of the Comintern network. Thus a newspaper of the “Bulgarian Communist Party” promptly described Britain and France as “aggressors” and appealed for the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, while a Russian trade delegation in Berlin was pressing the Germans to deliver an enormous quantity of arms and ammunitions. Goering, Keitel and the commander-in-chief of the German navy Admiral Erich Raeder even protested to the Foreign Ministry of the Reich that it was impossible to fulfill these excessive demands, but Hitler needed Russian food and raw materials as much as Stalin needed German weapons and technology. So the Fuehrer saw no alternative but to satisfy the demands of the “Leader of the World Proletariat” and the only thing Hitler could do was to instruct his subordinates to show the Russians everything except the newest models and the secret production.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Among the reactions of Britain and France to the Soviet-Nazi pressure was to seek for a closer military cooperation with the countries that were threatened by a Nazi aggression. At 11 AM on November 1 a group of French officers asked for a meeting with their Swiss colleagues at the state border. The French declared that they were instructed to give immediate assistance to the Swiss in case of a German attack, but only on condition that a Swiss officer explicitly invite them to do so. Under the constant German protests against the freedom of the media in Switzerland and against the would-be tolerance of Bern toward the activities of the Polish emigration, the Swiss foreign minister Giuseppe Motta thought it wise for his part to look for military cooperation with all the neighbors of the Confederation against any aggression. However, the commander-in-chief of the Swiss armed forces General Guisan had already established a close link with the French military to the point that a phone call would be enough for joint actions against a German attack.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Unlike Switzerland Finland was threatened not by a Nazi, but by a Soviet aggression. Nevertheless, the government in Helsinki hoped to avoid the admission of Russian naval bases on Finnish territory by offering to the Russians some islands in the Gulf of Finland. However, the Turkish ambassador to Moscow Ali Haydar Aktay declared to the Hungarian minister Joszef Kristofi that the Soviets were ready to wage a war on Finland even in the forthcoming winter and that after solving “*the Finnish problem*” the Russians were going to concentrate their “*dynamism*” on Romania for Bessarabia.[[132]](#footnote-132)

On November 3 Molotov directly told the Finnish delegates that there was no progress in the negotiations and that under these circumstances the floor had to be given to the soldiers. At the same moment the Bulgarian premier Kjoseivanov, whom King Boris III intended to replace with some less ambitious person, had enough courage to reject the Russian proposal of a mutual assistance pact on the grounds that such a treaty might “*accelerate the war in the Balkans and, above all, provoke an assault of Turkey and England on Bulgaria*”.[[133]](#footnote-133)

Meanwhile the Germans arrived with the American ship “City of Flint” and her captured crew in a Norwegian port, where the German crew was immediately interned, whereas the captured American sailors were set free. It was only at this moment that the US Senate and the House of Representatives decided to lift the embargo on the exportation of weapons and ammunitions, provided that the interested party was able to pay for them in cash. It was rightfully thought that Germany lacked the needed hard currency and the Cash and Carry Act would be profitable almost exclusively to Britain and France.[[134]](#footnote-134)

On November the German ambassador to Brussels Vicco Karl Alexander von Buelow-Schwante, who was involved in the plot against Hitler, warned King Leopold III of Belgium that the situation was extremely serious, whereas another conspirator, Colonel Hans Oster informed the military attaches of Belgium and the Netherlands to Berlin that the Third Reich was going to attack the Low Countries on November 12. The following day, i.e. on November 6, Leopold III visited Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and the two monarchs offered publicly their good offices for peace negotiations.[[135]](#footnote-135)

For his part, the Romanian ambassador to Ankara Vasile Stoica made an official proposal for a Balkan neutral bloc, but Bulgaria met the idea with reservations, whereas Germany and Russia were more or less hostile. On the other hand, the Soviet-Nazi alliance increased the gap between the Social Democrats and the Communists in the Scandinavian countries as well. In Stockholm the Social Democrats organized an anti-Communist protest rally and the Danish premier Thorvald Stauning, who was also a Social Democrat, published an anti-Communist article, although in a less conspicuous parochial newspaper.[[136]](#footnote-136)

That was the moment when Stalin publicly shared his feeling that the difference between Communism and National Socialism was not as deep as it appeared at first sight. On November 7, in a speech dedicated to the anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik coup d’état, the Russian dictator proclaimed that, “*unlike the bourgeois leaders of the Chamberlain type*”, the German “*petit bourgeois nationalists*” were flexible and had no connection “*with the capitalist traditions*”. He did not exclude “*a Nazi evolution from their present-day behavior*”.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Indeed Hitler was flexible enough to postpone the assault on Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg. The German leader was confused by the sudden peace appeal of Leopold III of Belgium and Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, which deprived the Reich of an excuse for the attack. Moreover, the German ambassador Buelow-Schwante reported from Brussels that Leopold III had revealed to Wilhelmina that he had exact information about the concentration of German troops on the Belgian border and that the assault was planned to begin in two or three days. So the attack couldn’t be any more a surprise and Hitler didn’t seem to have much choice. As a matter of fact this was only the first of a series of postponements that were going to disorient quite efficiently the intelligence services of the Western European democracies.[[138]](#footnote-138)

On the other hand, the Nazi repression services staged an attempt upon Hitler’s life after his annual speech, dedicated to the anniversary of the 1923 Beer Hal Putsch in Munich. Seven veteran National Socialists died of a bomb explosion that occurred well after the Fuehrer’s departure. The German and Russian press hurried to blame the British for the attempt, but the Nazi comments did not fail to mention that the perpetrator planned to look for refuge in Switzerland, which made the Swiss fear that the attempt might serve as an excuse for a German invasion of the Confederation. The head of the German secret police Heinrich Himmler went so far as to order the kidnapping of two British spies from the Netherlands to Germany as would-be organizers of the crime.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Even Mussolini was somewhat less enthusiastic than the Russian press in congratulating Hitler for having escaped death. High ranking Italian officers like Marshall Pietro Badoglio frankly confessed to the Italian foreign minister Ciano, who was also a son-in-law of Mussolini, that in case of war they would prefer fighting against the Germans and not on their side. For the time being Italy refused to take part in Hitler’s economic blockade of Britain, while Ciano was constantly complaining to the Germans about rumors that there wouldn’t be any resettlement of the South Tyrolean Germans to Germany, as promised by Hitler, but that Italy would hand over South Tyrol to the Reich.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Such controversies didn’t seem to exist between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, on November 13, 1939, after long hesitations, the Finnish delegation in Moscow rejected the Russian demands and returned to Helsinki. The Russian war minister Kliment Voroshilov immediately responded by ordering the completion of the concentration of troops against Finland. Within a week the Soviet command had to be ready with a concrete plan for the assault. In face of the imminent aggression a Norwegian committee started to collect funds for the Finnish Red Cross. According to some diplomatic sources, the Finns were prepared to fight and got a certain amount of artillery pieces from Sweden, planes from Germany and even weapons from Hungary.[[141]](#footnote-141)

The fact was that Hungary, together with Bulgaria, was quite reluctant to accept the Romanian initiative for a neutral bloc, the more so as Germany and Russia didn’t hesitate to show their hostility to the idea. Moreover, the Romanian government rejected the British efforts to induce the Romanians to agree to some territorial rectifications in favor of Budapest and Sofia, whereas Hungary and Bulgaria openly declared that they would join a neutral bloc in Central and Southeastern Europe only after a satisfactory arrangement of the territorial issues. However, King Carol II of Romania persisted on the idea and that was the position of the new cabinet of ministers that he formed on November 23, by replacing Argetoianu with the former leader of the Liberal Party Gheorghe Tatarescu as Prime Minister.[[142]](#footnote-142)

For the time being, though, Stalin’s attention was concentrated not on Romania, but on Finland. In the afternoon of November 26 the Soviet interior ministry staged the shelling of a small “Red Army” unit at Mainila, close to the Finnish border. Four soldiers died and another eight were injured. Molotov immediately summoned the Finnish minister to Moscow A.S.Yrjö-Koskinen, accused the Finns of “provocation” and of concentrating their troops on the Russian border and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Finnish troops from the front fortifications of their defense line. In other words, the Finns had to abandon the first of their three defense systems, known as the Mannerheim Line.[[143]](#footnote-143)

Two days later Yrjö-Koskinen handed over to Molotov a written reply of his government, proposing a joint enquiry of the Mainila incident and a withdrawal of troops from both sides of the border. Molotov responded by a written declaration that denounced the nonaggression treaty between the two countries. That was followed by the recall of all Russian political and trade representatives from Finland, whereas Stalin decided to form a puppet government of “New Finland” under the Kuusinen with the aim of transforming this country into another “Soviet Socialist Republic”, i.e. into a mere province of Communist Russia. In the face of imminent Soviet aggression the Romanian foreign minister Gafencu announced to the German minister to Bucharest Wilhelm Fabricius that Romania withdrew the neutral bloc project.[[144]](#footnote-144)

At 8 AM on November 30 between 240,000 and 450,000 Russian soldiers assaulted Finland with 1,900 guns, 1,500 tanks and between 1,000 and 2,500 combat planes. For their defense the Finns could rely on only 140,000 soldiers, 400 pieces of artillery, 60 tanks and merely 270 planes. According to some authors the “Red Army” troops, invading Finland, were going to reach about one million people, whereas the Finns could mobilize a maximum of 640,000 soldiers, which amounted to 16 per cent of the entire population. Helsinki and other major cities were immediately exposed to devastating air raids. However, the Finns were much better equipped and trained for warfare in the Arctic region, where temperatures often fell under minus 40 degrees centigrade, while the Russian soldiers didn’t even know how to run skis. Moreover, for more than two decades the Finns had been preparing themselves for such an attack and by 1939 the Mannerheim Line was probably the world most efficient defense structure.[[145]](#footnote-145)

The Russian invasion of Finland was accompanied by a further consolidation of the Soviet-Nazi alliance. At Hitler’s explicit orders the German diplomatic representatives were instructed to support the aggression and to refrain from any kind of sympathies with the Finns. On the contrary, they had to criticize the Finns for the favorable attitude of their media toward Britain and for the refusal to conclude a nonaggression treaty with Germany, similar to that with Russia. The press and the radio of the Third Reich obligingly reproduced the Soviet viewpoint of the conflict. Moreover, the German and the Russian secret services reached a concrete agreement for the mutual exchange of undesirable elements. In this way Stalin could get rid of some 350 Communists of German descent, who were simply transferred from Soviet to Nazi concentration camps, whereas Hitler gave over a number of Russian émigrés, including supporters of Leon Trotsky, who had been Stalin’s chief rival in the struggle for the succession of Lenin.[[146]](#footnote-146)

On December 1 the Finns formed a national coalition government with the governor of the National Bank Risto Ryti as Premier and the Social Democrat Väinö Tanner as Foreign Minister. However, the Russian air raids forced the new cabinet of ministers and the Parliament to leave Helsinki for an unknown destination, whereas the diplomatic corps had to remain in the capital, losing any contact with the government. The same day, though, the first German warship „Sachsenwald” entered the new naval base that Stalin had secured to Hitler near Murmansk.[[147]](#footnote-147)

Hitler’s solidarity with Stalin only increased the mistrust of Mussolini toward the Third Reich and the British thought it possible to work for the detachment of Fascist Italy from National Socialist Germany. To the German representatives the Duce constantly stressed the “*anti-Bolshevik orientation*” of his policy, whereas Ciano instructed the chief of the Italian military intelligence General Carboni to agree with the minor demands of his German counterpart Admiral Wilhelm Canaris in order to be able to reject the serious claims. For his part, the Spanish dictator Franco distanced himself from the totalitarian model by renewing the subsidies for the Catholic Church with the hope of achieving some agreement with the Holy Seat. Much more important was the fact that he was preparing a decree, restoring fully the rights of the king-in-exile Alfonso XIII on the throne of Spain, since a monarchy was and still is completely incompatible with modern totalitarianism.[[148]](#footnote-148)

In neighboring Sweden the Russian assault on Finland led to a political crisis. The Swedish foreign minister Rickard Sandler gave his resignation after his colleagues in the cabinet rejected his recommendation to assistance for the Finns. Sandler’s resignation served as a pretext for reshuffling the government by adding to the Social Democrats and the Agrarians representatives of the Conservative and of the Liberal Party. Sandler was replaced with Christian Günther, who was not a politician, but a career diplomat. All political forces agreed that Sweden had to avoid both intervention in the Russian-Finnish war and a declaration of neutrality, which might not preclude assistance to Finland in the future.[[149]](#footnote-149)

Under these circumstances Stalin apparently felt quite confident and summoned the chairman of the “*New Finland’s*” government Kuusinen to sign “*A Mutual Assistance and Friendship Treaty*”. According to this treaty the Soviet Union “generously” gave Finland 420 million Finnish marks and ceded to Finland 70,000 square kilometers of Soviet Karelia, although in a traditionally Russian way the Finns of Karelia had been proclaimed and forced to be a different “Karelian” ethnicity. In exchange for that Finland had to hand over to Russia the Karelian Isthmus, islands in the Gulf of Finland and to lease Hanko to the Russians for a naval base. This treaty had no legal force whatsoever, but it was conceived just as a justification of the Soviet assault on Finland.[[150]](#footnote-150)

To the same effect the Soviet authorities started to recruit a Finnish “Red Army” among the Russian soldiers of Finnish descent. As a matter of fact, though, even some Finnish Communists fought in the ranks of the national army against the Soviet invaders. Moreover, the Finns succeeded in capturing two “Red Army” divisions, whose soldiers had merely gone mad because of the murderous frost. The lakes and swamps made it impossible for the assailants to go around a resisting force on the road and to move further. Thus small units were able to stop forces that largely outnumbered them. Last but not least, the morale of the Finns that was very high anyway, was enhanced even further by the sympathies of the world public opinion with their cause, as well as by the presence of 9,000 Swedish volunteers, as well as by the Swedes and the Norwegians, fighting for Finland in the air forces. The Hungarian government under Pal Teleki also sent a volunteer corps to Finland, whereas the United States proclaimed a moral embargo on Communist Russia. The Roosevelt administration banned the export of planes and strategic materials to the Soviet Union and granted a loan of 10 million dollars, but the President vetoed a motion for an unlimited loan.[[151]](#footnote-151)

On the other hand, the German command was concerned that the Russian aggression against Finland might lead to the landing of British forces on the Norwegian coast. On December 8 Admiral Raeder strongly recommended to Hitler the occupation of Norway, whereas the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, who was in charge of the Party’s foreign relations, revived his plan for a National Socialist Revolution with the help of a former Communist, named Vidkun Quisling. Like many other Communists Quisling became in the 1930s an ardent supporter of National Socialism, but his popularity in Norway was so low that he was incapable of winning over enough votes to secure a seat in parliament even for himself.[[152]](#footnote-152)

The Russian-Finnish war only deepened the cleavage between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. An outstanding Fascist like Italo Balbo gave his newspaper such an anti-Communist stand that Mussolini rightly considered it as directed also against the Third Reich. This didn’t prevent Ciano from promising the Finnish minister to Rome a delivery of more planes. The Italian press condemned vehemently the Soviet aggression and the newly appointed Russian ambassador Gorelkin declared that he could not present his credentials because he had been recalled back to Moscow.[[153]](#footnote-153)

On December 14 the League of Nations Assembly expelled the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from the organization as an aggressor. The measure was in response to the complaint of Finland and resulted from the initiative of France and Britain, but the representatives of a number of small European countries abstained from voting. That was the position of Belgium, Luxemburg, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and even the Netherlands, although the Dutch were among the few members of the League of Nations, who had voted back in 1934 against the admission of Communist Russia to the League. Switzerland also preferred abstention and the same attitude was adopted by Turkey, although the Turkish press accused Russia of aggression and openly sympathized with the Finns, considered to be of the same “*race*” as the Turks. However, even the Finnish delegate abstained from voting, whereas by their abstention the representatives of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia seemed to sign the death sentence of their own countries.[[154]](#footnote-154)

The expulsion of the Soviet Union from the League of Nations removed all formal obstacles for a direct military clash of Britain and France with the Russians. The two western European democracies even planned air raids on the Russian oil fields in Baku at the Caspian Sea. A British landing in Norway became more probable too. Prime Minister Chamberlain proclaimed in the House of Commons that the United Kingdom had to assist the Finns in their struggle against Russian aggression. As if in response, Hitler received Quisling, who boasted of being able to stage a “revolution” in Norway and to call in the German army. For the time being the Reich granted him 200,000 gold reichsmarks in support of his activities. Meanwhile Stalin promised the Arctic Russian port of Murmansk for the concentration of part of the German landing forces and the Fuehrer instructed the High Command to work out the concrete plans for the invasion of Norway, which included inevitably the occupation of Denmark too.[[155]](#footnote-155)

The Romanians saw in the British position an opportunity for renewing their endeavors to get an extension of the guarantee, provided to Romania by Britain and France on April 13, 1939, to a possible Russian assault as well. However, the British thought that such an extension would only increase further the solidarity between Berlin and Moscow. So the British minister to Bucharest Reginald Hoare declared to the Romanian foreign minister Gafencu that the United Kingdom was ready to extend its guarantees also with regard to Russia, only if Turkey would come immediately to the assistance of Romania and if there were no threat from Italy. In fact the Turks were by no means ready to fight against the Russians for the sake of Romania.[[156]](#footnote-156)

On December 16, 1939, the Russians made a supreme effort to break through the Mannerheim Line, but their troops got stuck in the snow. Thanks to the specific geographic conditions and to the horrible frost two Finnish divisions were able to stop the entire Ninth Army under the command of Vasily Chuikov. Nevertheless, Stalin was still confident that he could annihilate Finland and rejected all Finnish attempts at contacting him through Sweden. At the same time, as if to reaffirm Hitler’s concerns, the First Lord of the British Admiralty Churchill proposed the occupation of two Norwegian ports, namely Narvik and Bergen. The operation had to be justified by the need to assist the Finns, but its real aim was to stop the exports of iron ore from Sweden to Germany through Norwegian territorial waters.[[157]](#footnote-157)

The risk of a British military intervention in Scandinavia made Hitler even more willing to consolidate his alliance with Stalin. The German dictator turned his eyes on the Middle East countries that were either British colonies or under British hegemony, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal and Southern China. At the same time he decided to advise Romania to arrange her relations with Moscow and to avoid taking a definite position with regard to the Russian pressure on Sofia for a mutual assistance pact, although such a pact would easily lead to the submission of Bulgaria to Russia.[[158]](#footnote-158)

For his part, Stalin had no interest whatsoever in a direct clash with the British and the French, since such a conflict would ruin his entire strategy of keeping an attrition war between Germany and the two western European democracies until the best moment for Russia’s own intervention. His military attaché in Berlin Maksim Purkaev directly warned the commander-in-chief of Germany’s land forces Fr.Halder that the British and the French were preparing a landing in Norway.[[159]](#footnote-159)

By that time the Russians succeeded in taking over the Finnish port of Petsamo (today Pechenga in Russia) on the Barents Sea. However, the grim prospects of a further extension of the war to Scandinavia didn’t prevent the Hungarian military command from planning an armed action against Romania. On December 22 the Supreme Defense Council worked out a plan for intervention in Romania in one of the following cases: 1) if the Romanian army falls apart and a revolution breaks out in Romania; 2) if the Hungarian minority in Transylvania is threatened; 3) if by way of war or peacefully Romania cedes to Russia or to Bulgaria territories without satisfying the Hungarian demands. According to Prime Minister Teleki Romania had to cede to Hungary at least 50,000 square kilometers, inhabited in his opinion by 50 per cent Romanians and 50 per cent Hungarians.[[160]](#footnote-160)

Under the command of Semyon Timoshenko the Soviet troops against Finland numbered at that moment as many soldiers as the entire Finnish population. Moreover in various propaganda materials the Russian authorities openly exposed their claims not only on the Romanian province of Bessarabia, but also on Subcarpathian Ukraine that had been annexed to Hungary after the annihilation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Most observers believed that Romania would be the next victim of Soviet aggression after Finland, but Hungary could not be certain about her borders either.[[161]](#footnote-161)

On December 23, 1939, the French premier Daladier declared to the National Assembly that Finland should be given assistance in the war against Russia. For their part, the Turks were even ready to allow free passage of the French and British fleet to the Black Sea in case of a Russian assault on Bessarabia. Significantly enough, four days later the Russian diplomatic representative in Stockholm Alexandra Kollontai surprised the new Swedish foreign minister Christian Günther by suggesting that a “*logical base*” had to be found for peace negotiations between Finland and the Soviet Union.[[162]](#footnote-162)

For the time being, though, the battles went on at full scale and Italy’s moral and military support of Finland, however limited it was, led to a further deterioration of relations with Russia. In response to the departure of the Soviet ambassador Gorelkin Italy recalled her ambassador Augusto Rosso from Moscow. On January 3, 1940, Mussolini wrote a long letter to Hitler, warning him that even with the help of Italy Germany would never be able to put Britain and France on their knees and that the struggle against the West would be successful “*only after the annihilation of Bolshevism*”. The Italian dictator went so far as to propose the restoration of a mutilated Polish state as a price for the restoration of peace with the two leading western European democracies, but the idea was totally unacceptable both to Hitler and Stalin.[[163]](#footnote-163)

Ciano himself was worried about the fact that Hungary’s hostility toward Romania might encourage further Russian expansion in Europe. On January 6 he met the Hungarian foreign minister Istvan Csaky in Venice and warned him that Hungary could hope for the cession of some territories only in exchange for a guarantee that the Hungarians would not attack the Romanians in their back while fighting against the Russians. Csaky pointed out that Hungary would not content herself with minor territorial rectifications, but he promised that Hungary would not move against Romania, if Romania opposed strong resistance to a third party, meaning Bulgaria or Russia.[[164]](#footnote-164)

True enough, Bulgaria had never given up her claims on Southern Dobruja, but there was no intention whatsoever to regain that region by war. On January 13 the general secretary of the Turkish foreign ministry Numan Menemencioglu and the Bulgarian premier Kjoseivanov signed in Sofia a declaration of neutrality and friendship. Bulgaria and Turkey proclaimed that they would observe complete neutrality toward each other and the two countries agreed to withdraw their troops from the border zone between them.[[165]](#footnote-165)

At the same time Mussolini was angry at the blockade, imposed by the British and the French and he was ready to satisfy Hitler’s demand of stopping all exports of weapons and war materials to the two western European democracies. However, Ciano persuaded him that Italy was in bad need of hard currency and eventually the “Duce” agreed that the German protests had to be rejected. On the other hand, the Italian dictator feared that his neutrality would prevent him from taking part in the future distribution of the booty by a victorious Germany and he planned to enter the war on Hitler’s side in the second half of 1940 despite the poor state of Italy’s armed forces.[[166]](#footnote-166)

In this way Switzerland was threatened both by Germany and Italy, but there was no doubt that the German threat was far more real and serious. For more than two decades the Swiss foreign policy had been in the hands of Giuseppe Motta as head of the Political Department (Foreign Minister), but he died on January 23 after witnessing the failure of his whole strategy of loyalty to the League of Nations. The Political Department was taken over by Marcel Pilet-Golaz, who was much less enthusiastic about the prospects of a lasting peace and much more careful about his country’s absolute and “integral” neutrality.[[167]](#footnote-167)

Three days later the Swedish foreign minister Günther responded to the suggestion of the Russian minister Kollontai for a “logical base” of peace negotiations between Finland and Russia by asking whether such a base would not exclude the Soviet claim on Hanko. Günther pointed out that the “Red Army” had already occupied the territories the Soviet Union wanted to annex and warned that if the Russian troops got too close to the borders of Sweden and Norway, the two Scandinavian countries might accept the military assistance of Britain and France.[[168]](#footnote-168)

The very existence of the medium and small European countries was, therefore, at risk and the ambition of Boris III of Bulgaria to hold even tighter the reins of government and especially of the foreign policy was one of the main reasons for the undemocratic and manipulated parliamentary elections that ended on January 28, 1940. The result was that the government candidates won 141 seats in the National Assembly out of 160. True enough, the opposition could hardly offer a different view from that of the regime, the more so as Bulgaria had a remarkable economic growth and everybody approved and supported strict neutrality with regard to the conflict. The only exception were the Communists, who got ten seats (6.25 per cent) and who advocated complete submission to Stalin. Another 5 seats went to the pan-Yugoslav wing of the Agrarian Union, which was in favor of the engulfment of Bulgaria by Yugoslavia and quite susceptible to Russian influence. Thus only two deputies apparently shared really democratic views, whereas another two were nationalists rather than democrats and they were in fact the only stern opponents to Soviet aggression.[[169]](#footnote-169)

On the following day Kollontai sent through Sweden’s mediation a written note to the Finns, stating that Moscow did not exclude an agreement with the government in Helsinki, provided that Finland pointed out in advance the territorial concessions she was ready to grant to Russia. However, on January 31 the British ambassador to Rome Percy Loraine revealed to Ciano that the United Kingdom delivered more provisions to Finland but did not intend to send troops there. Loraine complained at the same time about the hostility of Mussolini toward Britain and stressed that such a position was an obstacle to a sincere and deep rapprochement.[[170]](#footnote-170)

Meanwhile the Belgians had forced a German plane, intruding in their air space, to land and found out in the captured German officer secret documents, revealing Hitler’s plans for the invasion of the Low Countries as an inevitable phase of the assault on France. The government under Hubert Pierlot ordered a new stage of mobilization of the army, while the Russians were launching another offensive for breaking through the Mannerheim Line between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga. By that time there were as many as 8 million people in Stalin’s concentration camps, where the average life expectancy of the inmates was less than a month.[[171]](#footnote-171)

On February 2 the Finnish premier Ryti and Foreign Minister Tanner, who were on a visit in Stockholm, informed the Russian minster Kollontai through the mediation of the Swedish foreign minister Günther that their firm decision was in favor of peace. Finland was even ready to go beyond the initial Russian territorial demands, but Ryti and Tanner made it clear that the Finns would also accept the Soviet offer of a territorial compensation to the north of Lake Ladoga.[[172]](#footnote-172)

Despite Loraine’s declarations to Ciano the British and the French command were in fact preparing the dispatch of an expeditionary corps to Scandinavia with the participation of some Polish units. The corps was to land at the Norwegian port of Narvik and to occupy from there the iron mines in Sweden. The British rejected the French idea of a landing at Petsamo (Pechenga), captured in the meantime by the “Red Army”. In other words, the aim of the operation was to put an end to the deliveries of iron ore from Sweden to Germany rather than to assist the Finns in their fight against Russian aggression. Moreover, this plan could be put into practice only with the consent of Norway and Sweden, but the two Scandinavian countries would hardly agree to get thus involved in the war. The Finns were perfectly aware of this fact and they continued their secret contacts with the Russians, rightfully realizing that the very existence of such contacts suggested that, at least for the time being, Stalin might have abandoned his ambition to annex Finland.[[173]](#footnote-173)

As if to compensate this forthcoming compromise with Finland, the Soviet occupation authorities submitted Poland to a new wave of terror. On February 9 they began another mass deportation of “unreliable elements”, most of whom died during the horrible journey to the extermination camps in Komi and Siberia. Until the summer of 1941 only about 381,000 Poles were going to survive out of approximately one million inmates. The same genocide was applied not only to the ethnic Poles, but also to the Polish Jews. There were about 1,300,000 Jews in the Russian occupation zone of Poland and within a couple of months about 400,000 of them perished in Stalin’s camps.[[174]](#footnote-174)

With regard to the Jews Stalin was even more murderous than Hitler, who had not yet come to the grim “final solution” for the extermination of the entire Jewish community, although the death rate in the Jewish ghettoes to be established soon in the Nazi part of Poland was going to be extremely high. On February 11 the close cooperation between Communist Russia and National Socialist Germany culminated in an economic treaty for the next 27 months. The agreement resulted from long and difficult negotiations, but it provided for an export from Russia to Germany, amounting to 640,000,000 reichsmarks. This included one million tons of grain, half million tons of wheat, 900,000 tons of petroleum, 100,000 tons of cotton, 500,000 tons of phosphates, 100,000 tons of chrome ore, 500,000 tons of iron ore, 300,000 tons of scrap and cast iron, 11,000 tons of copper, 3,000 tons of nickel, 950 tons of tin, and a number of other strategic items. In exchange for that Germany had to deliver to Russia the huge „Lützow” battle cruiser, the plans of the “Bismarck” battle ship, as well as big naval cannons, about 30 most modern battle planes, including “Messerschmitt” 109 and “Messerschmitt” 110 fighters and U-88 bombers. The treaty was, therefore, a fatal blow to the British blockade.[[175]](#footnote-175)

One of the consequences was that Moscow demanded new concessions from the Finns. In a note to Günther the Russian minister to Stockholm Kollontai stated that Finland had not only to provide the Soviet Union with a naval base at Hanko, but also to cede the entire Karelian Isthmus, as well as the region to the north of Lake Ladoga. Moreover Kollontai hinted in another message that before starting any negotiations with Russia the Finns had to form a new cabinet of ministers with the participation of the Soviet apparatchik of Finnish descent and head of the puppet “government” Otto Kuusinen. At the same moment Romania declined the Finnish request for arms and ammunitions on the ground that the Romanians needed these materials for their own defense.[[176]](#footnote-176)

On February 14 the “Red Army” finally succeeded in breaking through the second Mannerheim Line at Viipuri (Vyborg), which was then the fourth biggest city in Finland. The commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces Marshall Carl Gustav Mannerheim, after whom the famous defense line had been named, came to the conclusion that the cession of large territories to Stalin was inevitable, provided that Finland preserved her sovereignty.[[177]](#footnote-177)

Under these circumstances most medium and small European countries endeavored to please both Hitler and Stalin. On February 15 King Boris III of Bulgaria replaced Georgi Kjoseivanov with Bogdan Filov as Prime Minister. Filov was chairman of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and minister of education in the previous government. Unlike his predecessor Filov was much more obedient and he was ready to implement with equal enthusiasm a pro-Russian or a pro-German policy according to the King’s will. Significantly enough, the Interior Ministry was entrusted to Peter Gabrovski, who belonged to a pro-Nazi and extremely anti-Semite organization, whereas the Foreign Ministry was taken over by Ivan Popov, who didn’t even bother to conceal his anti-Nazi feelings and his sympathies with Britain and France.[[178]](#footnote-178)

For their part, the Norwegians did their best to prove a strict observance of the neutrality rules and protested strongly against a British attack on a German battle ship in the territorial waters of Norway. This dissuaded by no means Hitler from his plan for the conquest of Norway and Denmark. He appointed General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst commander of the operation. With Soviet permission three German ships were anchored in the Kola Gulf to surprise the British by additional naval forces from a direction, unknown to them.[[179]](#footnote-179)

On February 28 the Russians broke through the third Mannerheim Line and their road to Viipuri seemed to be clean. It was only at this moment that the US House of Representatives allowed the „Export and Import Bank” to grant a loan of not more than 20 million dollars to Finland, but the Finns could not use it for purchasing war materials. On the other hand, the Soviet victory made Hitler accelerate his preparations for the invasion of Scandinavia.[[180]](#footnote-180)

On March 1 the “Red Army” made its first attempt to capture Viipuri (Vyborg), but the Finns opposed an efficient resistance and were even able to destroy two Russian divisions. Britain officially demanded free passage for her troops through Sweden in assistance to Finland, but the Swedish foreign minister Günther rejected the request and urged the Finns to accept the Soviet peace terms. Somewhat later the Finns appealed for better terms again and asked Sweden for an alliance treaty with Finland. Günther turned down the possibility of such an alliance but he promised to mediate for less harsh peace terms with the Russians.[[181]](#footnote-181)

Stalin seemed to agree even with this. In any case the Soviet minister to Stockholm Kollontai declared to her Finnish colleague Eljas Erkko that there was no foundation of the rumors that the Kremlin intended to force the Finns to admit Stalin’s puppet premier Kuusinen in their government. Moreover, proceeded Kollontai, the Russian leadership was aware of Sweden’s attachment to the internal freedom of Finland.[[182]](#footnote-182)

On March 5 the Finnish government decided to accept the Russian peace terms, no matter of how harsh they were. It was only at this moment that Molotov had the kindness to inform the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg about the peace terms with Finland. However, Hitler also refrained from revealing to his Russian allies that he intended to strike at Denmark and Norway as soon as possible. The problem was that Germany could rely less and less on the alliance of Russia, although the Fuehrer didn’t seem to be fully aware of that.[[183]](#footnote-183)

Significantly enough, on the same day the people’s commissar of the interior Beria informed Stalin in a letter that in the Soviet concentration camps there were still 33,368 inmates from the Russian part of Poland. He proposed the extermination of 25,700 of them, mostly army officers. The proposal was approved by Stalin, Voroshilov, Molotov and Mikoyan with their personal signatures. As a matter of fact such a sinister result could be achieved by simply sending the victims to some Siberian death camp, which would have assured within a year the death of 20 per cent of the inmates that had survived the journey. On the other hand, though, the camp authorities needed five years for liquidating the required figure of human beings. Everything seems to indicate that by accelerating the extermination of 21,857 Poles Stalin intended to secure in advance the ethnic cleansing of the regions along the German border before moving against Hitler.[[184]](#footnote-184)

At this moment the German dictator had turned all his attention to Scandinavia. On March 6 he issued an order for attacking Norway and Denmark nine days later in response to the British and French demand for a free passage of their troops through Norway and Sweden. For their part the German command decided to hand over to the Russians the intelligence materials about the concentration of French and British forces in the Near East for an assault toward Iran and the Caucasus.[[185]](#footnote-185)

The British themselves hinted that an allied action in Scandinavia to the assistance of the Finns was imminent and Stalin finally decided to postpone the conquest of Finland for better times. A Finnish delegation was invited to Moscow, but on March 8 a central Soviet newspaper published an article by Kuusinen who appealed to the Finnish nation to admit that it had been put to death for the sake of Britain and France.[[186]](#footnote-186)

That same evening Hitler wrote a long letter to Mussolini in order to revive the axis with Fascist Italy and to justify the alliance with Stalin. The Fuehrer repeated that he intended by no means to restore a Polish state in any form whatsoever and stressed that Italy had no other choice but to side with Germany in the war against Britain and France. In Hitler’s words some evil-minded circles in England endeavored to eliminate the totalitarian regimes because they threatened the feudal-reactionary plutocracies.[[187]](#footnote-187)

On March 10 Hitler’s letter was carried to Rome by the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop who assured Mussolini that Germany was able to provide Italy with one million tons of coal monthly. He even claimed that Stalin had abandoned the idea of a world revolution. The Duce reacted by asking whether he, von Ribbentrop, really thought so but at the same time the Italian dictator proudly declared that Fascism had to side with Nazism on the combat line. However, he refused to give a specific date for Italy’s entrance in the war, whereas von Ribbentrop didn’t even hint at the planned assault on Norway and Denmark, which was in the meantime postponed, but by no means annulled. In order to please Hitler, Mussolini expressed his wish to improve relations with Moscow.[[188]](#footnote-188)

Late in the evening on March 12 the Finish delegation in Moscow, headed by the former premier Juho Paasikivi, had to sign a peace treaty whose text was not even discussed. On behalf of Russia the treaty was signed by Molotov and another two Soviet officials. According to the terms Russia annexed the Karelian Isthmus together with the city of Viipuri (Vyborg) and a number of islands in the Gulf of Finland. Stalin was given for a 30-years period the Hanko Peninsula and the city of the same name for a naval and air base. Finland was also deprived of her outlet on Lake Ladoga and to build an extraterritorial railway through the region of Petsamo (Pechenga) from Murmansk to Sweden. The Finns could maintain no military equipment whatsoever in that area, whereas the territories, ceded to Russia, contained 10 per cent of Finland’s textile, chemical and metallurgical industry, about 100 power stations and practically timber-producing and timber-processing facilities in Karelia. Moreover, Finland was forbidden to conclude with third parties agreements that the Soviet Union might consider hostile. Nevertheless, the Russians had abandoned the demand for a bilateral mutual assistance pact. Finland had to withdraw her troops to the new border line until March 26, but the “Red Army” units could remain in the region of Petsamo until April 10, 1940. Finland’s casualties amounted to 23,452 dead and missing and 43,501 injured, but as many as 450,000 people had to leave the territories, ceded to Russia, within 12 days.[[189]](#footnote-189)

The Russian had had much more casualties. These included from 54 to 72 thousand killed, and from 200 thousand to 540 thousand frozen to death, injured and missing. Under the terms of the peace treaty Finland had to hand over to the Soviets about 10,000 “Red Army” prisoners of war, who were deported to the Russian region of Arkhangelsk to the north of the Arctic Circle and shot to the last man. For Stalin the war with Finland was just a test for the readiness of the “Red Army” for the conquest of Europe. For their part, the military command of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were horrified by the fact that it had taken the Russians only three months to break through the Mannerheim Line. Their desperate conclusion was that any resistance to Soviet aggression was futile, the more so as the three Baltic countries were already under Russian occupation.[[190]](#footnote-190)

Hitler was to some extent relieved by the outcome, since Stalin had stopped his aggressive actions in the Baltic region. The German dictator got the wrong, if not suicidal impression that the “Red Army” was not very powerful and that its performance in Finland was weak rather than strong. On the other hand, though, Hitler was worried that he was losing all excuse for the invasion of Norway and Denmark, although Britain was also deprived of any political reason for an occupation of Norway.[[191]](#footnote-191)

**II.THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY ON THE VERGE OF ANNIHILATION**

There is none righteous,

no, not one:

There is none that

understandeth,

there is none that

seeketh after God.

(Rom. 3: 10-11)

On March 15 an official announcement was published simultaneously in Stockholm, Oslo and Helsinki that Sweden, Norway and Finland were prepared to start negotiations for the conclusion of a defensive alliance between the three countries. The mood in Sweden was somewhat less courageous. According to the Romanian diplomatic envoy in Stockholm Barbu Constantinescu the Swedes were worried by the big concessions the Finns had made to the Russians and considered that “*the Russian-Finnish peace treaty is a victory for Germany*”. Moreover, in the eyes of the Swedish public the annexation of Vyborg and the Hanko Peninsula by Russia deprived the Finns of any future military options.[[192]](#footnote-192)

The Finns felt the peace treaty with Russia as a national catastrophe, just like the Hungarians and the Bulgarians after World War I, although in 1916-1918 the Bulgarians had victoriously frustrated a Russian attempt to annex Bulgaria before conquering Constantinople and the Straits. Scandinavian solidarity was for the Finns a possible way out of international isolation, but on March 16 the Russian premier and foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov summoned the new Swedish minister to Moscow Assarsson to the Kremlin. Molotov declared that an alliance of Finland with Sweden and Norway could be directed only against the Soviet Union and that it would be incompatible with the neutrality policy of Norway and Sweden. Assarsson tried in vain to persuade Molotov that the only aim was to strengthen the relations of Finland with the rest of the Scandinavian countries and that the planned alliance had a purely defensive character. Eventually Sweden, Norway and Finland saw no other choice but to postpone the plans for an alliance between themselves.[[193]](#footnote-193)

On the other hand, despite the end of the Russian-Finnish war the British didn’t preclude a possible conflict with the Soviet Union. The British military attaché to Sofia Colonel Ross even worked out a plan for the defense of the Balkans in the case of a German attack from the northwest, of a Russian attack from the northeast and of a joint German-Russian attack from the north. According to Ross, the first option required the construction of a defense line on the Danube, South Yugoslavia and Albania, whereas a Russian or a joint Russian-German assault had to be met by a defense line in Eastern Thrace. The second option required the military cooperation of Bulgaria. Colonel Ross was aware of the poor state of Bulgaria’s relations with Romania, Greece and Yugoslavia, but he thought that a military cooperation between Bulgaria and Turkey might be possible.[[194]](#footnote-194)

As if in confirmation of the British fears the Hungarian Prime Minister Pal Teleki sent to the Hungarian minister to Washington Janos Pelenyi a detailed instruction about a government in exile to be formed in the United States, if the Germans occupied Hungary on their way to Romania. Teleki was in fact transmitting the ideas of Regent Miklos Horthy who was the real master of the country. A sum of 5 million dollars was to be transferred to Pelenyi in Washington, D.C., for the support of such a Hungarian government in exile.[[195]](#footnote-195)

Horthy apparently had enough reason to fear a German occupation, since at that very moment Hitler endeavored to consolidate his shaking alliance with Mussolini, which meant, among other things, Hungary could rely ever less on an Italian support against the German designs. In the snowy morning of March 18 Hitler and Mussolini met at the Brenner Pass, which was once at the border between Italy and Austria, but now was a checkpoint between Italy and Germany. The talks were centered on the imminent assault of Germany on France. Mussolini ardently declared that Fascist Italy had no other alternative but to side with National Socialist Germany. However, he added, Italy needed four to three months to be prepared militarily for the intervention. Hitler readily agreed but he didn’t even mention about his plans for an imminent attack on Denmark and Norway. Russia was apparently not even mentioned, but on the same day the German ambassador Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg reported from Moscow that the Soviet Union had a visible desire to improve relations with Italy.[[196]](#footnote-196)

At the same time Stalin accelerated further the mobilization of his own armed forces. On March 20 it was decided in Moscow to prepare within the next three years 208,400 commanders and 890,000 junior officers for the “Red Army”, but full mobilization had to be completed as early as in 1940-1941. By that moment the German “Wehrmacht” had mobilized 4,020,000 men and had 420,000 motor vehicles at its disposal.[[197]](#footnote-197)

This went parallel with an even closer Soviet-Nazi coordination of the genocide strategy in Poland. To that effect representatives of the Russian People’s Commissariat of the Interior (NKVD) and of the German Gestapo met at their first joint symposium in the medieval capital of Poland, Krakow. Special attention was paid to the Polish prisoners of war. The Germans were more pragmatic and ready to set free the peasants, whereas the Russians did not allow anyone to leave the POW camps. Lists were exchanged with people to be exterminated and in this regard Stalin’s services proved to be more efficient, since from April to May they were going to shoot 15,000 prisoners of war. Only 9,000 of them were active army officers, while the rest were mobilized teachers, legal experts, lawyers, physicians and priests.[[198]](#footnote-198)

The Romanians had all reasons to believe that they would be the next victim of Stalin after Poland and Finland. These fears were reaffirmed by a special envoy of the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who conveyed to the Romanian foreign minister Grigore Gafencu von Ribbentrop’s sympathies with the would-be evolution of the political system in Russia. According to von Ribbentrop and his envoy Russia did not have a Bolshevik any longer but, thanks to the clever leadership of Stalin, was moving toward a nationalist regime on a socialist basis. This regime showed much more understanding of the political tendencies of the Axis and ever less understanding of the Jews and was fully competent to cooperate for the preservation of peace in Eastern Europe. The Soviets had offered a great economic support and this also made Russia closer to the national and social forms, dominating in the Third Reich. The words of the German envoy were a kind or warning about Bessarabia, whose union with Romania at the end of World War I had never been recognized by Moscow.[[199]](#footnote-199)

To make things worse, Romania could hardly rely on the two western European democracies, the more so as France suffered from another cabinet crisis. On March 21 the French National Assembly passed a vote of no confidence and Premier Edouard Daladier gave his resignation the following day. His government was accused, among other things, of allowing the failure of the idea of armed intervention in assistance to Finland. Daladier was also tired of the “funny war” that consisted mainly in fighting against the agents of Stalin and Hitler in France. He was replaced by the right-wing Liberal Paul Reynaud, who had strongly opposed both the 1936 “Popular Front” government and the 1938 surrender of Britain and France in Munich, when Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to Hitler. However, he appointed Daladier war minister in order to secure the support of the Radical Party, but the new cabinet of ministers got only one parliamentary seat more than the opposition.[[200]](#footnote-200)

Hungary could not rely on Britain and France either and on March 23, 1940, the Hungarian premier Teleki paid a visit to Mussolini and to his son-in-law and foreign minister Count Galeazzo Ciano in Rome. After three days of talks Mussolini saw in the Hungarian fears of a German occupation an opportunity for urging them to preserve their neutrality and to wait patiently for a territorial solution in their favor. The Italian dictator pointed out that Hitler was also interested in the preservation of peace in Southeastern Europe. On the other hand, though, the Duce stressed that he would not remain indefinitely neutral and that he intended to intervene at a particular moment on Germany’s side.[[201]](#footnote-201)

A reshuffling of the government took place in Finland too. Väinö Tanner, in particular, was replaced as Foreign Minister by Rolf Witting. Tanner was a Social Democrat but he became the object of violent verbal attacks by the Soviet press and Prime Minister Risto Ryti preferred him taking over the Food Ministry, whereas Juho Paasikivi, who had conducted the peace negotiations with the Russians, left the cabinet altogether and was appointed Minister of Finland to Moscow. The new council of ministers was a real national coalition, supported by all the major political parties: the Social Democratic, the Peasant, the Liberal, the Conservative and the Swedish Party. One of the most important measures was to continue the fortification of some sections of the border with Communist Russia.[[202]](#footnote-202)

For his part, Stalin summoned on March 27 a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) to discuss the war with Finland and the fighting capacity of the “Red Army”. As a matter of fact it was one of those grim shows of passionate and “spontaneous” self-criticism Stalin staged, before eliminating another group of high-ranking apparatchiks. The People’s Commissar of Defense Kliment Voroshilov complained that the preparations had been insufficient, that a number of commanding officers were unfit and that the army had been badly equipped. Those chiefs-of-staff, who attended the meeting, were also severely criticized.[[203]](#footnote-203)

Hitler hardly knew the details about Stalin’s further war steps, but he was quite confident in his alliance with Russia. In the afternoon of the same day the Fuehrer told the commander-in-chief of the land forces Walther von Brauchitsch and the chief-of-staff of the land forces Franz Halder that a rupture between France and Russia would be desirable and that never since the 1870 defeat of France by Prussia did Germany enjoy such favorable political and military situation. The leader of German National Socialism stated that he trusted entirely Mussolini, but he was aware that Italy was going to enter the war only after a decisive blow to France by Germany. After discussing some details of the planned offensive against France through Belgium and the Netherlands Hitler pointed out that the conquest of Norway and Denmark had to begin on April 9 or April 10 and that the assault on Belgium, the Netherlands and France had to start four or five days later. Simultaneously the German military intelligence (the Abwehr) began to prepare an uprising in Ireland with the help of an outstanding terrorist of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).[[204]](#footnote-204)

On March 28, 1940, as if responding to these designs, the joint Anglo-French Supreme War Council decided to begin mining the Norwegian territorial waters by April 5, in order to stop the transportation of Swedish iron ore to Germany. Sweden and Norway had to be warned about the action on April 1 or April 2. Mines were to be put in the Rhine as well, but probably the most important decision was that during the present war France and Britain would neither negotiate, nor conclude ceasefire agreements or peace treaties without the consent of the other party.[[205]](#footnote-205)

The problem was that the Soviet-Nazi Alliance was also consolidated further. On March 29 Molotov declared in a speech the clear intention of the Soviet Union to subordinate even further Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and to reserve a similar fate for Finland too. He repeated hysterically that Russia would not support the British and French “*imperialist policy against Germany*” and that the hostility of Britain and France toward the Soviet Union had increased because of the deep “*class roots of the hostile policy of the imperialists against the socialist state*”. Hitler was no doubt pleased by these assurances and he ordered that the war deliveries to Russia should have a priority even over the German armed forces despite the complaints of his generals that the German industry could not satisfy the needs of the “Wehrmacht”.[[206]](#footnote-206)

Hitler’s preparations for the invasion of Scandinavia activated the conservative anti-Nazi resistance. An opponent to National-Socialism, namely Colonel Hans Oster of the military intelligence warned the Dutch military attaché to Berlin Colonel J.G.Sas about the imminent German assault on Denmark and Norway. Sas hurried to hand over this information to the Danish air-force attaché Kjölsen, but the government in Copenhagen refused to believe in his own man. In a similar way the Norwegians fatally underestimated the reports about concentration of German troops and war ships in the North and Baltic Seas.[[207]](#footnote-207)

However, Stalin and Molotov were reluctant to accept an invitation to an official visit to Hitler in Berlin. As the German ambassador Schulenburg reported from Moscow, the Russian leader and his foreign minister feared that a visit to Berlin might lead to a rupture of diplomatic relations and even to war with Britain and France, something, which Stalin wanted to avoid by all means. In Schulenburg’s opinion that was the reason for the categorical denial, made by the Soviet TASS news agency, of the rumors about an imminent visit of Molotov to Germany. Under these circumstances the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop decided to stop, for the time being, the efforts to invite Molotov and possibly Stalin to Berlin.[[208]](#footnote-208)

Moreover, Hitler proved to be much less efficient in the naval warfare against Britain. By April 1, 1940, the Germans had lost already 71 ships of 340,000 tons and 25 U-boats, whereas the British losses amounted to only 200,000 tons. On the other hand, though, the Anglo-French coalition was helpless in face of the ongoing terror in Poland. By the same time as many as 261,517 Poles and Polish Jews had been forcefully deported from the territories, annexed directly to Germany, to the General Government of Warsaw. Nevertheless, in the territories, annexed directly to Germany, there remained as many as 8,530,000 Poles, of whom only one million were considered by the Nazi authorities as fit for Germanization. However, those Polish army units that had refused to lay down arms, began an increasing armed resistance against the Nazi and Soviet occupying powers.[[209]](#footnote-209)

Stalin’s reluctance to visit Germany didn’t prevent Hitler from searching for a consolidation of the alliance by mediating for an improvement of relations between Communist Russia and Fascist Italy. On April 1 the German ambassador to Rome Hans Georg von Mackensen reminded Ciano of Mussolini’s wish to normalize relations with Moscow. The German diplomat even recommended that the Italian press begin to publish articles, “*more or less praising the Soviet Union*”, but Ciano recalled the verbal attacks Molotov had made against Italy in his speech three days ago.[[210]](#footnote-210)

Despite the growing rumors about an imminent German attack on Scandinavia the British government decided to pay more attention to the situation in the Balkans. On April 2, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced to the House of Commons that the United Kingdom’s diplomatic representatives to Ankara, Athens, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia and Budapest were summoned to London for a special conference on Southeastern Europe. Being on vacation in Britain, the British ambassador to Rome Percy Loraine would also take in the conference. Chamberlain had to admit, at the same time, that trade between the United Kingdom and Southeastern Europe was quite modest.[[211]](#footnote-211)

The same afternoon Hitler ordered that the assault on Denmark and Norway had to start on April 9, at 5:15AM. He explicitly stressed that the operation had to be carried out in such a way as to prevent the kings of Denmark and Norway from running away from their respective countries. Von Ribbentrop was instructed to take all possible measure in order to make the Danes and the Norwegians to surrender without opposing any armed resistance. At 2AM on April 2 two German supply ships, disguised as British vessels, set for Narvik far to the north on the Norwegian Sea.[[212]](#footnote-212)

For his part, Stalin kept on preparing his own assault on Germany, which included also the massacre of 25 700 “unreliable” Poles. Most of the victims were army officers, 4,404 of whom were transported to Katyn and shot one by one in the neck. Later the Germans were going to discover the mass grave in the Katyn Forest but, for the time being, their efforts were directed at amassing troops for the invasion of Norway and Denmark. Even at this moment, though, the British Cabinet of Ministers interpreted the concentration of German naval and land forces in the Baltic port of Stettin (today Szczecin in Poland) only as a countermeasure against a possible attack of the United Kingdom on Narvik or on some other Norwegian port.[[213]](#footnote-213)

Apparently the British government was still more concerned about Southeastern Europe than about Scandinavia. Before leaving for the conference in London, the British minister to Sofia George Rendel called upon King Boris III, who seemed to have forgotten his earlier complaints about the would-be Russophilia of the Bulgarians and stated that the Bulgarian peasants were immune to Russian propaganda. In his opinion Russia had lost the war on Finland and he shared his satisfaction that, as a result, this war had diminished the threat of a Soviet aggression on the Balkans and toward the Straits. Boris III reiterated his attachment to peace and neutrality, but he reminded of Bulgaria’s revisionist claims with regard to Romania. Rendel replied by declaring that the war was conducted “*against the German and Russian system of liquidation of individual freedoms*”. He assured the King, as well as Prime Minister Bogdan Filov and Foreign Minister Ivan Popov that Britain also favored a revision of the peace treaties but she rejected Hitler’s methods.[[214]](#footnote-214)

The Romanian foreign minister Gafencu was considerably less optimistic about the Russian threat than the Bulgarian king. On April 4 Gafencu told the British minister to Bucharest Reginald Hoare that Russia’s hostility toward Romania, evident in the last speech of Molotov, imposed an “*utmost caution*” on the Romanians. Gafencu clearly showed his awareness that Britain and France didn’t want to get involved in a war with Russia and he didn’t fail to point out that he didn’t expect Britain and France to cause complications on the Danube. He warned, though, that such complications would submit Romania to “*not only to repression measures by Germany, but also to a flank attack by Russia*” and that Romania might be partitioned between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union just like Poland.[[215]](#footnote-215)

On the following day the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill began to implement the plan for the mining of the Norwegian territorial waters and for the dispatch of British and French troops for the occupation of a number of ports on the Norwegian Sea, namely Trondheim, Stavanger, Bergen and Narvik. In order to prevent the enemy from using these ports, the British and the French had to occupy also the strip of Norwegian territory between Narvik and the Swedish border. British troops began to embark on ships for the Norwegian coast, but even at this moment the cabinet of Chamberlain still believed that the amassment of German armed forces in the Baltic Sea was just a maneuver for frustrating Britain’s intention to mine the Norwegian territorial waters.[[216]](#footnote-216)

Hitler carefully concealed his intention to invade Denmark and Norway not only from Mussolini, but also from Stalin. On the other hand, though, despite the discontent of the Russians with the fact that the Soviet Union exported much more commodities to the Third Reich than the other way around, military cooperation between the two totalitarian powers went on more or less smoothly. On April 6 the German tanker “Jan Wellem” left the Russian port of Murmansk for Norway too, after the Russians had obligingly filled it with enough fuel. Even more ironic was the fact that the German command expected no British action in Scandinavia whatsoever, but Hitler was going to look for a justification of his own aggression in a possible British assault.[[217]](#footnote-217)

The German preparations for the invasion of Denmark and Norway didn’t seem to worry too much even the countries that were most directly concerned. Under these circumstances it was hardly a surprise that the Hungarian government was interested above all in a possible action of the Third Reich against Romania. The Hungarian Premier Pal Teleki and the High Command went so far as to accept a possible occupation by the “Wehrmacht”, provided that it would secure territorial gains from Romania. It was decided that Hungary could participate actively in an invasion of Romania only in case of a Russian offensive and that the Germans had to be asked to be more specific about whether they had concrete information about Russia’s intentions and about whether the Germans intended to forestall the Russians in occupying the Romanian oil fields. In any case, according to Teleki and the Hungarian Chief-of-Staff General Henrik Werth Hungary had to ask Germany for the permission to occupy Transylvania and Eastern Slovakia and that a coordination was needed with Italy for frustrating a possible intervention of Yugoslavia.[[218]](#footnote-218)

On April 7 several German war ships, loaded with land forces, were spotted as they sailed for Norway. A British Royal Air Force unit attacked another German fleet in the Skaggerak Strait in close proximity to the Norwegian coast, whereas the “Orzel” Polish submarine, already operating as part of the British navy, sank another German liner, transporting troops to Norway. For his part, General Kurt Himer, who was the chief-of-staff of the German expeditionary corps that was to conquer Denmark, arrived in Copenhagen by train. True enough, he was dressed in plain clothes, but his mission was to inspect the Danish capital and to find a pier that would be fit for the coming German ship.[[219]](#footnote-219)

Somewhat later von Ribbentrop instructed the German ministers to Oslo and Copenhagen to wake up the respective foreign ministers early in the morning of April 9 and to justify the Nazi invasion as an operation for the protection of the two Scandinavian countries from British and French occupation. The royal palaces had to be put under strict control in order to prevent King Christian X of Denmark and King Haakon of Norway from finding refuge abroad. The diplomatic missions and the citizens of the neutral and friendly countries had to be treated in a polite way. In fact the only neutral power that deserved such a treatment was the United States, while the powers that, according to von Ribbentrop, were friendly to the Third Reich, consisted of Italy, Russia, Spain and Japan.[[220]](#footnote-220)

Part of these instructions were dispatched to the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg, who had to inform Molotov about the assault on Norway and Denmark only on the day of its beginning at 7AM. Von der Schulenburg had to assure Molotov, though, that the German operations would by no means affect the territory of Sweden and Finland. Moreover, the German ambassador had to point out that a possible invasion of Scandinavia by the British and the French might have led to a reopening of the Finnish problem.[[221]](#footnote-221)

Sweden and Italy were to be acquainted with the German invasion at 6AM of the same day. The Swedes had to be assured that the operation would by no means affect their territories or territorial waters, but they had to be warned at the same time to refrain from any mobilization measures and to continue unimpededly their trade with Germany. Only Mussolini had the privilege not to be awaken in the early morning hours, but to receive the German ambassador to Rome von Mackensen only after the beginning of his regular working day.[[222]](#footnote-222)

The British and the French were still under the illusion of forestalling the Germans in Scandinavia. On April 8 at 6AM their diplomatic representatives to Oslo and Stockholm handed over to the Norwegian foreign minister Halvdan Koht and to his Swedish colleague Christian Günther notes, announcing that the two Western European powers began mining Norway’s territorial waters. As a matter of fact the British even intended to land a small unit in Narvik to control the railway to Sweden. On the other hand, though, the British command abandoned the plans for a preemptive occupation of Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik the moment they learned about the advance of the German armed forces against Denmark and Norway. The reaction of the Norwegian government was not adequate either, because they protested strongly not against the obvious intention of Germany to attack their country, but against the mining of Norway’s territorial waters by the British.[[223]](#footnote-223)

Under these circumstances it was hardly a surprise that the government in Budapest was concerned mostly by a possible occupation of Hungary by the Germans in transit for Romania. A special envoy of the Hungarian premier Pal Teleki directly asked Mussolini whether Italy would assist Hungary in case Hungary decided to oppose a resistance to the Germans, but the Italian dictator advised them to accept the German demands and reiterated his solidarity with Hitler and his intention to fight the English and the French.[[224]](#footnote-224)

Even the British seemed to pay at least as much attention to Southeastern Europe as to Scandinavia. On the very eve of the German invasion of Norway and Denmark the diplomatic representatives of the United Kingdom to Belgrade, Rome, Ankara, Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia and Athens began to confer in London under the chairmanship of Foreign Secretary Edward Frederick Halifax about the situation in that region. The British minister to Sofia Rendel rightfully pointed out that the Russian threat was more serious to Bulgaria than the German one and that the United Kingdom had to encourage an improvement of the relationship between Bulgaria and her neighbors by promising, among other things, a territorial rearrangement in Bulgaria’s favor after the end of the war. The ambassador to Ankara Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen predicted that a possible annexation of Bessarabia by Russia would alarm the Turks, but they would assist the British in a war against Germany and Russia only in case of a direct assault on Turkey. Halifax declared that Britain’s policy with regard to Turkey had to rely on a defensive front of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania and Hungary. The British minister to Bucharest claimed in his turn that the Bulgarian-Romanian relations were not as bad as before any more after the Romanians promised to their Yugoslav, Greek and Turkish allies in the Balkan Pact that they would settle the Dobruja problem after the end of the war. All participants agreed that despite a more favorable attitude with regard to Moscow King Boris III of Bulgaria had not abandoned his anti-Soviet policy. At approximately the same time the Bulgarian minister to Washington, DC, Dimitûr Naumov reported to Sofia that US President Franklin D.Roosevelt also admitted that the injustice, done to Bulgaria as a result of World War I, had to be at least partially redressed in order to consolidate the situation in the Balkans.[[225]](#footnote-225)

On April 9, at 4AM local time the German ministers to Copenhagen and Oslo abruptly woke up the Danish foreign minister Peter Munch and his Norwegian colleague Halvdan Koht and handed over to them an ultimatum that their governments should accept immediately and without resistance the protection of the Third Reich against an Anglo-French occupation. An excuse of the Nazi aggression against Denmark and Norway was found, among other things, in the intention of the British and French government to intervene militarily in the conflict between the Soviet Union and Finland.[[226]](#footnote-226)

At that very moment mechanized German units had already crossed the Danish border, whereas the Norwegians declared that they did not intend to obey and that the battle had already started. Indeed they opened fire at the German units that were trying to capture Oslo and stopped them at 25 kilometers from their capital, which is at the end of a deep fjord. The Norwegians even sank the ship, boarding the Gestapo agents, who had the order to arrest King Haakon VII and the Cabinet of Ministers.[[227]](#footnote-227)

Before dawn German forces landed in Copenhagen as well, only at a couple of hundred meters from the royal palace and the headquarters of the Danish army. It looked so fantastic that some people thought that they were witnessing the shooting of a movie. When the Germans reached the royal palace, though, they were met with fire, the more so as at this very moment King Christian X was conferring with his ministers. The war minister proved to be the only member of the Cabinet in favor of further armed resistance. Eventually, in accordance with his ministers the King ordered a cease-fire. The Danes gave 13 dead and 23 dead, while the number of the killed Germans amounted to approximately 20 people.[[228]](#footnote-228)

By 8AM the Nazis took Narvik in the Far North of Norway’s Atlantic coast and about half an hour later, the Danes accepted all German terms. For the time being the Danes could preserve their multiparty representative democracy and the coalition government under Thorvald Stauning of the Social Democratic Party remained in power. No measures were taken even against the 7,000 Danish Jews, but every step of the Cabinet of Ministers, especially in the field of foreign policy, had to be submitted to the preliminary approval of the Nazi occupation authorities.[[229]](#footnote-229)

Meanwhile the British naval forces, already sailing for the Norwegian coast, received the order to push at any price the Germans back from Bergen and Trondheim. On their way the British ships clashed several times with German vessels despite the snowstorm that was ravaging at that moment in the Norwegian Sea, whereas at 9:30AM King Haakon VII, the Cabinet of Ministers and the members of parliament managed to escape from Oslo to the north. The country’s gold reserves were saved from German capture in a similar way and transported to Britain.[[230]](#footnote-230)

At 10:30AM the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg announced to the Russian premier and foreign minister Molotov about the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Molotov showed complete understanding of the German motives. In his words there could be no doubt that the English had gone too far and didn’t take into account the interests of neutral countries. He wished Germany a complete success in her “*defense measures*” and promised that the Soviet Union would resume immediately the deliveries of grain and petroleum that had been temporarily stopped.[[231]](#footnote-231)

In the afternoon of April 9 the Germans succeeded in capturing Kristiansand at 330 kilometers to the southwest from Oslo, but they were still unable to take the Norwegian capital. The same evening the leader of the pro-Nazi “National Unity” Party Vidkun Quisling intruded into the headquarters of the Norwegian national radio station and proclaimed that he assumed power because the government of Johan Nygaardsvold had run away. Quisling appealed for a cessation of hostilities against the Germans but his appeal only encouraged the Norwegians to oppose an even more powerful resistance to the invaders.[[232]](#footnote-232)

In the morning hours of April 10 the British attacked the German navy unit in Narvik in the Far North and destroyed most of the German ships. Another bad surprise came from Iceland, whose government proclaimed complete sovereignty from Copenhagen. Until that moment Iceland had been under the supremacy of Denmark. According to the preliminary agreements the complete cessation of Iceland from Denmark was planned for 1943, but the Icelanders decided to hurry things out of fear that the Nazis might try to occupy their island as part of the Danish territory. The Americans felt relieved since Iceland offered a relatively easy access to the Atlantic coast of Canada.[[233]](#footnote-233)

It was only in the late afternoon that the first German units penetrated in Oslo but the city looked deserted and even the German minister Curt Bräuer had left for a small town in the north to meet with King Haakon VII. The King even refused to receive him in the absence of his ministers and Bräuer had to talk with the monarch in the presence of Foreign Minister Koht. By a combination of threats and promises the German diplomat tried to persuade Haakon VII to recognize the government under Quisling, which was unanimously rejected both by the monarch and by the Cabinet of Ministers. To make things worse a German unit made an attempt to capture the King, but it was dispersed by the Norwegians and Haakon VII and the government of Nygaardsvold moved further to the north.[[234]](#footnote-234)

In the morning of April 11, thanks to the arrival of two German cargo ships with Russian assistance from Murmansk, the Nazis captured the airport near Trondheim, situated at a strategic point in the middle of the coast on the Norwegian Sea. These developments made the First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill believe that the next victim of Germany and Russia might be Sweden. However, the British Prime Minister Chamberlain rejected his idea about trying to get the Swedes involved in the war, arguing that such an initiative would bring the United Kingdom more liabilities than assets because of the attachment of Stockholm to a policy of strict neutrality.[[235]](#footnote-235)

In the night of April 11 to April 12, after the obvious failure of the attempt to induce Haakon VII to collaborate, the Nazis made an air raid on the village where the King was hiding together with the Cabinet of Ministers. At the last moment the monarch and the government found refuge in the nearby forest, but the aviation of the Third Reich destroyed completely the village. Somewhat later the British occupied the Faroe Islands, a Danish possession situated between the Great British Isle, Iceland and Norway. The local governor made a formal protest but the population was pleased with getting protection from a possible Nazi invasion. US President F.D.Roosevelt availed himself of the opportunity and declared that Greenland, which was another Danish possession, belongs to the western hemisphere and instructed the American Red Cross to provide the local population with medicines if medical supplies from Denmark became unavailable.[[236]](#footnote-236)

Anyway, the commander of the German forces in Norway General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst and the minister of the Reich to Oslo Curt Bräuer did not at all feel secure about the situation in Norway either. In the late evening of April 12 Bräuer telegraphed to Berlin that Quisling was so unpopular that he was unable to form even some similarity of a government, because four of his ministers were not in Oslo, whereas another two flatly refused to assume positions in such a cabinet. Bräuer suggested that Norway might be placed under direct German administration. One of the first retaliatory measures was an order of General Falkenhorst to take some 20 hostages among the most distinguished inhabitants of Oslo, who had to be shot in case of continuous resistance or sabotage activities.[[237]](#footnote-237)

Moreover, Hitler was still unaware that the ongoing extermination of “enemies of the people” in the newly acquired western territories of the Soviet Union were only an element of Stalin’s preparations for the assault on Germany. In the night of April 12 to April 13 at least 300,000 close relatives of those Poles, Ukrainians and Jews, who had been already killed, were loaded on freight railway cars from Eastern Poland either to Siberia or to Northern Kazakhstan. Many died during the transportation, while the rest were left in the open area. In this way the Soviet authorities liquidated another 100,000 human beings, mostly women and children.[[238]](#footnote-238)

Yet the German dictator didn’t seem to exclude entirely the option of losing the war, although not in favor of Britain, but in favor of Russia. In a long conversation with Quisling’s newly appointed war minister Viljam Hagelin, the Fuehrer stated that even if Germany lost the fight, England would never win, but the winner would be Russia, especially in the northern countries. Hitler reiterated that any resistance to the Germans was senseless, but he hardly concealed his doubts about the stability of the Quisling cabinet, by stressing that it had to secure the active support of the trade chambers, the ship owners and the intellectual elements, which was obviously not the case.[[239]](#footnote-239)

As a matter of fact Hitler simply wanted to blackmail the Scandinavian countries with the Russian threat. Anyway, a couple of minutes later Hagelin had to leave the chancellor’s office for a while to avoid the official representative of Norway, who was still in Berlin and to whom Hitler declared that the Norwegian king Haakon VII had to follow the example of the Danish monarch Christian X. The Fuehrer boasted that Germany was going to provide the Danes with everything they had been importing until that moment from Britain and France, even if Germany had to attract Russia to that effect. This didn’t prevent the German dictator from accusing the media of neutral countries like Norway, Belgium, Switzerland and Turkey of publishing materials, hostile to the Reich, but of banning friendly commentaries under the pretext of freedom of the press.[[240]](#footnote-240)

On April 14 at 6:30PM a special envoy of the German Foreign Ministry, Theodor Habicht, and the German minister to Oslo Bräuer engaged in difficult negotiations with Quisling in order to persuade him to resign since his “government” was rejected even by those Norwegians, who were ready to collaborate with the Reich. Quisling claimed that he was the only one, able to maintain peace and order in Norway, but Habicht and Bräuer tried to console him with the idea that he could form a government at a later stage, when his “National Unity” Party would have a sufficient number of supporters.[[241]](#footnote-241)

It was only at noon of the following day that Quisling eventually agreed to resign together with his short-lived government. He was allowed to speak on the national radio in order to calm down his followers and put in charge of the demobilization, while his cabinet was replaced by an administrative council under the chairmanship of Chief Justice Paal Berg. The ironic thing was that Paal Berg was going to become the secret leader of the Norwegian Anti-Nazi Resistance. On the other hand, as the Hungarian minister to Stockholm Matuska reported to Budapest, collaboration with Germany was supported also by the local “*pro-Communist elements*” in Norway.[[242]](#footnote-242)

The administrative council was not a permanent solution in the eyes of Berlin either, because the new body lacked the authority of royal approval. In a telegram von Ribbentrop instructed Bräuer to work out with General Falkenhorst the details of a plan for the abduction of King Haakon VII and Crown Prince Olaf, although the Germans did not know their whereabouts. At the same moment, though, the state secretary of the German Foreign Ministry von Weizsaecker announced to the chief-of-staff of the land forces Halder that there was an information about a “*strengthening of Russian troops*” on the border with Germany and Romania.[[243]](#footnote-243)

However, on April 16 Hitler was enraged by the failure to capture the Norwegian king to the point that he ordered the dismissal of the German minister to Oslo Bräuer. Yet the Fuehrer was no doubt encouraged by the decision of the Swedish government under Hansson to yield to the German demand for the transit of some non-military materials through Sweden for the German troops at Narvik in Norway, as well as of some medicine workers, but the permission was granted for one transit only.[[244]](#footnote-244)

Despite the concentration of “Red Army” units on the eastern borders of Germany the Third Reich and the Soviet Union went on to be quite unanimous in the genocide of the Poles. For the time being, though, the murderous methods of German National Socialism appeared to be considerably less efficient than those of Russian Communism. Some economic considerations forced the general governor of the Warsaw region to introduce a labor conscription for all Poles, aged between 14 and 25 years. This limited to some extent the deportation of the Poles from the territories, annexed directly to Germany. However, by that time the Nazi authorities had exterminated some 43,000 Poles, whereas those, who had the dubious privilege to remain in Germany were submitted to undernourishment. Each contact with the German population was prohibited and any sexual intercourse between a Pole and a German was punishable by death.[[245]](#footnote-245)

The Hungarian premier Pal Teleki had apparently forgotten his sympathies with Poland and wrote a letter to Hitler, suggesting tripartite talks between Germany, Italy and Hungary about Romania. He expressed a readiness to join the Rome-Berlin Axis, provided that Hungary would be granted equality at least as far as the problems of Southeastern Europe were concerned. In a letter to Mussolini, though, Hitler reiterated his belief that the Balkans had to be kept away from the war.[[246]](#footnote-246)

This interest in peace in the Balkans might have been enhanced by developments in Norway, where the British engaged in the first land battle with the Germans at Lillehammer. The Germans succeeded in pushing the British and the Norwegians back to the north. Significantly enough, at that same moment Sweden allowed another 514 Germans to cross her territory from Norway to Germany as sailors from cargo ships, but there were members of U-boat and battle ship crews among them.[[247]](#footnote-247)

For his part, on April 22, 1940, Mussolini had to postpone the entrance of Italy into the war for the spring of 1941, because Norway had removed the end of the conflict, as well as the theater of war operations. In other words, the Duce had to calm down his aggressive appetites, the more so as he became aware that Italy was not at all ready for war. The Italian foreign minister Ciano could reassure the French ambassador André François-Poncet, his US colleague William Philips and some other diplomatic representatives that no Italian war action was to be expected in the foreseeable future.[[248]](#footnote-248)

This didn’t prevent the Anglo-French Supreme War Council from expecting an imminent German attack on the West. At a session in Paris the French premier Paul Reynaud described a rather grim perspective by stating that the Allies could put only 90 French and 10 British divisions against 150 German divisions. Moreover, the Germans could mobilize in his view as many as another 300 divisions. The British Prime Minister Chamberlain was somewhat more optimistic at least about the situation in Scandinavia, where some 13,000 troops had already landed around Trondheim. It was decided to reinforce them with another 5,000 British, 7,000 French and 3,000 Polish troops and to make an attempt to capture both Trondheim and Narvik.[[249]](#footnote-249)

On April 24 Hitler appointed the inveterate National Socialist Josef Terboven Reichskommissar (Imperial Commissary) for Norway because, according to the decree, the government of Nygaardsvold had created a state of war. Terboven could use the Norwegian council, headed by Paal Berg, only for carrying out his administrative orders. The Reichskommissar could issue decrees with the force of law. The existing Norwegian legislation could be preserved only insofar as it was compatible with the German occupation. On the other hand, Hitler hurried to reply to a letter of King Gustav V of Sweden, who had given assurances about an uncompromising neutral policy, by stressing that Germany would respect “*absolutely*” the neutrality of the Swedes.[[250]](#footnote-250)

At 8PM of the same day, in the presence of Ciano, the German ambassador to Rome von Mackensen handed over to Mussolini the letter Hitler had written a couple of days ago about the request of the Hungarian premier for a tripartite conference. The Italian dictator fully agreed with the decision of the Fuehrer to reject the request and to hold Hungary back from any action against Romania, which might push Yugoslavia in the arms of Britain and France: “*Any precipitate action by Hungary might bring Russia into the Balkans, which would be a very serious thing.*” Moreover, Hitler made it clear that he was displeased with the Italian ambassador to Berlin Bernardo Attolico and Mussolini and Ciano saw no alternative but to replace him with Dino Alfieri.[[251]](#footnote-251)

Attolico had the disadvantage of being too much attached to peace, which was hardly tolerable for Mussolini, whose bellicosity seemed to grow parallel to Hitler’s military successes. The Italian dictator remained untouched not only by a letter of the French premier Reynaud, who appealed in vain for a renewal of Latin solidarity, but even by the warnings coming from the United States. In a letter to the Duce President Roosevelt hinted that his country could not remain neutral forever, but in his reply Mussolini stated that Italy could not stay any longer without an access to the oceans and that if America was for the Americans, then Europe had to be for the Europeans.[[252]](#footnote-252)

For their part, the Swedes were not at all sure that Hitler would keep his word about the respect of their neutrality, the more so as Berlin renewed the pressure on Stockholm for more transit permissions. Eventually the Swedes agreed to allow the transportation of provisions and medical supplies for the German army in Norway and even of prisoners of war from Norway to Germany, although neutrality rules required from Sweden to intern such prisoners on her own territory. For a while the Swedes refused only the transportation of ammunitions for the “Wehrmacht” in Norway. However, at 2AM on May 1 von Ribbentrop instructed the legation in Stockholm to start immediately negotiations for the transportation of war materials and arms through Sweden to Norway in exchange for the delivery of some artillery pieces and machine guns by Germany to Sweden.[[253]](#footnote-253)

On May 2 the British and French troops that had landed near Trondheim, were forced to re-embark on the ships for Britain and to abandon the plans for the capture of the city. King Haakon VII and the Norwegian government had already moved to the Far North in Tromsø. Despite these dramatic developments, most Norwegians kept on considering their king and the cabinet of Nygaardsvold as the only legitimate authority in their country and even Quisling had to admit it.[[254]](#footnote-254)

The new German victories apparently accelerated Stalin’s preparations for his own war. He removed Voroshilov from the War Ministry and replaced him with Semyon Timoshenko, who had distinguished himself with his ruthless war methods in Finland. Voroshilov didn’t fall in disgrace despite his poor accomplishments as military. More important was the fact that his removal from the War Ministry, but by no means from the Politburo, was accompanied by an increasing number of Soviet “protests” against the Romanians for staging “border incidents”, although Bucharest had obviously no interest whatsoever in irritating Stalin. At the same time numerous “Red Army” units were transferred toward the Middle East and India.[[255]](#footnote-255)

Hitler didn’t seem concerned enough about the intentions of Russia, even though he postponed the assault on the West for another three days. On May 4, though, the Dutch representative to the Holy Seat reaffirmed in a telegram to his government that the Germans would invade the Netherlands and Belgium on May 10 and this information was immediately transmitted by the Dutch to the Belgians. Besides, the Belgian premier Pierlot made a militant speech to encourage his fellow countrymen. He declared, in particular, that Belgium was well armed and ready to oppose resistance to any aggression.[[256]](#footnote-256)

As a matter of fact the concentration of Russian troops in Central Asia was more or less in harmony with Hitler’s preparations for the assault on the West, since it was apparently directed against the British possessions there. This impression was enhanced by the Soviet ambassador to Ankara Aleksey Terentiev, who assured his German colleague Franz von Papen that the common aim of the Soviet Union and the Reich was to keep Turkey out of the war. Terentiev also stated that if Italy entered the war without affecting the Balkans, Russia would not intervene even in a conflict between Italy and Turkey. This seemed to announce a softening of Stalin’s position toward Italy, but on May 6 Molotov declared to von der Schulenburg in Moscow that, as far as the Russian-Italian relationship was concerned, the “Soviet Government” did not hurry.[[257]](#footnote-257)

The following day Hitler dispatched a letter to Mussolini to be handed over on May 9 about the assault on the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg, while von Ribbentrop sent to von der Schulenburg in Moscow two memorandums that were to be given to the Russian government also two days later. As usual, the memorandums justified the action by an imminent aggression of Britain and France against these three countries. At the same moment the British Prime Minister Chamberlain was severely criticized in the House of Commons for the failures in Norway. The attacks came both from the Left and from the Right, but Chamberlain valiantly defended the First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill by pointing out that the latter had not been in charge of the coordination between the General Staffs during the Norwegian campaign.[[258]](#footnote-258)

In the afternoon of May 7, though, bad weather forced Hitler to postpone the attack again, but on May 8 the German radio announced that Britain was about to invade the Netherlands. In fact, at this very moment the United Kingdom had to find a solution to the cabinet crisis that resulted from the critics against Prime Minister Chamberlain. The Liberal leader and former Prime Minister David Lloyd George openly invited Chamberlain to give his resignation. Eventually, the Cabinet succeeded in preserving its majority by 81 votes more than all the other political parties together, but more than 30 Conservative members of parliament voted against the government, whereas another 60 Conservatives abstained from voting. In the afternoon two leading representatives of the Labour Party declared personally to Chamberlain that they would not participate in a national coalition under his leadership.[[259]](#footnote-259)

On May 9 Hitler issued the orders for an attack early in the morning of the next day. It was only at 5AM on May 10, when the German army began the invasion of Luxemburg, Belgium and the Netherlands, that the German ambassador to Rome von Mackensen woke up Mussolini to hand over to him Hitler’s personal letter and the two memorandums about the action. The diplomatic representatives of Belgium and the Netherlands in Berlin were treated in a similarly way. They were summoned by von Ribbentrop at 5:45AM to hear that the German army entered into their countries in order to preserve their neutrality from an imminent Anglo-French assault. The same declaration was made by von Weizsaecker to the chargé d’affaires of Luxemburg. As for the foreign ministers of the Low Countries, they received the respective notes only after the Germans had already started the bombing and shelling. The Belgian and Dutch foreign ministers, in particular, stated explicitly to the German representatives that from that moment on their countries were in war with the Reich.[[260]](#footnote-260)

At 7AM Mussolini declared to von Mackensen that he agreed fully with the German action and that Italy would enter the war as soon as her armed forces were ready for that. Britain and France were even more surprised than Mussolini by the German attack. At first side the forces were even, consisting of 136 German divisions against 135 British, French, Belgian and Dutch divisions and of 2,580 German tanks against 3,100 tanks of the Allies. However, the German tanks were concentrated in the Ardennes Mountains, whereas the French had scattered their tanks all over the front. To make things worse, the French army was seriously demoralized by the propaganda of National Socialist and Communist agents. Yet the British had enough forces to occupy Iceland in order to protect more efficiently the sea route to America. They had no intention whatsoever to change the government of Iceland and hurried to send a diplomatic representative to Reykjavik. In fact the local newspapers refrained from any comments, but the Icelanders felt in fact relieved because the only armed force they had consisted of some 70 policemen, who obviously could do nothing in case of a German assault.[[261]](#footnote-261)

At 8:15AM the Germans captured the railway station of the city of Luxemburg, but by that time the Grand Duchess Charlotte and the government had already left the country for France. The Nazis continued also their air raids on Brussels, killing 41 civilians, although the Belgian capital had the status of an open city. In their turn the Swiss mobilized another 450,000 soldiers, 57,000 horses and 10,000 motor vehicles, but their aviation consisted of only 70 fighters.[[262]](#footnote-262)

It was only in the late afternoon that the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg informed officially Molotov about the assault on the Low Countries. Once again Molotov congratulated the Germans on their “*defense measures*” and wished them success. However, Stalin apparently dreamed about reaching the Atlantic Ocean and he was not quite sure about the capacity of his army to smash even Germany, because he feared a possible agreement between Britain and France, on the one hand, and Germany, on the other. Therefore, the Russian dictator seemed to prefer waiting another six months rather than attacking Germany immediately.[[263]](#footnote-263)

For their part, the British finally overcame their cabinet crisis thanks to King George VI. Initially the monarch tried to persuade Chamberlain to remain in office, but eventually he used his power to accept or to reject a resignation by stating that he would accept the resignation of Chamberlain provided that Churchill would be the next Prime Minister. It was a difficult choice since Churchill had too many enemies: the Labourites hated him because of his actions against the trade unions in the past, whereas the Conservatives could hardly forget his violent critics against Chamberlain’s appeasement strategy with regard to Nazi Germany and his readiness to ally with Stalin against Hitler. At 6PM Greenwich Mean Time King George VI entrusted Churchill with the formation of the next Cabinet of Ministers.[[264]](#footnote-264)

For the time being, though, the British could hardly do anything more than to issue declarations of solidarity with the Belgians like Pope Pius XIII, who sent to King Leopold III of Belgium, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and to Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxemburg telegrams, expressing his sympathies with them. Mussolini was enraged and the new Italian ambassador to the Holy Seat Attolico protested against the telegrams. Pius XII promised to avoid taking sides, but he also declared that he would do nothing contrary to his conscience even at the risk of deportation to a concentration camp.[[265]](#footnote-265)

On May 11 at noon the Belgian fort of Eben-Emal Fort, considered impregnable until then, had to surrender. The diplomatic representatives of Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain and Egypt left Brussels, but the envoys of the United States, Italy, the Holy Seat, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Columbia and Iran chose to stay further in the Belgian capital. It was only in the afternoon that the 7th French Army reached the Dutch city of Tilburg, but the French and the Dutch lacked any support from the air. At 10:30PM Luxemburg was already placed entirely under German administration.[[266]](#footnote-266)

In the night of May 11 to May 12, at the initiative of the new British Prime Minister Churchill, eighteen bombers of the Royal Air Force dropped their bombs not over some military targets, but over the civil population in Westphalia. However, the other members of the Cabinet did not approve these tactics, among other things, because of their inefficiency from a military viewpoint and for the time being such bombings remained an exception.[[267]](#footnote-267)

On May 12 the British Expeditionary corps came finally to the aid of the Belgians, but by that time the Germans had already captured 4,000 allied soldiers against some 100 casualties only. This didn’t prevent the British, the French and the Norwegians, assisted by some Polish units, to launch in the following night an operation for the reconquest of Narvik in order to secure a basis for King Haakon VII of Norway and the government of Nygaardsvold and to cut the exportation of iron ore from Sweden to Germany through Norway and through the Norwegian Sea.[[268]](#footnote-268)

On May 13 the House of Commons approved unanimously the new national coalition government under Winston Churchill. The cabinet consisted of 15 Conservatives, 6 Labourites, 3 National Liberals and one Liberal, while another five ministers didn’t belong to any political party. In a speech before the vote Churchill declared: “*I say to the House as I said to ministers who have joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many months of struggle and suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime.*”[[269]](#footnote-269)

While Churchill was promising victory at any price, the Germans took the city of Sedan in Northern France and threatened to cut the Franco-British front into two. This exacerbated further the antipathy between the French premier Reynaud and his predecessor Daladier. Eventually Daladier got the Foreign Ministry, whereas Reynaud took personally the War Ministry. For their part, the Dutch decided to surrender, while Mussolini came to the firm conclusion that within a month Italy had to declare war on France and Britain. Last but not least, Stalin chose this moment to complete the engulfment of the three Baltic countries, by addressing a threatening note to Lithuania, accused of hostile acts toward the Soviet Union.[[270]](#footnote-270)

In the morning hours of May 14 Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and the government of Dirk Jan de Geer embarked on two ships for Britain, while the defenders of Rotterdam engaged in negotiations with the Germans for a cease-fire agreement. However, Hitler ordered the total bombardment of the city in order to accelerate the surrender of the Dutch. The German planes destroyed completely the center of Rotterdam, killing 814 civilians and leaving another 78,000 with no roof. At the same time the Germans broke through the defense lines in the Ardennes Mountains, which was a complete surprise for the French, and rushed toward the English Channel through the rear of the allied troops in Belgium.[[271]](#footnote-271)

At sunset the commander-in-chief of the Dutch forces General H.G.Winkelman ordered his troops to lay down arms, while the French premier Reynaud informed the British about the German breakthrough at Sedan. Under these circumstances the United Kingdom simply rejected the demand of the Polish government-in-exile to protest against the atrocities, committed by the Soviet occupation authorities in Eastern Poland on the ground that Britain was in war with Germany, but not with Russia.[[272]](#footnote-272)

On May 15 at about 7AM Reynaud called Churchill on the phone and told him that France had been defeated and that the war was lost. The British Prime Minister tried to persuade his French colleague that in five or six days the Germans would stop their advance because of the lack of supplies and then the Allies would be able to counterattack. US President Roosevelt was not quite sure about the fate of the two Western European democracies either and in a letter to Mussolini, written at the request of Churchill and Reynaud, he tried to persuade the Italian dictator to improve his relations with France and Britain. However, Roosevelt’s quotations from the Gospel could hardly impress Mussolini, who was an atheist and hated profoundly the Church.[[273]](#footnote-273)

The same day Churchill wrote his first letter to Roosevelt in his capacity of Prime Minister. He warned the President that the United States might remain alone in the face of a totally subdued and Nazified Europe and asked for the delivery of several hundred war planes, as well as for anti-aircraft equipment. In Churchill’s opinion if Italy entered the war, the United Kingdom would need also some 100 submarines. He was ready to pay for the deliveries in dollars but he entreated the United States to continue the deliveries even if Britain would be unable to pay any more. Churchill went so far as to ask for the dispatch of a couple of squadrons in the Irish ports as a preemptive measure against a possible German landing in Eire, but the Americans wanted by no means to engaged to such an extent in the European affairs. For similar reasons Washington rejected a demand of Dublin for the proclamation of the Irish status quo as vital for the American interests.[[274]](#footnote-274)

For his part Stalin’s new war minister Timoshenko issued an order for the preparation of the “Red Army” for large-scale offensive operations. The drills to that effect had to last from eight to ten hours daily. All Soviet soldiers had to learn how to operate day and night, as well as in the worst weather conditions, whereas the railway troops had to be trained to reconstruct the European tracks to the broader Russian standard as fast as possible. Moreover the Russian soldiers had to be brainwashed along the lines of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine even more intensely than before. In fact beating and execution became almost the only forms of punishment in the army.[[275]](#footnote-275)

Expecting the worse, the Latvian government entrusted secretly the minister to London Karlis Zarinš with almost absolute powers. In case of losing contact with the government in Riga Zarinš had to take over the leadership of all envoys and representatives of Latvia. If he deemed it necessary, he could dissolve any diplomatic mission abroad except the Latvian legation in the United States.[[276]](#footnote-276)

The open solidarity of the Soviet press with the Nazi aggression in the Low Countries only accelerated the negotiations of the Swiss with the French for the transfer of the Swiss gold reserves to the United States through France. The problem was that at this very moment the French banks got the order to leave Paris, while the Swiss had been involved in refining the gold coming from Russia to the United States through Germany. Eventually, handed over to the Swiss their gold reserves that had been already transferred to New York in exchange for the gold, coming from Switzerland to France.[[277]](#footnote-277)

The Germans were rapidly approaching Paris and the roads were blocked by retreating soldiers and civilians. The aggressors didn’t even bother to capture the French and simply told them to throw their weapons and to move to the south in order to encumber less the roads. The Germans even shouted to the French that they had no time for taking them prisoners, while the premier of France Reynaud had the fatal idea to include in the cabinet Marshall Philippe Petain, who was at this moment ambassador of France to Madrid. The Marshall was renowned as a hero of World War I and as the victor at Verdun, in particular, but he maintained close and friendly relations with the German ambassador Eberhard von Stohrer and was convinced that France had to surrender.[[278]](#footnote-278)

On May 16 the Belgian government under Hubert Pierlot left Brussels for Oostende to the north of the Strait of Dover. The Belgian ministers were accompanied by some of the foreign diplomatic representatives, but their departure caused a panic. People started to loot the stores and not only the policemen, but even the firemen fled from the furious crowd. [[279]](#footnote-279)

The same day Churchill flew to Paris only to find out that the French were evacuating their capital and that they had no more striking forces. He had written a personal letter to Mussolini in a last attempt to dissuade the Italian dictator from siding with Germany in the war in stating, among other things, that if he had to choose between Communism and Fascism, he would prefer Fascism. Hitler also didn’t know that the French had no more striking forces and, fearing a counterattack, he ordered his tank units to stop their rapid advance toward the English Channel.[[280]](#footnote-280)

In the evening hours of May 17 relatively small German units entered Brussels. The British had withdrawn from the Belgian capital, but they had destroyed a number of strategic bridges, as well as the water, phone and gas facilities, depriving the inhabitants of these services for several days. The local police had been disarmed before the arrival of the Germans and now the armed Belgians among the civilian population had to hand over their weapons to the Germans too. Despite their promise to respect the property of everyone, the occupation authorities requisitioned all cars and trucks and closed all stores and gas stations.[[281]](#footnote-281)

At the same time the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop put a hard pressure on the Swedish minister Arvid Richert for the passage of troops and war materials through Sweden to Norway and back. Richert had to fly the same night to Stockholm to acquaint his government with the new German requirements. After a midnight session the cabinet of Hansson instructed him to tell the Germans that Sweden could not allow the transport of troops and ammunitions, but only of 2,000 sailors from the destroyers at Narvik. Moreover, the Swedish foreign minister Günther was ready to come to Germany for a personal meeting with von Ribbentrop.[[282]](#footnote-282)

The following morning Hitler appointed Arthur Seyss-Inquart Imperial Commissary of the Netherlands. The country was therefore placed under direct German administration. As to Seyss-Inquart himself, he had played a crucial role in the engulfment of Austria by Germany in 1938 and his loyalty to Hitler and to the National Socialist regime was unquestionable.[[283]](#footnote-283)

At 6PM the German command succeeded in persuading Hitler that after the fall of Brussels and Antwerp in German hands there was no reason whatsoever for delaying any more the advance westwards. The Fuehrer finally gave the respective order, while the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France Genera, John Gort recommended measures for a possible evacuation of the British troops from France to Britain.[[284]](#footnote-284)

On May 20 Prime Minister Churchill instructed the Admiralty to gather all sorts of vessels for a possible transportation of the Allied forces from France to Britain through the Strait of Dover. To make things worse, because of opposition in Congress President Roosevelt had in fact refused to deliver the war planes and anti-aircraft equipment, solicited by Churchill. In a new letter to Roosevelt the British Prime Minister hinted that in case of a catastrophe he and his cabinet might be replaced by people, ready to obey the will of the Germans.[[285]](#footnote-285)

The battles in the west were accompanied by the concentration of a rapidly increasing number of Russian troops on the borders of Hungary and Romania. Yet the Hungarian premier was apparently unable to give up the claims on Romania. In a letter to Hitler he promised to postpone the fulfillment of these claims to a later stage, but at the same time he pretended that Russian Communism was finding a favorable ground in Slavic nations like Yugoslavia and Slovakia.[[286]](#footnote-286)

In the evening hours a German tank division reached Abbeville at only 15 kilometers from the English Channel to the south of the French-Belgian border. In this way the Belgian, British and French troops in Belgium were cut from the rest of the Allied forces and in fact encircled. Hitler was full of joy, while von Ribbentrop instructed the German ambassador to Tokyo General Eugen Ott to tell the Japanese that the German-Dutch conflict was a purely European affair and that the Reich was disinterested in Dutch India (Indonesia). Ott had to add that Germany understood fully Japan’s concerns about the Pacific area and that Berlin had always followed a friendly policy toward Tokyo.[[287]](#footnote-287)

The rapid advance of the “Wehrmacht” in the West and the concentration of Russian troops in the East apparently dispersed the fears in Budapest of a possible Nazi occupation. The fact was that Teleki wrote to the Hungarian minister to Washington (DC) Pelenyi that the formation of a government in exile was not a pressing issue any more. The Hungarian premier intended to ask Pelenyi to send back the five million dollars, assigned to that effect.[[288]](#footnote-288)

The growing aggressiveness of Stalin made Hitler and his commanders think more seriously about a possible armistice and peace with the United Kingdom. Some military even tended to consider that a certain discrepancy appeared between Germany and Italy, because for Italy the main enemy was England, whereas for Germany the main enemy was France. Besides, there were no concrete military and political agreements between Germany and Italy, the more so as the German command was confident that the “Wehrmacht” could handle the situation on the western front without the help of the Italians.[[289]](#footnote-289)

On May 22 the Romanian foreign minister Gafencu informed the German diplomatic representative in Bucharest Wilhelm Fabricius about the concentration of Russian troops and about the firm intention of the Romanians to fight in case of a Soviet aggression. Gafencu directly asked Fabricius whether the Reich was interested in the conquest of positions at the Danube by Russia. The German diplomat replied that Stalin had done a great favor to Hitler and that Hitler was not the man to forget that. He went further by stating that Romania had to reach an agreement with her eastern neighbors and that the Romanians had to yield some territories to the Russians for that purpose.[[290]](#footnote-290)

The concentration of “Red Army” units on the western borders of Russia was accompanied by an ever more intense campaign in the Soviet press, directed not only against Romania, but also against Finland. There was also an increase in the subversive activities of the Communists of Finnish descent, who founded a Finland-USSR Association for Peace and Friendship. Despite its name this association staged a series of violent street demonstrations against the would-be hostile policy of Finland toward the Soviet Union.[[291]](#footnote-291)

The concentration of Russian troops on the Bessarabian border against Romania began finally to worry the German command. According to General Alfred Jodl the Soviet troop movements created a critical situation for the Reich, but at that very moment the “Wehrmacht” succeeded in encircling as many as 45 French, British, Canadian and Belgian divisions in Western Belgium and Northwestern France. Significantly enough, that was the time, chosen by Hitler, to decree the direct annexation of the two Belgian municipalities of Eupen and Malmedy, whose population, despite its predominantly German character, had voted after the end of World War I for Belgium.[[292]](#footnote-292)

The emerging catastrophe of the two leading western European democracies made the Irish Prime Minister Eamon de Valera send Joe Walsh, who was in charge of the foreign affairs, on a secret mission to Britain. Walsh had to inform the British that in case of a German attack Eire would no doubt fight the invaders and ask for the assistance of the United Kingdom. However, in conformity with the neutrality of Ireland, British troops could penetrate Irish territory only after a German landing, but the British intended to persuade the Irish to admit British forces on their territory before a German invasion.[[293]](#footnote-293)

On May 24, though, Hitler was worried again by the quick advance of his own troops toward the English Channel and ordered his commanders to stop the offensive until the arrival of fresh reinforcements. The British Expeditionary Force intercepted the order and Prime Minister Churchill realized immediately that in this way Dunkirk remained the only port on the Strait of Dover that was out of the reach of the Germans and that could be used for the evacuation of the Allied armies from Europe to England.[[294]](#footnote-294)

Nevertheless, the destruction of the French, British and Belgian forces was only a question of time and on May 25, at 5AM King Leopold III engaged in difficult conversations with the premier Hubert Pierlot and the other ministers. Pierlot and his colleagues firmly believed that the government had to leave Belgium and to continue the fight, whereas Leopold III thought to remain in Belgium, even at the risk of becoming a hostage of National Socialist Germany. He advocated surrender and the idea was supported by a leading Social Democrat, who told the King that the Belgians had to lay down arms unconditionally for the sake of the new socialist order in Europe. The monarch also hoped that he could negotiate with the Germans for a relatively less harsh armistice, but the Cabinet of Ministers flatly disagreed and left.[[295]](#footnote-295)

Somewhat later Leopold III met with the French Commander-in-Chief General Maxime Weygand and told him that if he did not get an efficient assistance from the British and the French, he would be forced to surrender. Impressed by this declaration, Weygand hurried to a session of the French Council of Ministers and recommended an armistice with Hitler. The idea was supported even by the new vice-premier Pétain, but the premier Reynaud and the President of the Republic Albert Lebrun rejected it on the ground that a Franco-British accord committed the two powers to conclude no separate agreements with Germany.[[296]](#footnote-296)

In the afternoon of May 26 Hitler repealed the order he had issued two days ago and the German troops could resume their offensive toward the English Channel, but the British and the French had already organized the evacuation of their forces through Dunkirk and the Strait of Dover to England. However, at 5PM on May 27 King Leopold sent an envoy to the Germans to conclude a ceasefire agreement and duly informed the British and the French about the step. Churchill tried in vain to dissuade the King and reiterated the idea of the Belgian government under Pierlot that the monarch could find refuge in Britain and that the Belgians could continue the fight from there. For his part, Hitler ordered explicitly that the surrender of Belgium had to be unconditional, intending to split the Flemings and the Walloons into separate POW camps. Leopold III sign the surrender agreement at 11PM and thus about 500,000 Belgian soldiers had to lay down their arms. The Pierlot Cabinet reacted, by issuing a declaration in Paris that the King was in no position to reign.[[297]](#footnote-297)

At approximately the same time the United States made a new effort to keep Mussolini out of the war. In another personal letter President Roosevelt invited the Italian dictator to state his demands, which would be transmitted to Britain and France. If an agreement on that basis became possible, Mussolini had to promise to preserve his neutrality until the end of the conflict. The French ambassador to Rome François-Poncet went so far as to offer to Italy Tunisia and even Algeria, which were then French possessions, but Mussolini had firmly decided to win incomparably more by war. He even refused to receive US Ambassador Philips, while Ciano simply declared to François-Poncet that it was too late.[[298]](#footnote-298)

On May 28 Churchill wrote to his French colleague Reynaud that they had to show only a readiness to discuss the Italians demands, but to refrain from concrete offers, since Mussolini would hardly abandon his alliance with Hitler. Moreover, Churchill stressed, Britain and France should not abandon their independence without fighting to the very end. The conclusion of the British Prime Minister was that if the two powers did not yield, they could still avoid the fate of Denmark and Poland.[[299]](#footnote-299)

Churchill was right at least insofar as Mussolini had determined by that time the date of Italy’s entrance into the war on the side of Germany, namely June 10. The British didn’t know about that decision, but Churchill had no illusions and urged the military to work out the measure against a possible Italian attack. Among these measures was the armament and financing of the Ethiopian rebels, who fought against the rule of Fascist Italy, imposed on them in 1936.[[300]](#footnote-300)

Meanwhile the Germans didn’t know what to do with King Leopold III of Belgium and eventually decided to put him under a sort of house arrest in the palace of Laeken in Brussels. An incomparably worse surprise for Hitler was the joint counterattack of Norwegian, Polish and French forces at Narvik in Norway. The Allied troops amounted to some 25,000 people, who succeeded in expelling the Germans out of the city and in destroying the railway from Narvik to Sweden. Thus the export of iron ore from Sweden to Germany through Norway and the Norwegian Sea was interrupted for one year. On the other hand, though, the German and the Swedish navy reached an agreement for installing anti-submarine barrages at the entrance to the Baltic Sea by German experts in civilian clothes, who could work even in Swedish territorial waters.[[301]](#footnote-301)

Despite the success at Narvik Churchill became aware that France was about to fall and that Britain had to wage the war against Germany alone. This only encouraged him further to look for an understanding with Stalin. To that effect the Cabinet appointed a new ambassador to Moscow, namely Stafford Cripps, who belonged to the left wing of the Labour Party and who had distinguished himself by his pro-Soviet views. Only at a later stage did Churchill find out that the Soviet Communists hated the leftists even more than the Liberals and the Tories. The appointment of Cripps turned out to be a bad choice.[[302]](#footnote-302)

The fact was that Britain would by no means assist any future victim of Soviet aggression, and such an assistance could be expected even much less from Germany because of her alliance with Russia. Under these grim circumstances King Carol II of Romania summoned his premier Tatarescu, the foreign minister Gafencu and the palace minister Ernest Urdareanu. According to Tatarescu Romania had to abandon her neutrality and to start negotiations with Germany, because the Reich was the only power that could oppose the Russian claims, but Berlin had no motives to do it as long as Romania remained neutral. Gafencu rejected the idea, pointing out that Moscow and Berlin were friends and that Germany would intervene only if, in their resistance to a Soviet assault, the Romanians destroyed their oil fields. In his opinion, an abandonment of neutrality in favor of Germany would only accelerate the intervention of Russia. The King agreed with the views of Tatarescu about an orientation toward the Rome-Berlin Axis and Gafencu gave immediately his resignation. Carol II replaced him with Ion Gigurtu, who had close business contacts with the Germans.[[303]](#footnote-303)

The Nazi leadership was apparently confident in the control of Romania and the efforts of the German diplomacy were directed more toward the improvement relations between Russia and Italy. In the early morning of May 30 von Ribbentrop dispatched a telegram to the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenburg, reminding him that Mussolini had agreed to the mutual return of the respective ambassadors, with no further formalities, on one and the same day. Von Ribbentrop instructed von der Schulenburg to try to persuade Molotov to accept the idea.[[304]](#footnote-304)

Romania didn’t seem to be the immediate target of Stalin, at least for the time being, since Russia overloaded at this moment Lithuania with protests against the would-be abduction of a couple of “Red Army” soldiers, who had in fact run away from the barracks themselves in search of drinks and prostitutes. The Lithuanian government made everything possible to comply with these protests, but Molotov summoned to Moscow the Lithuanian premier Antanas Merkys to clear the misunderstandings.[[305]](#footnote-305)

The Baltic countries were and still are farther away from Sweden than Norway and for that obvious reason Stockholm was more concerned about Norway than about the sinister developments across the Baltic Sea. The recapture of Narvik by the Allied forces encouraged the Swedish foreign minister Günther to propose unofficially to the German minister zu Wied that Narvik and the surrounding area be proclaimed neutral zone. The Norwegians might retain their territory to the north of Narvik, whereas the German could control the territory to the south, while the neutrality of the Narvik strip could be guaranteed by Swedish troops.[[306]](#footnote-306)

Germany intended by no means to evade her obligations under the agreements with Russia for the partition of Europe, but in afternoon the “Wehrmacht” command had to observe helplessly how the British embarked at Dunkirk another 53,823 soldiers on the ships for England. Thus the successfully evacuated forces from continental Europe amounted to 126,606 persons in all, but there were only about 6,000 French among them. True enough, the heavy armament was left to the Germans, but the British command rightfully thought that the industry of the United Kingdom was bound to restore the losses, whereas the most important think was to save the life of the soldiers for the battles to come.[[307]](#footnote-307)

The upcoming collapse of France no doubt surprised Stalin, but apparently didn’t disturb him too much, since his foreign trade deputy minister Aleksey Krutikov came to Berlin and assured the Germans that the deliveries of copper, nickel and tin, scheduled by the bilateral trade agreement for the first twelve months, would be carried out in the next couple of days. As Krutikov added, this decision was due to the assumption of the Soviet leadership that Germany had an urgent need of these metals because of the increased military activity in the West.[[308]](#footnote-308)

This didn’t prevent Churchill from writing a personal letter to Stalin to be brought to Moscow by the newly appointed ambassador of the United Kingdom Stafford Cripps. In the letter the British Prime Minister tried to persuade the Russian dictator that Germany was striving for hegemony in Europe, which created a threat both to England and the Soviet Union. For this reason, continued Churchill, Britain and Russia had to agree on a joint self-defense policy against Germany with a view to the restoration of the European balance of power.[[309]](#footnote-309)

Churchill didn’t seem or rather didn’t want to know that Stalin was also planning to conquer Europe. However, even before Cripps left for his new appointment, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union issued an official declaration that Moscow would not receive him as an extraordinary envoy and wished to negotiate on the trade problems with the previous ambassador William Seeds or with the person that would replace the latter.[[310]](#footnote-310)

In the morning of May 31 Churchill flew to Paris for a new session of the joint Anglo-French Supreme War Council. He and the French premier Reynaud agreed that the Allied forces had to abandon Narvik in Northern Norway. In fact the British Prime Minister had accepted the plan of Stockholm for a neutral zone at Narvik under the control of Swedish troops. He reiterated that it was better to see a tragic end of the Western European civilization than to leave the two western democracies lagging behind, but the French vice-premier Pétain didn’t even bother to conceal his readiness for a separate armistice with Germany. Churchill stressed that Britain would continue to fight even without France.[[311]](#footnote-311)

At this very moment, though, the French divisions, defending Lille, had to hoist the white flag. Thus the Germans captured some 50,000 French, who had covered until then quite efficiently the evacuation at Dunkirk, where already as many as 194,620 soldiers had embarked for England. For his part Mussolini had written to Hitler that Italy intended to enter the war on June 5, but the Fuehrer urged him to postpone the action by three days. Eventually the Duce removed the date of his attack on France to June 10.[[312]](#footnote-312)

On June 1 the British minister to Athens Charles Palairet asked the Greek dictator General Ioannis Metaxas about his position as to a possible occupation of some Aegean islands by British and French troops, if Italy entered the war. Metaxas replied that he had already rejected the British guarantee for the sovereignty of Greece and that the Greeks would fight even for the smallest island or port. Somewhat later he made a similar declaration to the Italian minister Emmanuelle Grazi, who came to inquire him about the Greek reaction to a possible occupation of some Aegean islands by Italian troops.[[313]](#footnote-313)

Hitler apparently did not expect from Italy a serious war capacity, but his experts were already working out vast plans for the future economic order in Europe and even in the world. According to these plans the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Norway and Denmark had to enter into a customs and currency union with Germany, based on a “*planned economy*”. Bohemia, Moravia and Poland were to be an integral part of Germany proper, while Hungary and the Balkan countries had been already incorporated in the greater German economic area, since Germany took between 50 to 70 per cent of their exports and imports. Sweden, Finland, Lithuania. Latvia and Estonia had to be “integrated” in a similar way. As for Russia and Italy, Germany had to develop close trade relations with these two powers, but the final goal of the German economic space, including a restored and broadened colonial empire in Africa, was autarky, namely an economy that would rely entirely on its own resources without any significant trade relations with the outside world.[[314]](#footnote-314)

Russia and Italy were considered, therefore, partners rather than parts of the German economic area, while Hitler kept on appreciating the two powers as allies and acted accordingly. On June 2 the German minister to Bucharest Fabricius responded to the Romanian soundings about improving relations with the Reich by declaring that Germany was prepared to work for a closer relationship with Romania provided that the Romanian government took into consideration possible revision demands by the neighboring countries. Fabricius explicitly specified that Berlin had in mind the Russian claims on Bessarabia.

**III.THE PARTITION OF EUROPE**

They are all gone out

of the way, they are

together become

unprofitable;

there is none that

doeth good, no, not one.

(Rom. 3: 12)

**IV.STALIN AND THE THREE-POWER PACT**

Their throat is

an open sepulcher;

with their tongues

they have used deceit;

the poison of asps is

under their lips.

(Rom. 3: 13)

**V.WHO/WHOM?**

Their feet are swift

to shed blood…

(Rom. 3: 15)

**CONSLUSIONS AND LESSONS**

However, we speak wisdom

among them that are perfect;

yet not the wisdom of this

age, nor of the princes of

this age, that come to nothing;

But we speak the wisdom

of God in a mystery,

even the hidden wisdom,

which God ordained before

the ages unto our glory…

(1 Cor. 2: 6-7)

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