

6

Soviet security or spreading revolution? Soviet foreign policy 1921-39

According to the orthodox Marxist view, revolution in the advanced states of Europe was essential for the success of the revolution in the USSR and, in March 1919, the Bolsheviks formed the Communist International – the Comintern – to help to produce this. The hostility of Western capitalist countries to the new Bolshevik regime and its Communist ideology was confirmed by their intervention in the Civil War. The Bolsheviks won the Civil War but found themselves engaged in a war with the Poles. By July 1920, however, the Polish army was in full retreat and Lenin realised this was an opportunity to spread the revolution. Lenin ordered the Red Army to pursue the Poles and then advance into Germany to encourage workers to rise up as part of the European-wide socialist revolution. But the Red Army was defeated and all attempts at revolution in Germany and Hungary collapsed.

The USSR now had to face up to being the only Communist nation in the world. Moreover, the draining experience of war, revolution and civil war had left the Soviet Union very vulnerable and in desperate need of economic help and consolidation. This presented the Bolshevik government with a serious foreign policy dilemma. How could it:

- a) work to undermine capitalist governments?
- b) achieve stable working diplomatic relations with them?

In this section, Chapter 15 examines the developments in Soviet foreign policy between 1921 and 1933 and Chapter 16 looks at the Soviet reaction to the aggressive policies of Hitler, who had strong anti-Communist views. It asks why the Soviet Union came to terms with Hitler and signed a non-aggression pact with Germany at the end of the 1930s.

SOURCE 1 A Communist cartoon of 1920. The caption reads 'Comrade Lenin cleans the world of filth'



SOURCE 2 Lenin, February 1921

We have always and repeatedly pointed out to the workers that the underlying chief task and basic condition of our victory is the propagation of revolution at least to several of the more advanced countries.

SOURCE 3 Lenin explaining why the Soviet Union was attending the international conference at Genoa in 1922

We go to it because trade with capitalist countries (so long as they have not altogether collapsed) is unconditionally necessary for us.

SOURCE 4 Trotsky, 1930

The way out lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the internal chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite declines and ebbs.

SOURCE 5 Litvinov (Commissar for Foreign Affairs), December 1933

The ensuring of peace cannot depend on our efforts alone, it requires the collaboration and co-operation of other states. While therefore trying to establish and maintain relations with all states, we are giving special attention to strengthening and making close our relations with those which, like us, give proof of their sincere desire to maintain peace and are ready to resist those who break the peace.

SOURCE 6 Stalin, speaking at the Seventeenth Party Congress, 1934

The USSR would never be swayed by alliances with this or that foreign power, be it France, Poland or Germany, but would always base her policy on self-interest.

SOURCE 7 Molotov (Commissar for Foreign Affairs), January 1936

We toilers of the Soviet Union must count on our own efforts in defending our affairs and, above all, on our Red Army in the defence of our country.

ACTIVITY**What were the aims of Soviet foreign policy?**

- 1 Study Sources 1-10. On your own copy of the table below, indicate which sources provide evidence of:
- the desire to spread revolution
 - attempts to establish working relationships with other countries
 - the desire to protect the Soviet Union's interests and ensure it could defend itself.

Source	Date	Desire to spread revolution	Establishment of working relationships	Defence of Soviet interests

- 2 What do these sources suggest about changes in Soviet foreign policy between 1920 and 1939?
- 3 Which events in Chart A on page 241 provide evidence to support your conclusions about changes in Soviet foreign policy?

SOURCE 8 Litvinov, May 1938, to the Director General of the Czech Foreign Office, comparing the situation with 1914-17

This time we shall observe the contest between Germany and the Western powers and shall not intervene in the conflict until we ourselves feel it fit to do so in order to bring about the decision.

SOURCE 9 Stalin at the Eighteenth Party Congress, March 1939

England and France have rejected the policy of collective security... and taken a position of non-intervention... the policy of non-intervention reveals an eagerness not to hinder Germany... from embroiling herself in a war with the Soviet Union...

... Be cautious and [do] not allow Soviet Russia to be drawn into the conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire.



SOURCE 10 The front page of a German weekly magazine, published after the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression treaty of 23 August 1939. It shows Stalin shaking hands with Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister

A Timeline of Soviet foreign policy, 1917-39**PHASE ONE**

October 1917
February 1918
March 1918

Extricating Russia from the war: October 1917-March 1918

Decree on Peace
Bolshevik cancellation of foreign debts
Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

PHASE TWO

April 1918
September 1919
March 1919

The Civil War: 1918-20

Foreign intervention in the Civil War

Comintern (Third Communist International) set up to guide, co-ordinate and promote the Communist parties of the world.

April-October 1920

Russo-Polish war. Attempt to spread world revolution by arms defeated outside Warsaw in August.

July 1920

Second Congress of Comintern - laid on other Communist parties the overriding duty to protect the USSR.

PHASE THREE

1921

The need for recovery and peace: 1921-27

Secret discussions with Germany on military and economic co-operation.
Anglo-Soviet trade agreement.

1922

Rapallo agreement with Germany - the two countries recognise each other diplomatically. Secret military co-operation.

1923

Soviets agree to the Curzon ultimatum (Curzon was British Foreign Secretary).

1924

Official recognition of USSR by Britain, France and Italy.
'Zinoviev letter' published in *The Times* newspaper in Britain.

1926

Treaty of Berlin with Germany extends the Treaty of Rapallo.

1927

Diplomatic relations between Britain and the USSR suspended (restored by Ramsay MacDonald in 1929).

PHASE FOUR

1928

The left turn of the Comintern: 1928-33

New, more radical Comintern line. Social Democrats (SPD) in Germany attacked as 'social fascists'. Foreign Communist party leaders suspected of following a line of their own are expelled from the Comintern and discredited. They are replaced by leaders obedient to Moscow.
War scares: propaganda stressed the imminent danger of invasion.

1928-32

Rise in economic and military collaboration between the USSR and Germany.

PHASE FIVE

March 1934

Collective security against fascism: 1934-39

Trade agreement with Germany.

September 1934

Soviet entry into the League of Nations. Litvinov promotes a 'collective security' policy.

May 1935

Pacts with France and Czechoslovakia.

August 1935

Reversal of policy by the Comintern: now supports popular fronts.

1936-39

Soviet Union intervenes in Spanish Civil War.

November 1936

Anti-Comintern Pact involving Germany and Japan and, a year later, Italy.

September 1938

Munich agreement, Soviet Union excluded.

1938-39

Japanese attacks on Soviet territory in the Far East.

April 1939

Litvinov proposes a triple military alliance between the Soviet Union, Britain and France.

May 1939

Molotov replaces Litvinov as Commissar for Foreign Affairs.

PHASE SIX

August 1939

The Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939

Soviet-Anglo-French talks in Moscow.

23 August

Ribbentrop and Molotov sign the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact and a secret protocol dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence.
(See the separate timeline - Chart 16E on page 262 - for the events leading to the pact of 1939.)

THE THIRD COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

The Comintern is described as the 'Third Communist International' because two previous organisations had been set up to encourage the spread of socialist ideas. The first was set up by Karl Marx in London in 1864 but was so riven by disputes that it soon fell apart. The second was a much looser association set up in Paris in 1889. It held international conferences to discuss Marxist theory but ceased to meet after the outbreak of the First World War.

FOCUS ROUTE

Note the differences between the three commissars under the following headings:

- background and experience of foreign countries
- status in the party
- attitude to Germany
- other policy differences.

**G. V. CHICHERIN (1872-1936)**

Foreign Commissar April 1918-July 1930

An ex-Menshevik and an aristocrat by birth, Chicherin was a highly educated but rather emotional, chaotic man. He had been employed by the tsarist foreign ministry and had extensive experience working abroad. He was in jail in Britain from August 1917 to January 1918. Lenin described him as 'an excellent worker, extremely conscientious, intelligent and learned'. He was not a member of the Politburo.

The policies he is identified with

- He always favoured close relations with Germany and helped to bring about the Treaty of Rapallo.
- He was anti-British.
- Like Lenin, he believed that the USSR was most secure when the capitalist powers were disunited, and that if the USSR were involved in, rather than isolated from, the system of capitalist international relations then this would be more likely to occur. So he pursued a policy of peaceful coexistence.

M. M. LITVINOV (1876-1951)

Foreign Commissar July 1930-May 1939 (Deputy Commissar 1921-30 and 1941-46)

Litvinov was an ex-Menshevik, with a Jewish background. He had spent a long time abroad, including ten years in Britain; his wife was British. He was an exceptionally talented negotiator and very good at establishing friendly relations with statesmen and opinion leaders in the democracies; a model of organisation. His influence was restricted to foreign affairs: he was not a member of the Politburo.

The policies he is identified with

- He believed that preventing all wars was in the USSR's interest. Unlike Chicherin, he favoured disarmament and signing the Kellogg Pact to outlaw war. He was a familiar figure at Geneva once the USSR had joined the League of Nations.
- He was pro-British and deeply suspicious of Germany, even in the 1920s; and he only grudgingly accepted the Treaty of Rapallo.
- He favoured collective security against fascism.

**V. M. MOLOTOV (1890-1986)**

Foreign Commissar May 1939-March 1949

Molotov means hammer, quite an apt name. A Bolshevik from his youth, he was never exiled abroad and had no direct experience of the world outside Russia. A member of the Politburo from 1925 (unlike Chicherin and Litvinov), he was made leader of the Comintern in 1929. He became Stalin's deputy and together they signed many death sentences during the purges. Trotsky called Molotov a 'blockhead' and other colleagues referred to him as 'stone arse' but he did exert some influence over Stalin in foreign policy and has been called 'one of the toughest negotiators of the twentieth century'. His appointment as Commissar (replacing the anti-German Litvinov) in May 1939 has been seen as sending out an encouraging signal to Germany.

The policies he is identified with

He favoured improved relations with Germany. The Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 is often referred to as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

■ **B Commissars for Foreign Affairs**

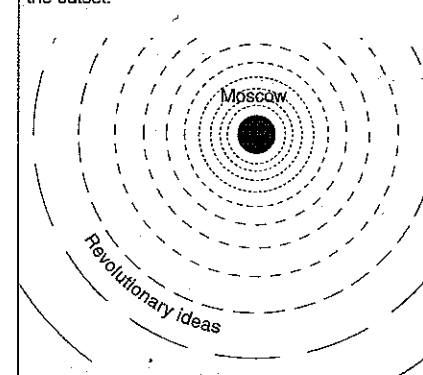
Lenin kept foreign policy very much in his own hands. As in the 1930s under Stalin, the leader and the Politburo made the crucial decisions. However, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs worked out the style and delivery of policy.

■ **C Factors that helped to determine Soviet foreign policy during the inter-war years**

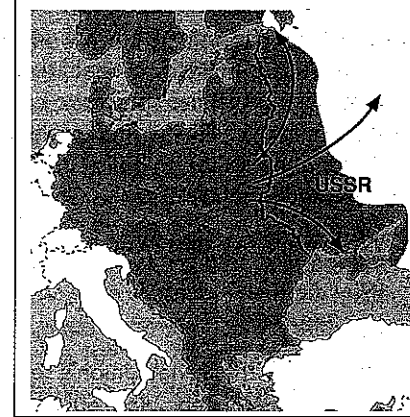
When politicians make foreign policy, they are influenced by a number of different factors. For any given country, some factors are relatively constant while others vary according to the individuals involved and the circumstances in which they were operating. Here are some of the factors influencing Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s.

Ideology

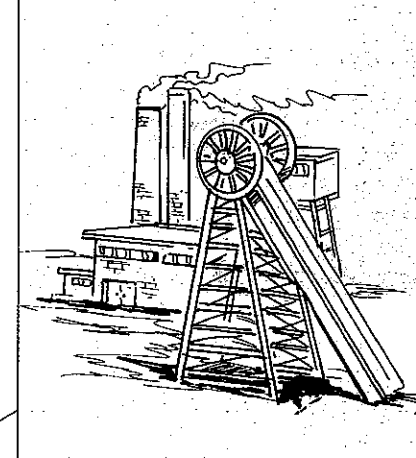
Orthodox Marxism stressed the need for revolution in other countries if socialism was to survive in the USSR. The USSR's desire to spread the revolution both at home and abroad threatened the West. Ideological differences did not rule out normal diplomacy, but they did provide the basis for mistrust. The existence of the Comintern and foreign intervention in the Civil War produced mistrust from the outset.

**Security - fear of invasion**

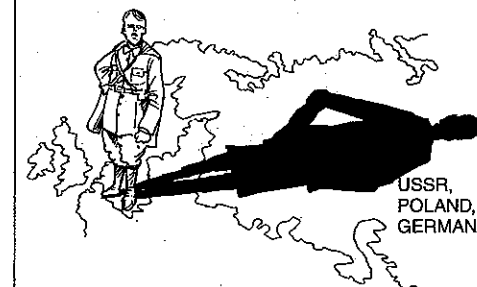
Worries about security were increased by Russia's geography. Its frontier in the north-west and west was 3200 km long and lacked natural boundaries. As the only Communist state it was not unnatural for the Russians to fear invasion by the capitalist states. The list of invaders of Russia over the previous 800 years read like a Who's Who of military aggression and was referred to by Stalin to justify the need for rapid industrialisation under the Five-Year Plans.

**Economic backwardness**

Soviet leaders were well aware of the perceived and actual technological inferiority of the Soviet state and the need for Western technological help in building Soviet industry.

**FACTORS DETERMINING SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE INTER-WAR YEARS****Attitudes of other countries**

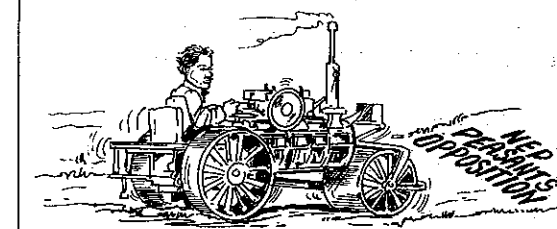
Not even the most powerful country can make policy totally uninfluenced by the actions of other countries. Foreign intervention in the Civil War left a legacy of suspicion, and the rise of Hitler and the failure of the British and French to act against him could not be ignored.

**The background and views of those making Soviet policy**

The leaders of the country - Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin - and their Commissars for Foreign Affairs - Chicherin, Litvinov and Molotov - had an influence on policy.

**The internal situation**

At any given time, the internal situation was bound to impact on foreign policy. Thus the state of the country at the end of the Civil War, the power struggle to succeed Lenin, the Five-Year Plans and collectivisation all had an influence on foreign policy.



FOCUS ROUTE

Which of the factors in Chart C do you think was most important in influencing Soviet foreign policy between 1920 and 1939? Place the factors in order of importance.

We will revisit your decisions at the end of the section.

Alone in a hostile world: how did Soviet foreign policy develop between 1921 and 1933?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In March 1919, the Comintern was set up to promote world revolution. But the Soviet Union also needed to establish diplomatic relations with countries in the capitalist world. At times these two contradictory aims led to problems as policies on foreign affairs collided with the objectives of the Comintern. In this chapter we look at the aims of foreign policy in the 1920s, especially in relation to Britain and Germany, and at the role of the Comintern.

- A** What were the aims of Soviet foreign policy under Lenin? (p. 245)
- B** Why did the Comintern exist and what problems did it present? (pp. 246–247)
- C** What were the Soviet Union's relations with Britain and Germany between 1921 and 1933? (pp. 248–250)
- D** How did Stalin change Soviet foreign policy between 1924 and 1932? (pp. 251–252)
- E** Review: What was achieved in Soviet foreign policy between 1921 and 1933? (p. 253)

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes in answer to the following questions:

- 1 What were Lenin's aims and what changes in policy did he make?
- 2 What evidence is there of the tension between the desire to spread revolution and the demands of political realism?
- 3 How did the Bolsheviks adapt their foreign policy to changing circumstances?

A What were the aims of Soviet foreign policy under Lenin?

In the new Bolshevik government, Trotsky was made Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Initially, the Bolsheviks saw this as a minor post and Trotsky chose it to give himself more time for party work. But he was soon embroiled in difficult peace negotiations. Taking Russia out of the First World War had been a major Bolshevik pledge and the Decree on Peace, which called for an immediate truce and a just peace, was issued as early as 26 October 1917. But it brought no response from the major powers fighting the war. So a separate peace had to be made with Germany and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed on Lenin's insistence (see page 75). In no sphere of policy was Lenin's leadership more decisive and discernible than in foreign affairs. Over Brest-Litovsk he showed a much clearer understanding of the realities of 1918 than Trotsky with his policy of 'neither peace nor war' or Bukharin with his impractical idea of transforming the war into a revolutionary war.

Hopes of world revolution were put on hold as the Bolsheviks fought for their survival in the Civil War. Nevertheless, Lenin was confident that the revolution would spread. He told the first meeting of the Comintern that 'the victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is assured, the founding of an international Soviet republic is on the way'. The opposite appeared to be true when foreign governments intervened on behalf of the Whites in the Civil War, but their intervention did not have a major impact on the outcome of the war. It even helped the Bolsheviks insofar as it allowed them to brand the Whites as agents of foreign imperialists.

In 1920 the Poles, hoping to gain territory, invaded Russia but the Red Army drove the Polish army back (see Chart 6D on page 84). Lenin saw the chance to use Poland as 'the red bridge into Europe' and for Russia to aid the expected revolution in Germany. It did not happen. The failure to take Warsaw was one of the major disappointments of his life. The decision to carry on the fight after the Poles had been chased out of Russia was very much his own, against the wishes of the majority of his colleagues, and although Lenin had to admit that the policy had failed he never admitted that it was wrong.

The realisation that the Poles had fought against the Red Army invaders rather than rising with them to embrace the revolution forced Lenin to accept reluctantly that peaceful coexistence rather than spreading revolution was the only option in Europe for some time. Lenin was ever the pragmatist and ready to adapt policy to changing situations. Alone in a hostile world, the Soviet Union was vulnerable to attack and Lenin sought to counter this. His main aim was to divide the imperialist countries and prevent them from forming a capitalist bloc against Soviet Russia. He worked on exploiting the differences between them. He made moves towards Germany, another outcast nation, which resulted in the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 (see page 249). He used conventional diplomacy to begin negotiating a trade agreement with Britain in 1921 (see page 248). However, establishing foreign relationships through diplomacy was complicated by the existence of the Comintern.

■ Learning trouble spot

Bolshevik objectives

It can be difficult to work out the objectives of the Bolsheviks in this period because they were contradictory. Lenin, interested in survival, was willing to compromise in conventional diplomacy but, as Beryl Williams makes clear in her book *Lenin* (2000, page 171), 'Peaceful coexistence [for Lenin] was a means to an end ... the goal remained a European, indeed a world Communist state'. So although the Bolsheviks were prepared to work within the normal diplomatic framework, they hoped that they would be able to foment revolution in other countries through the Comintern.

FOCUS ROUTE

Note your answers to the following questions:

- 1 What was the Comintern?
- 2 What happened at the second Congress and with what result?
- 3 What problems did the Comintern cause?

SOURCE 15.1 'Workers of the world unite!': the title page of *The Communist International*, a pamphlet published in Moscow in May 1919 and printed in several languages



SOURCE 15.2 A propaganda poster produced in Germany in 1919 by the Association for the Fight Against Bolshevism. The association was formed with support from the government and businesses to counter the threat of revolutionary influences on Germany



B Why did the Comintern exist and what problems did it present?

In January 1919, when the revolutionary wave in Europe was at its peak, Lenin had called for an international congress of revolutionary socialists. In March 1919, a motley collection from 35 groups did meet in Moscow and the Comintern – the Communist International – was formed. The Comintern appealed at its first meeting to the workers of all countries to support the Soviet regime by all available means, including, if necessary, 'revolutionary means'. Such an appeal was likely to fuel fears in Western Europe, as the German propaganda poster (Source 15.2) shows. Winston Churchill, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1924 and fiercely anti-Communist, voiced these fears: 'From the earliest moment of its birth the Russian Bolshevik Government has declared its intention of using all the power of the Russian Empire to promote world revolution. Their agents have penetrated into every country. Everywhere they have endeavoured to bring into being the "germ cells" from which the cause of Communism should grow.' His fears were shared by many others but, as Chart 15A on page 247 shows, attempts to stir up revolution in Europe were singularly unsuccessful.

The failure of revolutionary attempts in Berlin and Munich and of Bela Kun's Soviet Republic in Hungary, which lasted less than four months, demonstrated to Lenin that success could only be achieved if foreign Communist parties adopted the Bolshevik model. The second international congress organised by the Comintern in 1920 was a much larger affair than the first. It was highly stage-managed and designed to impress the delegates, who came from 41 countries. It took place as the Red Army moved towards Warsaw. One of its main aims was to bring foreign Communist parties under Comintern control. Twenty-one conditions were drawn up for membership of the Comintern, including the following:

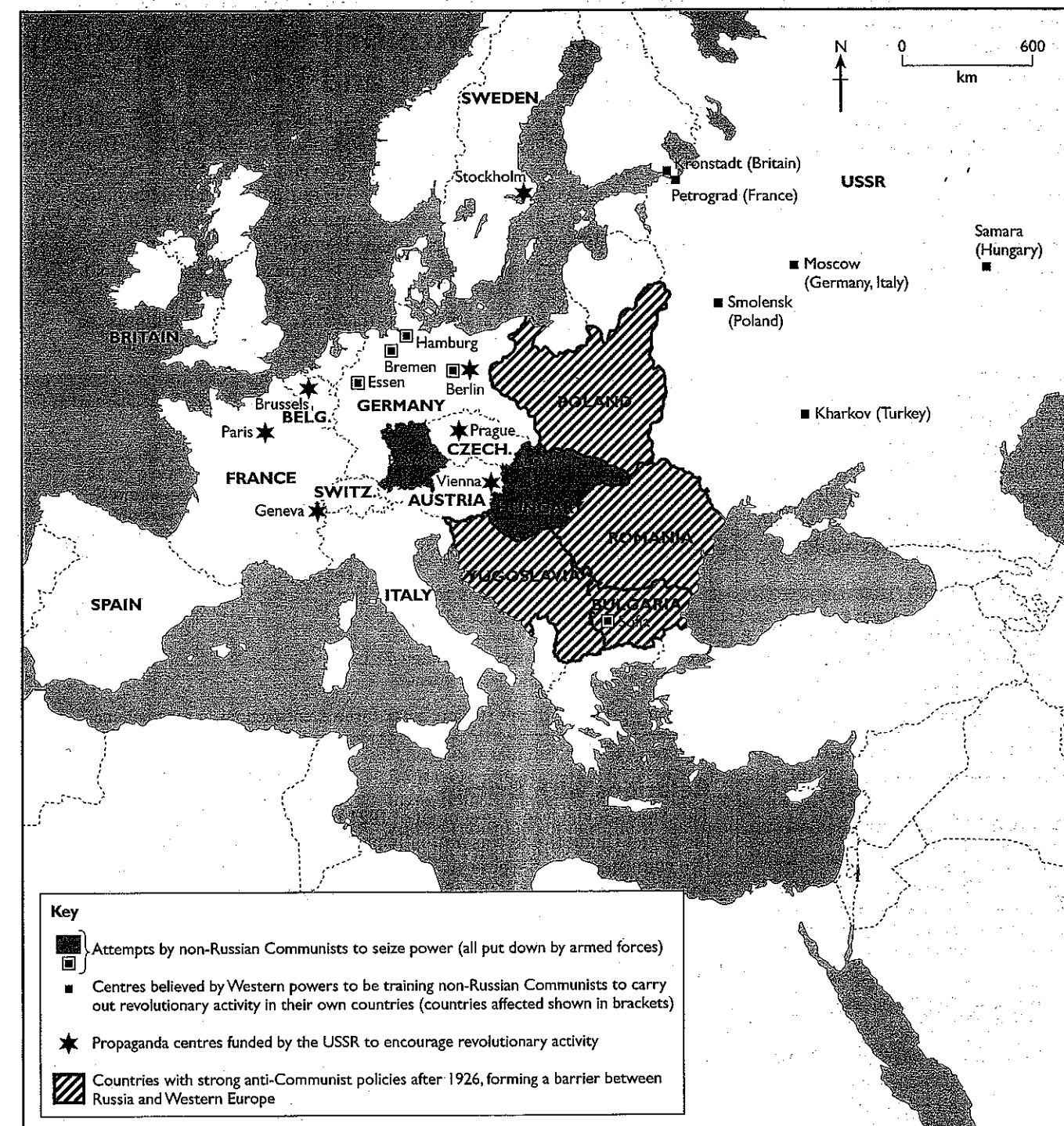
- Communist parties had to be organised on Leninist principles of centralisation and discipline. (The British and Spanish delegates had demanded freedom of action for their Communist parties but it was not granted.)
- Parties had to prepare for civil war by establishing an underground organisation, by spreading revolutionary propaganda among the proletariat, peasantry and armed forces, and by setting up cells in trade unions and other worker organisations.
- Party programmes had to be approved by the Comintern; disobedience could mean expulsion.

This policy was understandable but it had two very important and damaging results:

- 1 Moscow insisted upon centralised control and discipline and made the national security of the USSR the top priority for all Communist parties in other countries. But this reduced the appeal of the Communist Party to the rank and file of workers in other countries and so party membership and influence declined everywhere in Europe.
- 2 The stated intentions of the Comintern – its threatening language and its aggressive ideology – and the financial support (real and imagined) it gave to its members seriously weakened the Soviet Union's chances of achieving reliable and stable commercial and diplomatic relations with the European countries.

Throughout his time in office, Chicherin petitioned the Politburo to separate the personnel, policies and activities of the Comintern from those of the Soviet government. In practice this did not happen. Key players like Zinoviev, Trotsky and Bukharin were all involved in the Comintern at different times and they could not be ignored. Any embassy was likely to contain an official whose main duty was Comintern matters and liaison with local Communists.

15A The failure of attempts to spread Communism



TALKING POINT

Was the Comintern more of a hindrance than a help to the USSR by 1925?

Here are two examples of how the activities of the Comintern damaged diplomatic relations with Britain.

- In 1923, the British Foreign Secretary, Curzon, infuriated by the activities of Soviet agents in Persia, Afghanistan and India, threatened to cancel the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of 1921 unless the Soviets abandoned these activities. The Soviets agreed to the 'Curzon ultimatum'.
- In 1924, the 'Zinoviev letter' – a letter supposedly from the Comintern to the British Communist Party instructing the latter to conduct propaganda in the armed forces and elsewhere – was published just before the British general election. It was a forgery, but it indicated how British opinion perceived the threat presented by the Comintern. The new Conservative government virtually suspended all dealings with the Soviet government throughout 1925.

■ Learning trouble spot

Britain's importance in the post-war years

In the 1920s and 1930s, Britain still had a huge empire 'on which the sun never set'. Britain was very much the major player on the world stage because the USA was pursuing an isolationist policy. Germany and the USSR took time recovering from war and the political turmoil of revolutions in 1917 and 1918 respectively; France was traumatised by the war which had been fought on its soil. Significantly, the Soviets considered Britain with its empire to be the centre of the capitalist world order and their main enemy. They made Britain a target for diplomatic recognition because it was an important country. If the USSR could establish relations with Britain, other countries would follow.

BRITISH GOVERNMENTS

- 1918-19 Coalition government led by Lloyd George (dominated by the Conservatives)
 - 1922-23 Conservative government
 - 1924 First Labour government (a minority government led by MacDonald)
 - 1924-29 Conservative government led by Baldwin
 - 1929-31 Second Labour minority government led by MacDonald
 - 1931-39 National governments all dominated by the Conservatives and led successively by MacDonald, Baldwin and Chamberlain
- Note: All Conservative dominated governments had large majorities in parliament.

C What were the Soviet Union's relations with Britain and Germany between 1921 and 1933?

Soviet Russia could not afford to remain isolated. It needed to trade with other countries and to bring in capital goods to help to revive its industry. There were also all sorts of other matters, such as the movement of people in and out of Russia, which needed to be sorted out by the normal round of diplomatic relations. These matters were handled largely by men working in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs who had some diplomatic experience, like Chicherin, or by the new intake who soon became specialists in the field. There was often tension between these men and the revolutionary agitators working for the Comintern. What progress was made by conventional diplomacy?

FOCUS ROUTE

Draw a table with four columns and these headings:

Moves that strengthened/maintained relations with Britain 1921-33	Moves that weakened relations with Britain	Moves that strengthened/maintained relations with Germany 1921-33	Moves that weakened relations with Germany

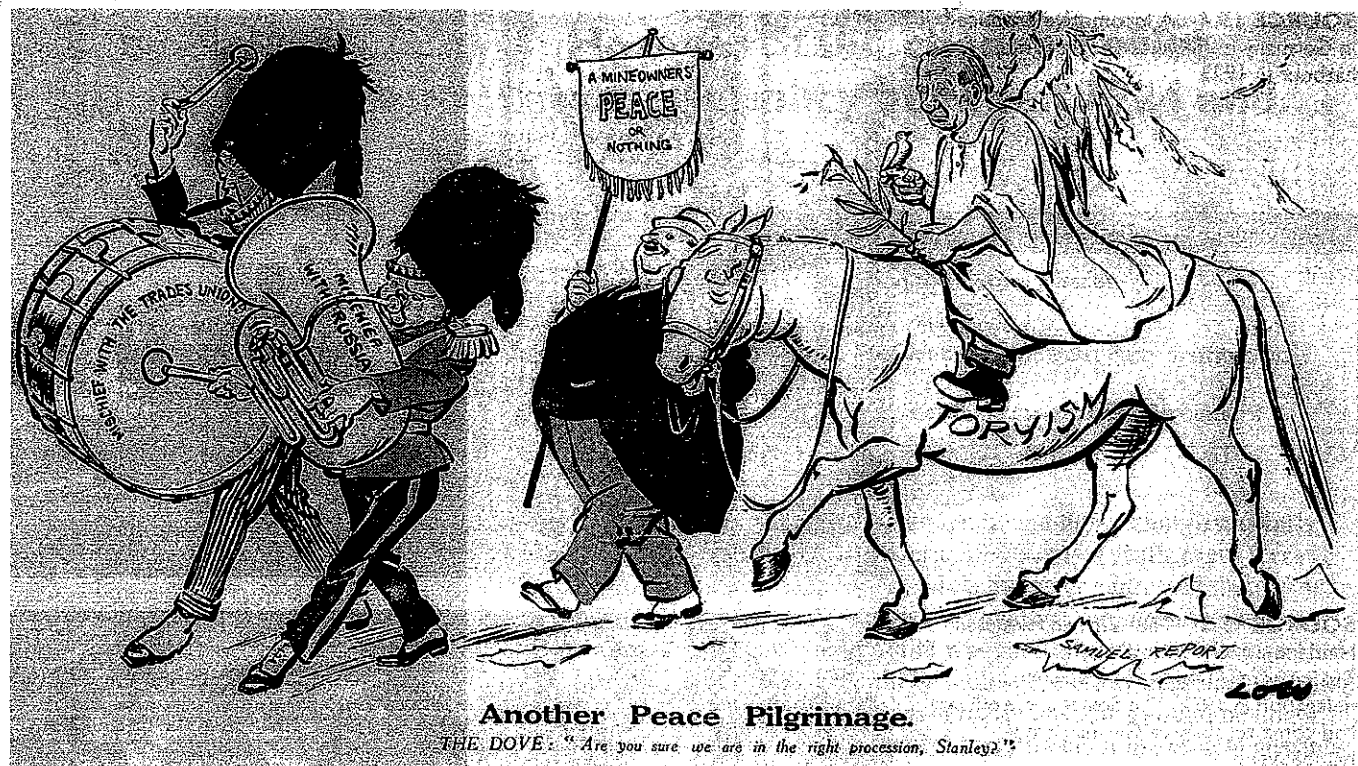
As you work through this section, enter three events/actions in each column.

Relations with Britain

The Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of 1921 marked the first positive contact with the Soviet Union (trade was mutually profitable) although relations between the two countries were never easy. The Conservatives dominated British governments for most of the 1920s and 1930s and were particularly suspicious of Soviet activity in Britain and the empire. This was illustrated by Curzon's ultimatum in 1923 (see page 247).

Diplomatic relations were strained in 1926 by what the British government saw as subversive Soviet behaviour during the General Strike. The Soviet leadership saw the strike as a political act and the beginning of a proletarian revolution (they now thought Britain the most likely candidate for revolution). In reality, it was a dispute about wages. The Russian Central Council of Trade Unions sent a cheque for £26,000 (a considerable sum) to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the national leadership of the trade unions. The TUC leadership sent it back to prevent the British government from claiming that they were in the pay of the Bolsheviks. All that Soviet policy had achieved was to encourage anti-Soviet die-hards in Britain. In 1927, the police mounted a full-scale raid on the premises of the Russian trade mission in London, which was suspected of being the centre of a Soviet spy ring. Known as the Arcos raid, it led to the breaking off of diplomatic relations.

Although it was Ramsay MacDonald's Labour governments which first recognised the USSR in 1924 and restored relations in 1929, historians have seen the very moderate Labour Party leadership as a major barrier to the spread of Communism in Britain.



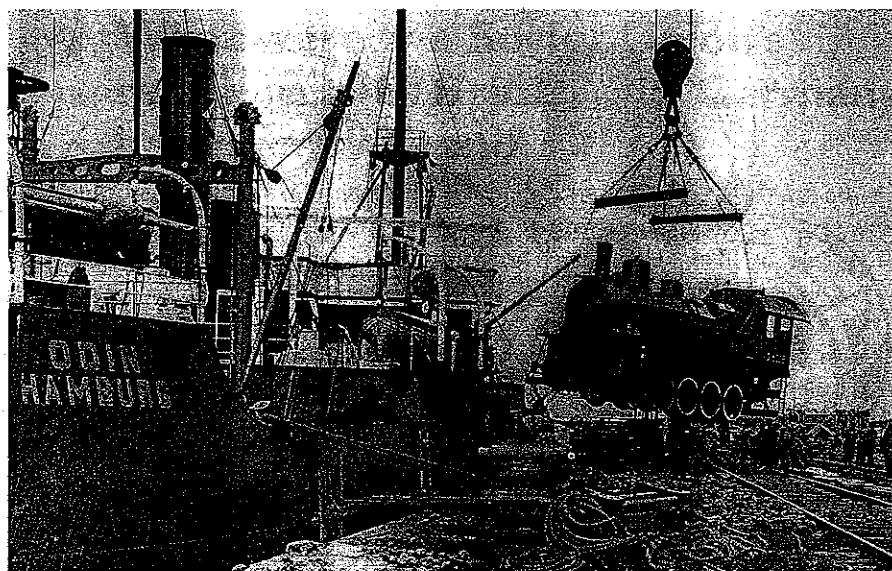
SOURCE 15.3 A Low cartoon on the General Strike, published in the *Star*, 24 June 1926. The strike, which lasted for nine days in May 1926, was the culmination of bitter industrial disputes in the coal industry. Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister (riding the horse), was more conciliatory towards the strikers than other Conservatives, such as Winston Churchill (blowing the tuba)

Relations with Germany

It has been said that Germany and the USSR were natural allies in the 1920s. Both were outcast nations: Germany because it had been defeated in and blamed for the First World War, the USSR because of its Communist ideology and its refusal to support the Western powers in the First World War. The Rapallo Treaty of 1922 between the two countries was central to the Soviet Union's security. Although on paper it amounted to no more than the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, a renunciation of financial claims on each side and a promise of economic co-operation, it ended the isolation that both countries were experiencing. In the years that followed, it was underpinned by significant economic and military collaboration. In spite of the tensions caused by the activities of the Comintern, especially its involvement in Communist risings in Germany in 1921 and 1923 (in 1921, the Comintern spent 62 million marks and, in 1922, 47 million marks preparing for revolution in Germany, at a time of great hunger in Russia), co-operation was mutually beneficial (see Chart 15B on page 250).

After 1923 the chances of a Communist rising in Germany faded, removing the cause of tension between the two countries. However, in 1925 the Locarno treaties (a set of treaties between Western powers, which guaranteed the existing frontiers of Western Europe) indicated better relations between Germany, Britain and France. This worried Russia: would Locarno reintegrate Germany into the Western world and isolate the USSR? As a result, a whole clutch of trade treaties were signed between Germany and Russia on the eve of Locarno to reassure the Soviets. The Treaty of Berlin, signed in 1926, the same year that Germany joined the League of Nations, had the same purpose. It reaffirmed the terms of the Treaty of Rapallo and was to remain in force for five years. The USSR and Germany pledged neutrality if either were attacked by another power and Germany agreed to abstain from any League of Nation's trade or financial boycott of the USSR. Militarily and economically, though not politically, ties between the two countries grew stronger.

SOURCE 15.4 A locomotive produced in Germany is unloaded in Petrograd harbour in 1922



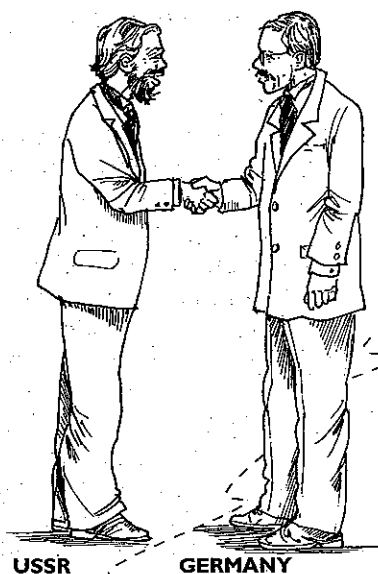
SOURCE 15.5 The German President, Hindenburg, welcomes Marshal Tukhachevsky (right) and a Soviet delegation in 1932. The Soviet army officers had come to observe German army manoeuvres



15B Advantages of mutual co-operation between the USSR and Germany, 1922–32

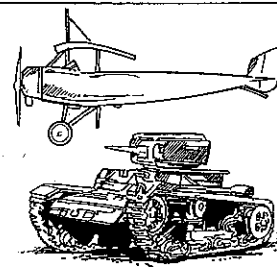
Diplomatic advantages

Both ceased to be isolated outcasts. The USSR avoided the nightmare prospect of capitalist countries combining against it and Germany strengthened its bargaining position with Britain and France.



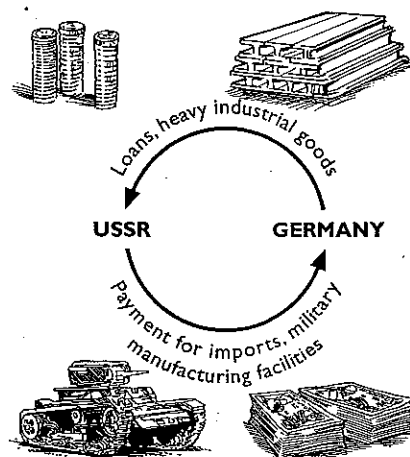
Military co-operation

German officers trained the Red Army in tank warfare and military aviation. The German army was able to train and experiment with weapons forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles – especially tanks, aircraft and gas. Co-operation reached its high point at the beginning of the 1930s.



Economic co-operation

Germany was the only major country to make significant long-term loans to the USSR. German financial and technical help was important during the NEP and the First Five-Year Plan. The USSR supplied markets for German heavy industry. By 1932, 47 per cent of total Russian imports came from Germany. German firms in the USSR manufactured guns, shells, aircraft and tanks.



D How did Stalin change Soviet foreign policy between 1924 and 1932?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes to prepare for a discussion on the following issues:

- 1 How did Stalin and Trotsky differ on foreign policy?
- 2 How does Stalin's policy towards the Chinese Communist Party illustrate his attitude towards foreign Communists?
- 3 How did internal concerns shape Stalin's attitude towards the Comintern?

Stalin was not internationally minded like Lenin and he was not particularly interested in the activities of the Comintern. After Lenin's death, there were only three more Comintern congresses and Stalin never addressed them. The reason for this was that Stalin did not believe that the Comintern would bring about a revolution, even in 90 years. Stalin was committed to 'Socialism In One Country' – the idea that socialism could be built successfully in the Soviet Union without the necessity for revolution elsewhere. He thought it would be utter folly to risk the socialist transformation of Soviet Russia for the sake of possible revolution abroad. He dismissed the potential of foreign Communists to achieve revolutionary change. In his view, 'One Soviet tractor is worth ten good foreign Communists.'

This policy line brought splits in the party over foreign affairs for the first time since the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Many sided with Trotsky and his idea of 'Permanent Revolution'. Trotsky believed that revolution could not survive long in one country. Only when revolution had spread to Western Europe could socialism be established. If it did not spread it would, in time, succumb to a conservative Europe or be undermined by Russian backwardness. Trotsky and his supporters were alarmed by the way Stalin was sidelining the Comintern. Trotsky argued that under Stalin foreign Communist parties changed from being 'vanguards of world revolution' to the more or less pacifist 'frontier guards' of Soviet Russia.

Stalin, it seemed, was changing the focus of the Comintern from promoting world revolution to protecting the interests of the Soviet state. Nowhere is this clearer than in his policy towards the Communist Party in China, a policy bitterly attacked by Trotsky.

Why didn't Stalin support the Communists in China?

In 1911, there had been a revolution in China which resulted in the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty. A lengthy period of confusion followed with individual warlords controlling much of China. During this time, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) was founded in 1921 with Soviet assistance. The policy of supporting a united anti-warlord front in China had been put forward by Lenin and backed by the Comintern. The CPC was to join the Guomindang (GMD), the Chinese Nationalists, as a 'bloc within'. The Nationalists represented the Chinese bourgeoisie. In 1925, Chiang Kai-shek, who had received military training in Moscow, became the leader of the GMD. Chiang sharply reduced the influence of the CPC within the GMD and showed strong anti-Communist tendencies. But Stalin continued to give Chiang Kai-shek military support. He thought that the Chinese Communists were too few to achieve anything on their own and needed to work with the Nationalists to bring about revolutionary change – the proletarian revolution would have to wait. He hoped that a Nationalist government would be a friend to Soviet Russia.

Then, in April 1927, Chiang struck. He massacred between thirty and forty thousand Communists and workers in Shanghai. Only a week before, Stalin had boasted at a party meeting that 'We [will] use the Chinese bourgeoisie and throw it away like a squeezed lemon.' Chiang had beaten Stalin at his own game. The policy had failed and the CPC under Mao Zedong adopted an independent policy. Trotsky, who had earlier criticised Stalin's China policy, felt that the massacres justified his attack on Stalin as the 'grave digger of the revolution'.

How did the Comintern change?

The leadership of the Comintern reflected the situation in the Soviet Union. Zinoviev was president from 1919 to 1926. When the United Opposition – Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev – was defeated, Bukharin, Stalin's ally, succeeded Zinoviev. When Bukharin in turn was forced out, the loyal Stalinist Molotov succeeded him.

Similarly, the leadership of foreign Communist parties reflected Moscow's preoccupations. Working-class leaders were seen as less trouble than intellectuals, and so Thaelmann (Germany), Thorez (France) and Pollitt (Britain) became leaders of their national parties. In 1928, following a financial scandal, the German party decided to remove Thaelmann but the Comintern insisted he remained. The situation weakened the leaders' standing in their own countries but this did not worry Stalin. Foreign Communist leaders in the 1930s learned that the alternative to obedience to Moscow's orders was to be charged with being the agent of the capitalist police.

In the late 1920s, Stalin's attention was fixed very much on the internal politics of the Soviet Union as the struggle for the leadership of the Communist Party reached its final stage. In 1928, he made his 'left turn' (opting for extreme left-wing policies of rapid industrialisation) and moved against Bukharin and the right wing of the party. As Stalin moved to the left, so did the policy of the Comintern. Foreign Communist parties were instructed to denounce social democratic parties as 'social fascists' because they co-operated with bourgeois parties and governments (mirroring the attack on Bukharin for his co-operation with the bourgeois elements of the peasantry and the NEP).

Probably the most damaging consequences of this new policy direction were felt in Germany where the KPD (the Communist Party) was instructed to attack the SPD (the Social Democrats) as 'social fascists'. This divided the left just at the time when the Nazis and fascism were beginning to grow stronger. Stalin rejected pleas for joint action by the left in Germany against the Nazis and thereby contributed to Hitler's rise to power. A theoretical justification was given for the policy: Hitler was the last stage of monopoly capitalism; a Nazi government would inflame social tensions and hasten a socialist revolution. This is why the KPD might say '*Nach Hitler Uns!*' which means 'After Hitler Us!' Unfortunately for the German Communists, this became true in a very different sense – they were Hitler's first victims!

FASCISM

Extreme nationalist political movement, originating in Italy in the 1920s and taken up by Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

TALKING POINT

How much change was there between 1921 and 1933? Do you agree with Adam Ulam's view: 'From the position of 1917–18, that Soviet Russia exists to promote the world revolution, the Communist Party by 1928 had shifted to the position that the world revolutionary movement exists to defend and promote the interests of the USSR. Expansion and Coexistence. And edn 1974, page 181'?

E Review: What was achieved in Soviet foreign policy between 1921 and 1933?

Between 1921 and 1933 conventional diplomacy had been much more successful than had the Comintern:

- the USSR was regarded as a European power once more
- there was no united capitalist front against the USSR
- foreign governments had begun to think they might be able to do business with the USSR
- valuable military and industrial gains had come from co-operation with Germany
- in 1933 the USA gave the USSR official recognition.

These were real gains, but in 1933 the world situation was deteriorating. Hitler had come to power in Germany and his anti-Communist intentions were well known. In September 1933, all Germany's military undertakings in the USSR were brought to an end. In January 1934, Hitler made a non-aggression pact with Poland, effectively ending the Treaty of Rapallo. In inter-war Europe, it was very difficult to be on good terms with both Poland and the Soviet Union. Indeed, the hope of regaining territory lost to Poland had been one of the chief factors that led Germany and the USSR to sign the Rapallo agreement. In his book *Germany and Europe, 1919–39* (1993), John Hiden comments that the non-aggression pact with Poland was 'a dramatic and decisive break ... and marked the virtual close of normal political exchange between Berlin and Moscow' (page 99). Furthermore, an expansionist Japan had, by its take-over of Manchuria between 1931 and 1933, shown itself to be a threat to the Far East. The makers of Soviet foreign policy were going to have to adjust to these changes.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 15

Alone in a hostile world: how did Soviet foreign policy develop between 1921 and 1933?

- 1 Soviet foreign policy had two tracks: strengthening the security of the USSR and promoting world socialist revolution.
- 2 The existence of the Comintern complicated the USSR's relations with other countries.
- 3 The failure to spread revolution was a disappointment to Lenin and meant that Soviet security became the top priority in Soviet foreign policy.
- 4 Alone in a hostile world, the USSR felt very vulnerable after the Civil War and needed economic help and foreign trade.
- 5 The Treaty of Rapallo (1922) and good relations with Germany ended the USSR's isolation and were central to foreign policy in the 1920s.
- 6 Britain was seen as the main enemy and in spite of the trade agreement (1921) relations were strained throughout the 1920s.
- 7 Stalin adopted a policy of 'Socialism In One Country' which advanced the USSR's interests above those of world revolution.
- 8 Foreign Communist parties were totally subservient to the USSR. This reduced their appeal and proved disastrous for the Chinese Communist Party.
- 9 Switches in Soviet foreign policy were often determined by Stalin's domestic priorities such as the leftward turn in 1929.
- 10 By the end of 1932, the USSR was recognised as a European power again and there was no united front against her.

Why did the Soviet Union come to terms with Hitler?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

It was Hitler rather than the Soviets who departed from the friendly relations that had existed since 1922. The Soviets renewed their commercial treaty with Germany in May 1933, but within Germany Hitler was attacking Communists. In January 1934, Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Poland and refused to sign a mutual guarantee of frontiers with the USSR. Stalin realised that Hitler's aggressive nationalism necessitated a change of policy. In this chapter we examine the problems facing the Soviets in deciding what policy to adopt. Their first reaction was to seek collective security against fascism. While this policy was being pursued the Spanish Civil War erupted, posing a number of problems for Stalin. Then in 1938–39, Stalin decided to sign the Nazi–Soviet Pact. We look at why he did this and how historians have interpreted Soviet foreign policy after the rise of Hitler.

- A** What was collective security against fascism? (p. 255)
- B** How did the Spanish Civil War complicate the situation? (pp. 256–258)
- C** Why did the USSR make an agreement with Germany rather than with Britain and France in 1939? (pp. 259–264)
- D** How have historians disagreed over Stalin's foreign policy in the 1930s? (pp. 264–269)

ACTIVITY

Stalin wants your advice. He has asked you to write a report on whether the USSR should make an agreement with Germany or with Britain and France. Your report will have two parts:

- 1 Factual information for the main body of the report. You will find help for this in the Focus Route tasks in sections A–C.
- 2 Your recommendations. This will involve you drawing conclusions and giving your opinion, making the points that you think will weigh most heavily with Stalin.

You will find guidance on how to set out your report on page 261.

FOCUS ROUTE

To help to write your report (see the Activity on page 254) you will need to know what collective security against fascism meant. Make notes on it.

A What was collective security against fascism?

Collective security meant working with other states to stop fascist expansion. In the USSR the shift towards this can be seen in Litvinov's speech in December 1933 (Source 5 on page 240) and he is identified with this policy. The historian D. C. Watt argues in *How War Came* (1989, page 112) that up to the Munich Conference in September 1938, Litvinov was virtually in sole charge of Soviet foreign policy while Stalin said and did little. However, relations with Germany were never broken off and behind the scenes between 1935 and 1937 there were negotiations on improving economic and political relations. Molotov, in particular, wanted improved relations with Germany and was openly critical of the policy of collective security.

The Politburo had proposed that the USSR join the League of Nations, once referred to by Lenin as 'the robbers' den', and the Soviet Union became a member in September 1934. Litvinov was active in the League and had hopes that it could be an effective body. He denounced appeasement towards Germany as suicidal and urged the League to act decisively and resolutely to stop German aggression.

In May 1935, the Soviet Union signed mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union was obliged to help the Czechs only if France came in, too. Although these pacts were good for the USSR's reputation as a supporter of collective security, neither was backed by military talks. Litvinov had no illusions: 'One should not place any serious hopes on the pact in the sense of real military aid in the event of war. Our security will still remain exclusively in the hands of the Red Army. For us the pact has predominantly a political significance, reducing the chance of war on the part of Germany and also of Poland and Japan.' The French saw the pact as a political measure to scare Hitler and not an agreement which would require any military action on their part.

In August 1935, the Comintern line of attacking Western social democratic and labour parties as 'social fascists' was completely overturned. The help of such parties was now sought in the creation of 'popular fronts' that aimed to contain the spread of fascism. Soviet policy was to support governments that pursued an anti-German, pro-Soviet foreign line. In France, for instance, this meant that the Communist leader, Thorez, went from stating that the Communists would not fight even if France were invaded to supporting rearmament and national defence.

Two popular front governments were formed in France and in Spain, but they were not successful. In Spain it proved an excuse for the right-wing rebellion which began the Spanish Civil War; in France Leon Blum's government did not last long, nor was it able to turn the pact with the USSR into military co-operation.



SOURCE 16.1 The International Brigades were supporters of the Republicans drawn from several countries and organised by the Comintern

B How did the Spanish Civil War complicate the situation?

FOCUS ROUTE

To write your report (see page 261) you need to study the evidence on the Spanish Civil War to see what lessons could be learned from it. These questions will help:

- 1 Did the Soviet Union make any gains by intervening in the Spanish Civil War?
- 2 What emerged about Britain and France's attitude to resisting fascism – was the collective security policy working?

TALKING POINT

Are there any grounds for a country to involve itself in another country's civil war?

ACTIVITY

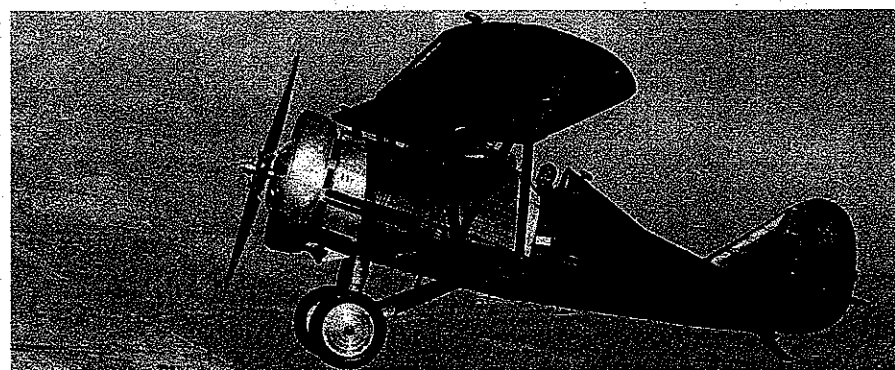
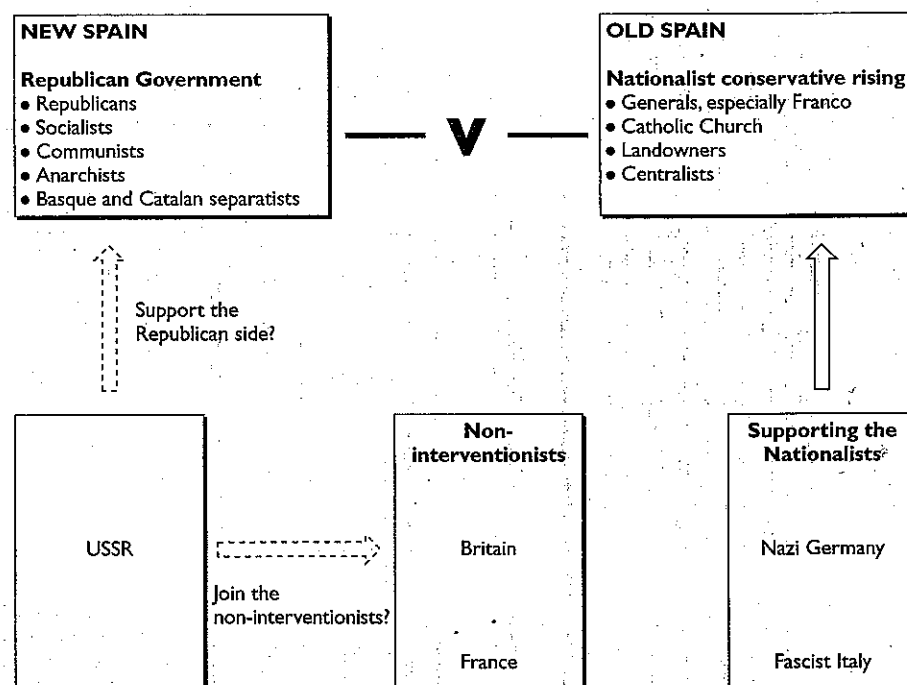
- 1 Could Stalin have stayed out of the Spanish Civil War?
- 2 What factors do you think carried most weight in his decision to intervene?
- 3 Did the USSR benefit from having taken part?
- 4 How does Stalin's policy regarding Spain between 1936 and 1939 help historians to identify Stalin's foreign policy priorities, particularly his attitude to spreading revolution?
- 5 Find out more about the International Brigades. Has the fact that Spain was a cause championed by writers and poets, and that they have written some of the history, led to an exaggeration of the International Brigades' importance?

Spain was a bitterly divided country, especially after the establishment of the Second Republic in 1931. On one side was the Republican left and on the other was the fascist right, the Nationalists. Civil war erupted in 1936. Army leaders, who could not accept the elected left-wing popular front government, launched an armed rebellion in July.

The Spanish Civil War was really all about Spanish issues but foreigners saw it as a battle between left and right. This made it difficult for Stalin to ignore, especially when Litvinov was enthusiastically pursuing collective security against fascism. What should the USSR, the champion of proletarian revolution, do in this war which captured the imagination of the left?

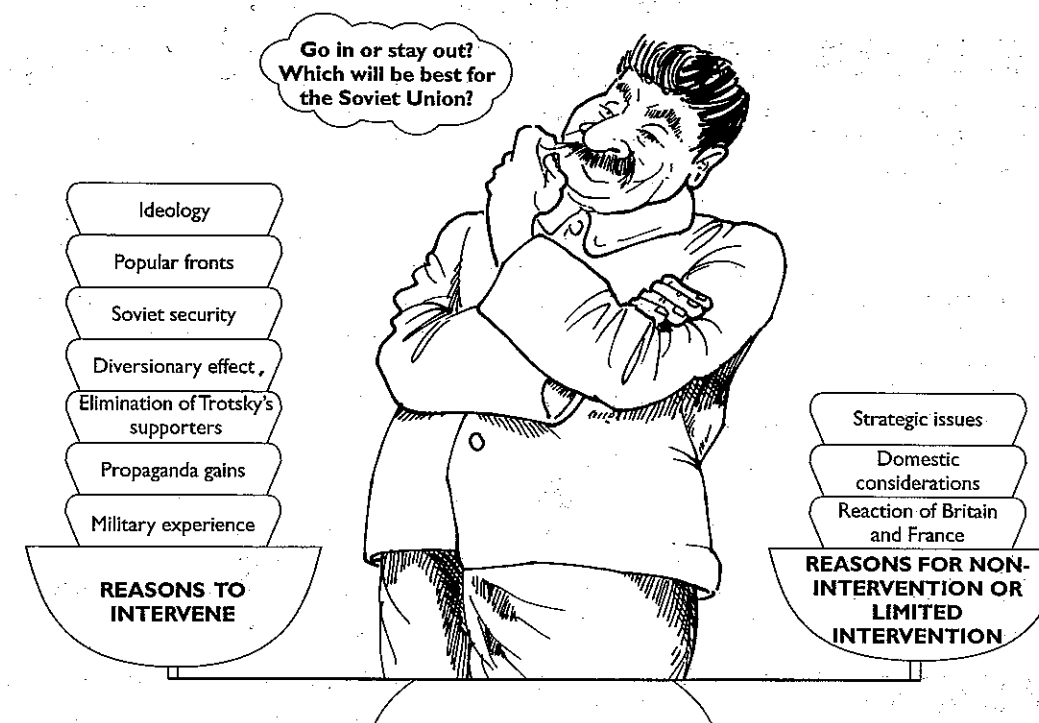
Germany and Italy were already involved in helping the Nationalists. Britain was the leading advocate of non-intervention and persuaded France not to help the Republicans. Many of the left in Europe saw it as a chance to fight back against fascism. 'We do not write History now, we make it,' wrote an enthusiastic volunteer for the Republican cause. The Soviet Union had to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of intervening, as shown in Chart 16A. In the end the Soviets decided that there were more reasons to intervene than not, but Stalin's intervention was cautious and the gains that the USSR made from involvement were limited.

16A How Spain and the European powers divided



SOURCE 16.2 A Soviet fighter plane, one of around 1000 aircraft supplied by the USSR to the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War

16B The Spanish Civil War balance sheet



Ideology

The Spanish Civil War was seen as a battle between left and right. Could the USSR, the leader of the international proletariat, stand aside? Germany and Italy were intervening on the other side. Inaction would bring Trotskyite accusations of betraying the revolution.

Support for popular fronts

The Spanish government was just the sort of bourgeois democracy the Comintern's popular front tactics were designed to support.

Soviet security

France was the USSR's potential ally. Defeat of the Spanish Republic would leave France surrounded by fascist countries. This could affect Soviet security.

Diversionary effect

The war in Spain kept other European powers divided and allowed Stalin to carry out the purges without anxiety about external threats. Therefore it was worth prolonging.

Elimination of Trotsky's supporters

Trotskyites from all over the world were going to Spain to fight for the Spanish revolution. If Stalin intervened, the NKVD would have the opportunity to eliminate them.

Propaganda gains

Intervention would allow the USSR to present itself as the only world power ready to defend democracy against fascism.

Military experience

The war offered an opportunity to try out weapons and give officers and pilots experience of combat conditions.

Strategic issues

Spain was too far away to matter much to the USSR's vital interests.

Domestic considerations

The USSR was preoccupied with and weakened by the purges, especially the purges of the armed forces.

Reaction of Britain and France

Strong, successful intervention might lead to Spain becoming a Soviet satellite. Britain and France would be alarmed by this prospect and they might form an anti-Communist alliance with Germany and Italy.

STALIN'S DECISION

Stalin took the view that Spain was not suitable for Communism, nor could it survive there surrounded by bourgeois regimes. But the USSR needed to become involved to try to prevent any weakening of France's power or military situation.

16C The Spanish Civil War and Soviet involvement, 1936–39

HELP PROVIDED BY THE USSR

The opening of the Spanish archives in the 1980s and the Soviet archives in the 1990s has led to a substantial re-evaluation in the features for Soviet aid previously ignored by Western historians. G. Hovhannisian's *Unsettled Spain* (1998) is an exhaustive study that challenges conventional views. He shows not only that the Republic was systematically overhanded for aid, but also that the Republic was systematically overhanded for aid.

Soviet political activity, 1936

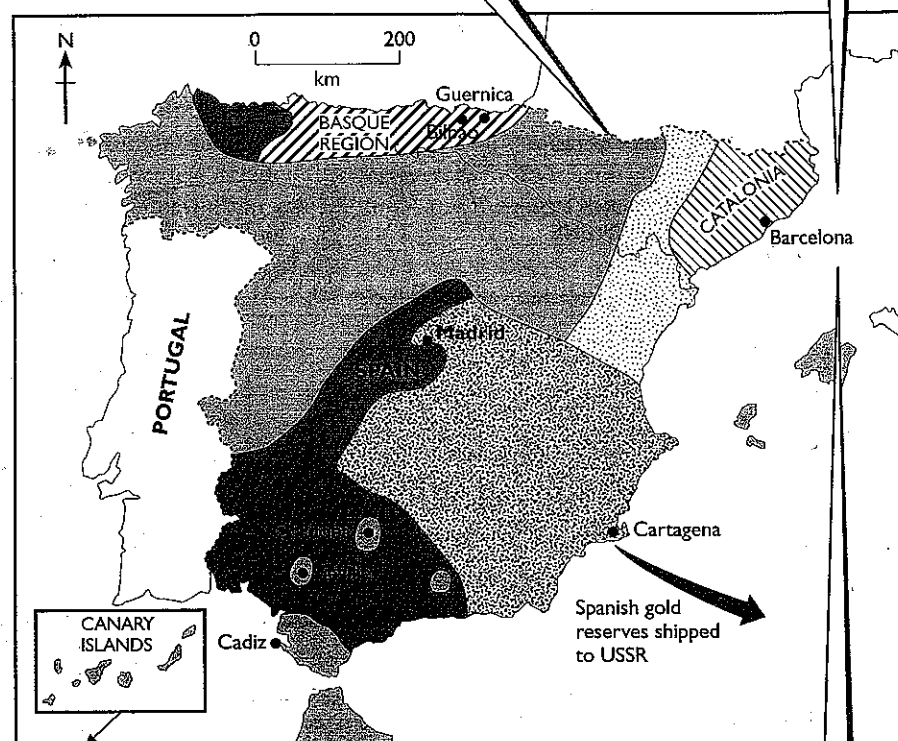
- 18 July Spanish army rebellion begins.
September Alexander Orlov sent to Spain to set up a branch of the NKVD to control Russian and Comintern activity.
15 October Military supplies and first volunteers recruited by the Comintern arrive.
21 December Stalin's letter to Caballero (socialist republican Prime Minister) urges Spanish Communists to be moderate:
- no social or economic radicalism
 - foreign property interests to be protected
 - non-Communist parties to be attracted to the Republican side.

Supplies from the USSR

Men: Maximum number at any one time 700 (the total including NKVD and medics, etc.: 2–3000). The USSR sent advisers rather than regular units.
Equipment: Around 650 planes, 400 tanks and armoured cars, 18,000 machine guns, clothing and medical stores. The Soviet tanks played little part in the war and the machine guns supplied were largely antique with little ammunition.
Soviet aid helped the Republicans to save Madrid in 1936 and kept the Republic going throughout 1938.

International Brigades

Supporters of the Republic from many countries, organised by the Comintern – 40,000 in total, with never more than 18,000 at any one time.



Key to Nationalist advance, 1936–39

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| July 1936 | October 1937–July 1938 |
| July 1936–March 1937 | July 1938–February 1939 |
| March–October 1937 | March 1939 |

Soviet political activity, 1937

In May 1937, there was a civil war within the Civil War in Barcelona. Communists who supported the Republican government fought the Anarchists and the POUM (a small semi-Trotskyite Communist party) who wanted immediate social revolution. Stalin wanted the POUM to be crushed and the NKVD took the lead in this. Communists become increasingly influential in the Republican government – this was the price for Soviet support. The social revolution in some Republican areas was reversed.

Results of the war for USSR

- 1 The Soviet Union gained the Spanish gold reserve – the fourth-largest in the Western world.
- 2 The propaganda value of Russia's identification with the anti-fascist cause was reduced by criticism of the anti-revolutionary and generally repressive conduct of the Communists in Spain. This alienated many on the left.
- 3 Many of the officers and diplomats who had served in Spain were purged on their return to the USSR. So little use was made of the military experience gained.
- 4 The failure of France, in particular, and Britain to help the Republic alongside the USSR offered no encouragement for those like Litvinov who saw collective security against fascism as the way forward.

C Why did the USSR make an agreement with Germany rather than with Britain and France in 1939?

FOCUS ROUTE

You will need to do the following in preparation for your report:

- 1 Assess the significance of the Munich Conference – how does it affect your view about whether the Soviet Union should make an agreement with Britain and France? Make notes on this.
- 2 Note down important points from Chart 16D on page 260. This should help you to weigh up the arguments over which side was the more attractive to the Soviets.
- 3 Don't forget the Japanese factor, which had a significant influence on Soviet policy. Which direction is it pushing you in – towards Germany or Britain and France?

In 1936, Hitler had marched German troops into the Rhineland. In March 1938, he had forced the Anschluss with Austria. Reacting to these aggressive moves, Litvinov stressed the grave dangers lying in the future and the readiness of the Soviet government to join in a conference of the great powers to 'check the further development of aggression'. Litvinov specified Czechoslovakia as the area threatened. His proposal was rejected by the British government. Low's cartoons (Sources 16.3 and 16.4) point out Britain's reluctance to involve, or negotiate with, the USSR in 1938 and 1939.

The Soviet Union was not invited to the Munich Conference in September 1938 in spite of its pact to join France in defence of Czechoslovakia. The Soviets always claimed they would stand by their treaty obligations, but had probably realised that they were unlikely to be called upon to do so. In any case, it would have been impossible to help Czechoslovakia without going through either Poland or Romania, neither of which was likely to agree to having Russian troops on their soil.

The Munich Conference and its concessions to Hitler must have made the Soviets wonder whether Britain and France would ever stand up to Hitler. However, the USSR did not drop its contact with Britain, although by March 1939 it was beginning to make some overtures to Germany. Whatever Stalin's preference, better terms would be achieved by being known to be negotiating with both sides.

Whether Stalin always preferred an agreement with Germany to one with Britain and France, or whether this was a last resort after the failure to reach agreement on collective security with Britain and France in August 1939, is a matter of debate. It could be argued that the cagey Stalin had no preferred option, was very flexible and was looking for the alliance which would be of most benefit to the USSR. Negotiating with both sides would drive up the terms; Stalin was interested in what each side had to offer.

SOURCE 16.3 'A piece missing, Tovarish [comrade]?' This Low cartoon from 1939 highlights the reluctance of Britain and France to work with Russia to achieve collective security.



SOURCE 16.4 'What, no chair for me?', a Low cartoon published in 1938. At the Munich Conference attended by (left to right) Hitler, the British Prime Minister Chamberlain, Daladier (Prime Minister of France) and Mussolini, Hitler's demands were acceded to and the Sudetenland and one-third of the population of Czechoslovakia were transferred to Germany. War was avoided for the time being. Neither the USSR nor Czechoslovakia was invited to attend the conference.



16D Which side should the USSR make an agreement with – Britain and France or Germany?

The British and French perspective

- They were parliamentary democracies. They greatly distrusted the USSR and saw Communism as a threat to their empires.
- They were happy to preserve the situation in Europe that had been established under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles which ended the war with Germany in 1919.
- Britain believed the Red Army had been seriously weakened by the purges.
- They gave a guarantee to Poland, the most anti-Soviet of the eastern states, in March 1939. Britain would not put pressure on the Poles to give Soviet troops rights of passage across Poland, although France by August 1939 was prepared to do this. It was the stumbling block in the August 1939 negotiations in Moscow.
- Britain and France did not anticipate a deal between Germany and the USSR.
- They were prepared to give a guarantee to Poland in response to demands from the British parliament and public to take action.

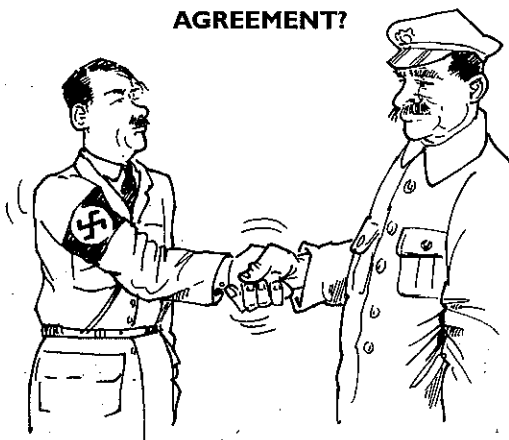
The Soviet perspective on agreement with Britain and France

- The Soviets suspected that Britain wanted to turn German aggression on to the USSR while it watched from the sidelines, happy to see the Nazis and Communists destroy each other.
- Britain and France had repeatedly appeased Hitler and shown little enthusiasm for collective security against fascism.
- They had excluded the USSR from the Munich Conference, even though the USSR had treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia.
- Britain and France had dragged their feet over the triple alliance negotiations proposed by Litvinov in April 1939.
- Alliance with Britain and France might not prevent war with Germany and, if it did not, the USSR might bear the brunt of the fighting.
- Britain and France were not prepared to accept the USSR taking territory or having a sphere of influence across eastern Europe.

AGREEMENT?



AGREEMENT?



The German perspective on an agreement with the USSR

- Hitler wanted to avoid a war on two fronts.
- A non-aggression pact with Russia would scare off Britain and France; they would not intervene to defend Poland.
- A non-aggression pact that included promises of Soviet economic help would overcome any Anglo-French blockade – the Allied blockade had been important in Germany's defeat in the First World War.
- Agreement was needed in August so that Poland could be defeated before the autumn rains.
- Hitler had no qualms about conceding other countries' territory to Stalin.
- It would appear to be an ideological somersault – next to anti-semitism, anti-Communism was Hitler's strongest feeling. But Hitler was very flexible in his tactics; his ultimate aim of defeating the USSR had not changed.

The Soviet perspective on an agreement with Germany

- A pact with Germany was the only way to be sure of avoiding war in the West – Soviet security was Stalin's main concern.
- It would avoid a war on two fronts – the USSR was involved in hostilities with Japan, and Germany had influence with Japan through the Anti-Comintern Pact.
- Soviet armed forces had been hit by the purges and the rearmament programme was nowhere near completion. A pact with Germany would at least buy Russia more time.
- Russia would gain half of Poland and a sphere of influence from Finland to Romania, including the Baltic states.
- Agreement with Germany would be in line with the Treaty of Rapallo and the good relations of 1922 to 1934.
- Germany was still the USSR's major trading partner.
- It was in Stalin's interests to stand aside while the capitalist nations fought each other.
- It would appear to be an ideological somersault – a reversal of collective security against fascism.

ACTIVITY

It is now time to write your report to Stalin. Use the notes you have made in the Focus Route activities in this chapter. Do you recommend that he make terms with Germany or side with Britain and France against Germany?

Note: How to set out your report.

1 Title page

Title: Should the Soviet Union make an agreement with Britain and France or with Germany?

From: Yourself

Date: 10 August 1939

For: J.V. Stalin

2 Introduction

- Explain why the report is being written – the danger of war, both Britain and France and Germany were negotiating.
- Explain the need to calculate the best option for the Soviet Union.
- Method: evaluate the success of the policy of collective security against fascism in the light of events 1936–39. Analyse the attitudes and actions of the three countries. Offer an assessment of what each side can offer the Soviet Union.

3 Main text

Headings:

- The policy of collective security against fascism
- Spanish Civil War – extent and results of Soviet involvement – British and French policy
- Munich Conference
- Key arguments for and against an agreement with Britain and France
- Key arguments for and against an agreement with Germany

4 Conclusions

Draw conclusions on how the collective security policy has worked and suggest which side has most to offer.

5 Recommendations

In the light of all the above, make recommendations to Stalin on what he should do.

Learning trouble spot

The Japanese influence

The Soviet Union's concern about Japan is often neglected when considering Stalin's actions. Stalin, like Hitler, wanted to avoid a war on two fronts. In the war scare of 1928, Stalin saw Japanese aggression as a significant danger. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 was a direct threat to Soviet railway interests there and a potential threat to Mongolia (a Soviet satellite) and to Siberia in the Soviet Union itself. A further worry was the Anti-Comintern Pact signed by Germany and Japan in November 1936 and directed solely against the Soviet Union. The Japanese ambassador in Berlin was the architect of the pact, and Italy became its third member in 1937. In 1938 and 1939, there were major battles ending in Soviet victories when the Japanese tested Soviet defences: in July and August 1939 the Japanese suffered 61,000 casualties. If Soviet Russia signed a pact with Germany, then Hitler could persuade the Japanese to cease their attacks on the Soviet Union and the danger of war on two fronts would be removed.

16E Relations between the USSR, Germany and the West during 1939

Date	Relations with Britain and France	Relations with Germany
10 March	Stalin's speech at Eighteenth Party Congress warns that the USSR will not 'be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire'.	
16 April	Litvinov proposes a triple pact of mutual assistance between Britain, France and the USSR.	
17 April		The Soviet ambassador in Berlin proposes a resumption of trade talks between the USSR and Germany.
28 April		Hitler omits the usual attack on the USSR from a major foreign policy speech in which he denounces the German-Polish Non-Aggression Treaty and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement.
3 May	Litvinov (a Jew, identified with collective security against fascism, and married to an Englishwoman) replaced as Foreign Commissar by Molotov.	
8 May	Britain rejects Soviet proposals for a military alliance.	
20-30 May		Germany puts out feelers for renewed trade talks with the USSR.
27 May	Chamberlain instructs British ambassador in Moscow to open talks with the USSR on a mutual assistance pact.	
31 May		In a major foreign policy speech, Molotov questions the commitment of the Western powers to negotiations with the USSR and shows a readiness to continue trade talks with Germany.
12 June	Ambassador Maisky (Soviet ambassador in London) proposes a visit to Moscow by Lord Halifax (British Foreign Secretary).	
18 July		Soviets offer Germany a favourable trade agreement.
23 July	Britain and France agree to military talks with the USSR.	
5 August	Drax (the admiral heading the British military mission) leaves London for Leningrad by slow boat.	
11 August	Drax mission arrives in Moscow. Military talks begin.	
14 August		Ribbentrop instructs the German ambassador in Moscow to request, on his behalf, an audience with Stalin so that Ribbentrop could tell Stalin of Germany's proposals at first hand.
19 August	Breakdown of Anglo-Soviet negotiations.	German-Soviet trade agreement announced.
20 August		Molotov agrees to Ribbentrop's visiting Moscow on 26 or 27 August. Hitler cables Stalin asking him to receive Ribbentrop by 23 August at the latest (no European statesman had ever addressed Stalin directly before).
21 August		Stalin agrees.
22 August		Ribbentrop flies to Moscow.
23 August		Ribbentrop and Molotov sign the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact and a secret protocol dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Stalin had led the discussions.

SOURCE 16.5 P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy*, 1981, p. 308, quoting a speech by Commander Bower, a backbench Conservative MP, to the House of Commons, March 1939

I am not prepared to regard Soviet Russia as a freedom-loving nation but we cannot do without her now. I know they have shot a lot of the people but there are some 170,000,000 of them left.

SOURCE 16.6 Neville Chamberlain, in a letter to his sister on 26 March 1939

I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia. I have no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive, even if she wanted to. And I distrust her motives, which seem to me to have little connection with our ideas of liberty, and to be concerned only with getting everyone else by the ears.

ACTIVITY

- Look at Chart 16E on page 262. What does it tell you about which power was most eager to make an agreement with the Soviet Union?
- How does your understanding of the perspectives of Germany, Britain and France influence your own views about why Stalin chose Germany?

TALKING POINT

Do you think that Chamberlain, together with the British and French negotiators, was just as responsible for the Nazi-Soviet Pact as Stalin and Hitler? Do you think that the British and French seriously blundered or do you think that whatever they did they were never going to make any difference to the outcome?

What were the attitudes of Germany, Britain and France?

Naturally we are focusing on Stalin's thinking, but the attitudes of German, British and French policy-makers are important, too.

Germany

Hitler's attitude to the USSR is not hard to understand. He needed to defeat Poland before the autumn rain and this is reflected in an increasing sense of urgency during August. Look at Chart 16D on page 260 to see what Germany could gain from a pact with the USSR. Hitler revealed his thoughts when talking to a League of Nations diplomat on 11 August 1939: 'Everything that I have in mind is directed against Russia; if the West is too stupid and too blind to grasp this then I will be forced to come to terms with the Russians, to smash the West and after its defeat to turn against Russia with all my forces. I need the Ukraine so that we can't be starved out as in the last war.' He did what he said. It did not contradict his anti-Bolshevism and shows his flexibility in approaching long-held objectives.

Britain and France

When Hitler took over the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the gravity of the situation forced Britain and France into guaranteeing Poland on 31 March. The Anglo-French guarantee to Poland was important. They were now bound to a country determined that the Red Army should not cross its borders again, as it had in 1920. The attitude of the Poles was a major stumbling block in the Anglo-French negotiations with the USSR, and one reason why the British spun things out was to delay reaching the sticking point of Soviet rights of passage through Poland.

British public opinion was in favour of a military alliance with France and Russia (84 per cent in favour according to a Gallup opinion poll) and there was support for it in the House of Commons (see Source 16.5). Chamberlain's attitude was rather different (see Source 16.6). He was strongly anti-Communist, and he wanted only as much Russian support as would be convenient to the British, would not alarm the Poles, and would not annoy the Germans. Molotov, on the other hand, was looking for an unbreakable alliance covering every possibility of Soviet-German conflict. The British also had concerns about how useful an alliance with the USSR would prove to be. In the wake of the purges, the British General Staff did not have a high opinion of Soviet military might and advised the Cabinet that Soviet intervention in a European war was likely to be 'an embarrassment rather than a help'.

The guarantee to Poland meant, in effect, that Britain and France had chosen Poland rather than the USSR. This situation was not as serious for the Soviets as it might appear; it had significant advantages for the Soviet Union. If an isolated Poland were to be attacked, the USSR would be vulnerable because Hitler might not stop at the Soviet-Polish border. But if Hitler attacked Poland now, Germany would face Britain and France. Both sides would want the Soviet Union, if not on their side, at least to remain neutral, and a long war between the three Western powers could allow a neutral USSR to achieve long-term gains.

There has been argument over the extent to which Chamberlain was responsible for the breakdown of the talks. It can be argued that however enthusiastically Britain had negotiated, it could not offer the Soviet Union as much as Germany - look at Chart 16D (page 260). On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Chamberlain was consistently sending out negative messages to the Russians. We cannot be certain of the intentions and assumptions of Stalin and Soviet policy-makers, but Chamberlain's attitude and the British lack of urgency provided a series of justifications, if not the true reasons, for Soviet rejection of any alliance.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact, August 1939

This pact referred directly to the Treaty of Berlin of 1926, which committed both countries to refrain from aggression and to observe neutrality in conflicts involving third parties. A secret protocol (whose existence was denied until 1991 by the USSR) defined future spheres of influence, with part of east Poland, plus Estonia, Latvia and Bessarabia (part of Romania) passing to the USSR.

Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and advanced very rapidly. The Soviet Union joined in on 17 September, attacking from the east. Poland was soon overrun. A new Nazi-Soviet treaty was agreed on 28 September: in return for giving Germany slightly more of Poland than was originally agreed, Lithuania was transferred to the Soviet sphere of influence. Important economic concessions were made by the Soviets to Germany, and the economic agreements made in October were crucial to Hitler's plans. The amount of grain and raw materials he gained from the USSR, together with the rubber from the Far East which came through the USSR, enabled Hitler to get round any Allied blockade. Without these supplies of natural rubber, neither the western campaigns of 1940 nor the later campaigns in the USSR could have been fought.

D How have historians disagreed over Stalin's foreign policy in the 1930s?

FOCUS ROUTE

At the centre of the debate is the question of whether Soviet commitment to collective security was genuine or a poor second to an agreement with Germany.

- 1 Study Chart 16F on page 265. What is the position of the three interpretations on this issue?
- 2 Look at the different interpretations of the Nazi-Soviet Pact (Sources 16.10–16.14 on pages 264–267) which illustrate the different views and the argument that Stalin had no favoured option and just sought to do whatever suited the USSR best. What is your own interpretation?



SOURCE 16.7 The Russian view of the Munich Conference: Chamberlain and Daladier direct German expansion east

FOCUS ROUTE

Some would argue that Stalin always sought what was best for the USSR, and how this was achieved did not matter. Look for evidence which supports the different views and at the end of the topic come up with your own interpretation.

SOURCE 16.8 J. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East, 1933–1941*, 1992, pp. 15–16. This quotation from one of the leading experts on Soviet foreign policy points to one reason why interpretation is difficult

Stalin's precise position on any given issue remained unclear and disputes over policy could and did arise within the upper reaches of the state and party apparatus; a process Stalin deliberately encouraged as a means of retaining ultimate control. In terms of diplomacy it meant that although Litvinov had considerable leeway in the conduct of day-to-day issues and essentially had Stalin's commitment (until 1939), he nonetheless faced intermittent opposition from other quarters that Stalin never entirely inhibited.

Three different interpretations of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s

The official Soviet interpretation

The USSR pursued a clear and unambiguous policy of building a European-wide shield of collective security against Nazi aggression. Since the USSR represented the forces of historical progress it was bound to take the lead in opposing the barbarous schemes of Nazi Germany. Collective security failed because of the failure of the Western democracies to oppose Hitler's murderous plans. British ruling circles had been dreaming for a long time of a war between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Nazi-Soviet pact or, as Soviets refer to it, Russo-Germany non-aggression treaty, was necessitated by the grave threat of German and Japanese attacks on the USSR and what they saw as the West's betrayal of collective security.

Two contrasting Western views

1 The 'German' school

Stalin always preferred co-operation with Germany, whether Weimar or Nazi, to a defensive alliance with Western powers. He was only interested in the notion of collective security for as long as an agreement with Hitler remained out of reach. The Germans repeatedly rejected Soviet moves for closer co-operation. Gerhard Weinberg and, in extreme form, Robert Tucker take this view. In *World in Balance* (1981, page 7), Weinberg stresses the contacts between the head of the Soviet trade mission in Berlin and key figures making German economic policy.

Tucker argues that Stalin was following an ambitious and aggressive policy whereby he manoeuvred the capitalist states into a mutually destructive war from which the USSR would emerge unscathed and in a strong position to expand territorially all along its borders (see 'The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy' in *Slavic Review*, 1977, pages 563–589 and pages 604–607). According to Tucker, collective security was a mask for Stalin's designs and a bait to attract Hitler. The purges were necessary to remove opposition to a deal with Hitler. The USSR struggled not for an alliance against Hitler but for the reconstruction of the Rapallo relationship between Germany and Russia.

2 The 'collective security' school

The USSR's campaign for collective security arose from a perceived need for the USSR to make common cause with the other states in opposition to Hitler's expansionist foreign policy. Jonathan Haslam wrote in *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe* (1984, page 230): 'What is so striking from 1933–1939 is less the tentative soundings in Berlin – the echoes of Rapallo – than the merciless persistence with which the Russians so doggedly clung to the policy of collective security, a policy which so rarely showed any promise of success.' Geoffrey Roberts and Teddy Uldricks are other historians supporting this school of thought.

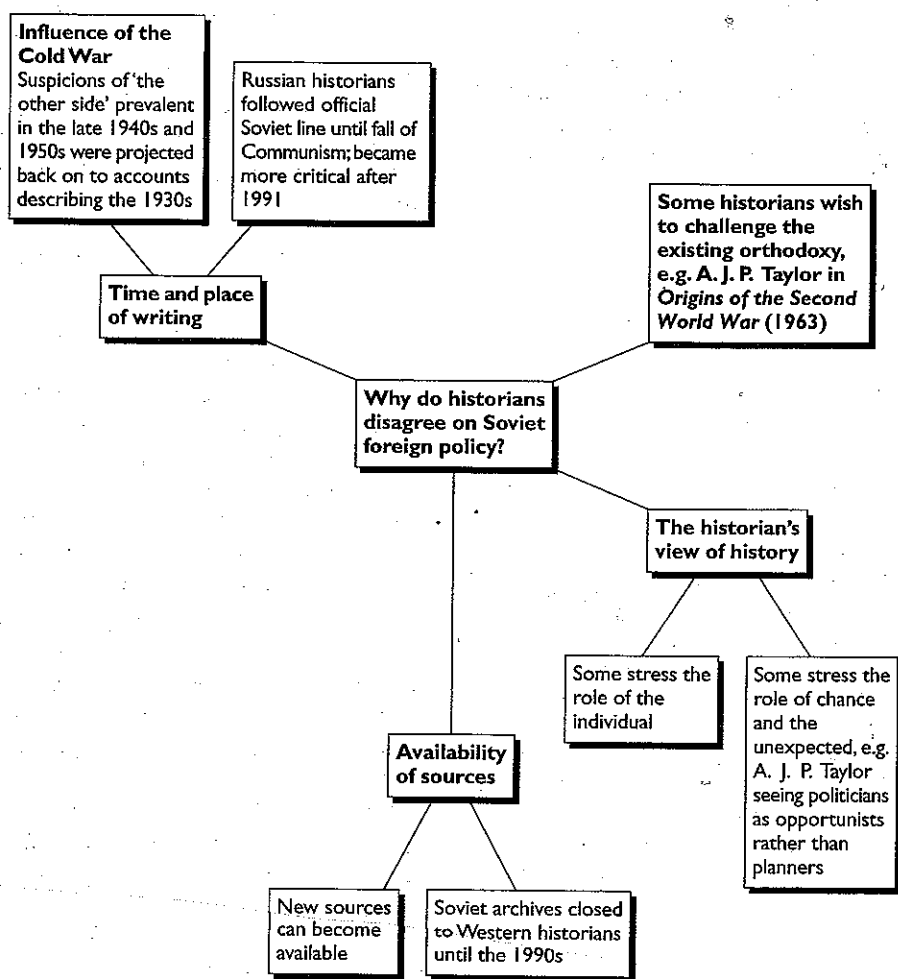
Why do historians disagree on Soviet foreign policy?

Until the 1990s, the study of Soviet foreign policy was problematic because it was difficult for Western historians to obtain access to records. Now that Communism has collapsed and records are more accessible, revelations may follow which could alter interpretations (see Source 16.14).

Just as the influence of the Cold War can be seen in the Soviet interpretation, it is not surprising that a Western interpretation of Soviet foreign policy as unscrupulous and double-dealing held sway at the same time. The Nazi-Soviet pact was seen as a typically treacherous Communist action. Also, since the pact encouraged Hitler to go ahead with his attack on Poland, the USSR could be said to bear a major responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War. Soviet domination of Eastern Europe after the Second World War was further proof of the aggressive nature of its policy. This interpretation is likely to be held by historians who are very critical of Stalin and Communism.

A. J. P. Taylor's *Origins of the Second World War*, first published in 1961, is an excellent example of a book that challenged the existing orthodoxy that the war was Hitler's peculiar and special responsibility, and it forced historians to re-examine their views. Taylor believed that Soviet policy was one of improvisation, which was in line with his view that politicians do not carry out master plans but take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Taylor's view on Hitler and the war has not carried the field, but he was one of the pioneers of the collective security school of thought on the Soviet role. He argued that the Russians had always advocated collective security but did not want to be manoeuvred into resisting Germany alone, and that by signing the pact Stalin thought that he had 'escaped an unequal war in the present, and perhaps even avoided it altogether' (2nd edn, 1963, page 319).

16F Why do historians disagree on Soviet foreign policy?



SOURCE 16.9 R. C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941*, 1992, p. 592

Stalin in his party congress speech set in motion talks leading to an alignment with Berlin. He did so by professing a desire for peace and business relations with 'all' interested states and disclaiming any intention of 'pulling chestnuts out of the fire' for others. That raised the possibility of a negotiated neutrality which would insure Hitler against what he had to fear most: a two-front war. This, Stalin could calculate, would enable Hitler to unleash aggression and him, while remaining neutral, to take over territories in Eastern Europe on an agreed-upon basis. And given his expressed belief that the democracies were stronger than the fascist states, he could and evidently did calculate that the oncoming war between them would be a protracted one that would result in their mutual weakening or exhaustion while Soviet Russia was at peace and rebuilding its own strength.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Read Sources 16.9-16.11 and assign each to one of the interpretations of Soviet foreign policy described on page 265.
- 2 Explain how Source 16.12 differs in its interpretation from Sources 16.9, 16.10 and 16.11.
- 3 Read Source 16.10 again. Explain why Roberts is likely to argue that the decision was made at a much later date than that suggested by Tucker in Source 16.9.

In the 1960s and 1970s, during the Vietnam war and the sharp criticism of American foreign policy, Soviet foreign policy was not seen as uniquely evil. Consequently, many historians felt that in coming to an accommodation with Hitler, Stalin was not acting very differently from the appeasers. A pact with Hitler did appear the safest option in August 1939.

Historians on the Nazi-Soviet Pact

SOURCE 16.10 G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War*, 1995, p. 89

Hitherto the operational objectives of Soviet foreign policy had revolved around the project of a triple alliance with Britain and France. By 15th August that project was in the latter stages of its disintegration. The only clear goal of Soviet foreign policy from mid-August to mid-September 1939 was that of avoiding a war with Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe while Britain and France stood on the sidelines. A new policy of security through strategic political expansion and co-operation with Hitler was foreshadowed in the Nazi-Soviet pact, but this actualisation was slow and hesitant, an effect of a series of ad hoc responses and reactions to the dynamic events rather than the result of prior decision or planned policy.

SOURCE 16.11 M. Pankrashova, V. Sipols, *Why War was not Prevented*, 1970, pp. 154-55

In the face of the threat from Germany, the Soviet Union did everything possible to conclude a comprehensive and effective military-political anti-aggression pact with Britain and France. Such a pact under those conditions could have forced the aggressors to come to reason and could have preserved the peace and prevented war both in Europe and elsewhere. However, the negotiations showed that Britain and France had no desire to conclude a pact, that they were playing a game of pact negotiations; they proposed that the Soviet Union take on far-reaching commitments but did not, in turn, want to help the Soviet Union, if it was attacked, i.e., they did not want an equitable and mutually beneficial agreement. The ruling circles of Britain and France during that period wanted only one thing: to prod German aggression against the USSR. This was the whole idea behind the big political game they were playing.

Under the circumstances, the only way to preserve the security of the USSR - at least for a time - was for the Soviet government to accept the proposal made at that particular time by the German government to sign a non-aggression pact on its own.

SOURCE 16.12 P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, 1987, pp. 261-62

The Soviets held a central position, and could judge which set of talks would better serve their interests. It is reasonable to assume that these were twofold: to keep out of a European war, especially when they were actually engaged in serious fighting with the Japanese in the Far East - they did not seek a war on two fronts; and to secure territory - a sphere of influence which would add to Soviet security, internal as well as external. It would be advantageous to bring the Ukrainians in Poland under Stalin's control. The British and French offered nothing substantial under either heading.

The Germans on the other hand were able to meet both Soviet interests. Instead of a risk of war, they could offer certain neutrality. In terms of territory and spheres of influence, they came bearing gifts, ready to carve up Poland and to yield at once when Stalin asked for the whole of Latvia to be in his sphere instead of only a part, as Ribbentrop at first proposed. Moreover the Germans could deliver the goods forthwith, whereas the British and French could deliver nothing.

Between the two sides, the Soviet choice could hardly be in doubt. It is only surprising that so much obloquy [criticism] has been heaped upon Stalin's head for making the best deal he could get, and that so much criticism has been levelled at the British for their dilatoriness [lack of urgency] when nothing could have enabled them to match the German offers. The competition was decided on substance, not on method.

ACTIVITY

- 1 To what extent do Sources 16.13 and 16.14 disagree?
- 2 Source 16.14 was not published until 1991. Which historian from Sources 16.9–16.12 would have felt particularly pleased when Source 16.14 was made public, and why?
- 3 Do you think that Source 16.14 shows that Stalin provoked war or was he exaggerating the benefit to the USSR of the Nazi–Soviet Pact in order to gain acceptance for his apparent change in policy?

Sources 6.9–6.11 indicate that bound up with the question of why Stalin made the Nazi–Soviet Pact is *when* he decided to do so. Some have argued that Germany was always the preferred option, others have seen the Munich Conference as decisive. Both Stalin's speech in March 1939 and the replacement in May of Litvinov, a Jew, by Molotov, a member of the Politburo and one of Stalin's henchmen, have been seen as significant. Stalin was taking a much closer interest in foreign affairs and was going to be involved in critical decisions. These actions, even if they do not signal a new policy, gave Stalin the flexibility to delay a decision until he was sure it was advantageous. Geoffrey Roberts (Source 16.10) does not believe that this was until mid-August.

SOURCE 16.13 Khrushchev Remembers, Vol 1, ed. S. Talbott, 1971, pp. 150–51. Khrushchev is recalling Stalin's words to members of the Politburo on 24 August – after Ribbentrop's departure

I heard with my own ears how Stalin said, 'Of course, it's all a game to see who can fool whom. I know what Hitler's up to. He thinks he's outsmarted me, but actually it's I who have tricked him!' Stalin told us that because of this treaty war would pass us by for a while longer. We would be able to stay neutral and save our strength. Then we would see what happened.

SOURCE 16.14 Speech by Stalin to the Politburo, August 1939

If we sign a mutual assistance treaty with France and Great Britain, Germany will forsake Poland and will try to find a modus vivendi with the Western powers. War will be averted, but later events could take a dangerous turn for the USSR. If we accept Germany's proposal and sign a non-aggression pact with her, Germany will attack Poland, and the intervention of France and England [sic] in that war will become inevitable. Western Europe will suffer serious uprisings and disturbances. In these conditions we will have a great possibility of remaining on the sidelines in the conflict, and we can reckon on our successful entry into the war.

We are making our choice, and it is clear. We must accept the German proposal and politely send back the Anglo-French mission. The first advantage which we will gain will be the destruction of Poland right up to the gates of Warsaw, including Ukrainian Galicia.

Germany is giving us complete freedom of action in the Baltic states and does not object to the return of Bessarabia to the USSR. She is willing to grant us a sphere of influence in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. The question of Yugoslavia remains open . . . At the same time we must consider the consequences arising from either the defeat or the victory of Germany. In the event of its defeat the Sovietisation of Germany will inevitably follow and a communist government will be formed . . .

Our task, therefore, is to ensure that Germany can fight the war for as long as possible so that an exhausted and debilitated England [sic] and France are in no condition to destroy a sovietised Germany. Maintaining a position of neutrality and waiting for its moment, the USSR will support today's Germany, supplying it with raw materials and foodstuffs . . .

If Germany is victorious, she will emerge from the war too exhausted to be able to start a military conflict with the USSR, at least for a decade . . .

Comrades! It is in the interests of the USSR, the homeland of workers, that war breaks out between the Reich and the capitalist Anglo-French bloc. We must do everything possible to ensure that this war lasts as long as possible to ensure the exhaustion of both parties.

ACTIVITY

Write an essay: Why did Stalin make an agreement with Germany in 1939 rather than with Britain and France?

As well as using the material in this section, you could look a little more closely at Hitler's motives. He was the one in a hurry!

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 16 Why did the Soviet Union come to terms with Hitler?

- 1 Hitler, not the Soviets, ended the close relations started by the Treaty of Rapallo.
- 2 Litvinov is particularly associated with the policy of collective security against fascism.
- 3 Joining the League of Nations (1934), supporting the popular fronts (1935), and the pacts with France and Czechoslovakia (1935) were all part of collective security against fascism.
- 4 Contact was never lost with Germany in the 1930s.
- 5 Stalin gave limited help to the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, but most of the fighting was done by non-Russians.
- 6 The USSR was excluded from the Munich Conference – a blow to the collective security policy.
- 7 During 1939, the Soviets negotiated with Britain and France and with Germany.
- 8 In May 1939, Molotov replaced Litvinov as Commissar for Foreign Affairs, a sign that the Soviets were moving away from collective security.
- 9 Stalin made the Nazi–Soviet Pact because Hitler could offer much more than Britain and France.