

Conclusions

The story of Soviet policy in Central Europe in the first half of the 1930s tends to support the view that it was guided mainly by a balance of power approach, which was to secure the survival of Bolshevik Russia and allow her to prepare for interference abroad when the time for the collapse of bourgeois Europe would arrive. From 1917 on, Soviet Russia's basic interests on the continent were the prevention of a bloc of capitalist powers and containment of imperialist Germany.

Given the Entente's hostility towards the new Russia and temporary decline of Germany's capabilities after the Great War, the first task had naturally assumed the priority that led Moscow to adopt the Rapallo policy. Resurgence of Germany's might and militaristic spirit in early 30s urged the Soviet leadership to reconsider its European policy in favor of seeking closer collaboration with the West and, eventually, collective containment of the ultimate enemy. This process of reorientation of Soviet foreign policy remained uncompleted throughout the decade and the possibility of its reversal was never discarded by Moscow. During the 30s, the tasks of preventing Germany's political domination in Eastern Europe and her joining an anti-Soviet alliance with the Versailles states competed with each other in Moscow. Although both aims seemed interconnected and had arisen from the same Soviet domestic needs and similar if not identical interests abroad, they implied different policies in Europe.

Had Moscow recognized the German menace to vital interests of the USSR as imminent and assessed chances for Germany's realignment with Britain, France and her eastern allies as more remote and less frightening, the Soviets should have concentrated on cooperation with the anti-revisionist states in order to keep Germany in check and attract her opponents by joining collective security efforts. In the context of the Soviet collective security course, Soviet-German dialogue was to be continued but aimed mainly at inducing Western leaders to seek Russia's, not Germany's, friendship.

On the other hand, the danger of an anti-Soviet coalition, if viewed by the Soviet leaders as the most probable development in near future, dictated a policy of maintaining distance from the West, Poland, the Little Entente, and international institutions while cultivating close ties with Germany — the main disturbing factor in Europe. By the 30s, however, the time of humiliation and limited power had been passing both for Russia and Germany and revival of their

conflicting historic ambitions was under way. In the new era, prospects for renewed cooperation between Moscow and Berlin depended on a Soviet-German agreement concerning division of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe rather than merely on their joint opposition to the shattered Versailles order. Parallel increase of economic and military potentials of the Soviet Union and Germany meant that neither of these powers could easily agree to play the subordinate role in an eventual alliance. Thus, the Russians might achieve a deal with Germany concerning terms and conditions for a revision of the post-war settlement only after a relatively long period of bargaining and browbeating. Pursuance of such a policy implied that the USSR would retain her freedom of maneuver and refrain from any binding agreement with anti-revisionist coalition. Policy along these lines is commonly called an isolationism. One should not lose sight of the fact, however, that due to Russia's innate vulnerability in Europe and Asia, an isolationist course in the true sense of the word was neither attainable nor desirable. The Soviet isolationism of the 30s could hardly be other than "active" because it implied — and, in fact, was aimed at — keeping doors open for accords with Berlin and even promoting diplomatic cooperation with the West in order to bring pressure to bear on Germany and reduce chances for *rapprochement* between them.

Collective security efforts and new isolationism were not easy to distinguish in Soviet policy of 1930-1932. Seen from a larger perspective, both trends were still in their infancy. After initial hesitations Russia decided on her *rapprochement* with France and Poland and betrayed German hopes for provisions of the Berlin Treaty forming the guidelines for Soviet international activity. In retrospect, the Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact of July 25, 1932 might well seem the major development which had paved the way for Soviet *rapprochement* with France and the League of Nations. Viewed from another vantage point, in the context of Soviet-German partition of Poland in 1939, the non-aggression treaty of 1932 appears to have been a sinister bluff on the part of the USSR aimed at gaining a greater share of future war spoils out of Germany. The ambivalent nature of international politics permits both interpretations. This ambiguity is also suggestive since it helps to explain the apparent unanimity of the Soviet leaders' decision to move towards reconciliation with Poland despite German resistance to this.

Whatever were the motives of Stalin and his associates, the Soviet negotiations with Warsaw in 1931-1932 dealt a deadly blow to what had remained of the Rapallo partnership and opened the phase of the USSR's transition from her policy of encirclement of Poland to that of encircling Germany. The continuation of this tendency by the Soviet Union in 1933 further suggests that her 1932 pacts with Poland and France signified the origins of the Soviet collective security policy. Soon after Hitler came to power the preference that Moscow had given to this method of securing its position in Europe became patent and So-

viet-Polish relations were improving through most of 1933. Hidden expansionist hopes of both states had given place to political discussions about ways of safeguarding their security and developing various bilateral contacts. Paradoxically, immediately after the Soviets' had proclaimed their intention to join collective efforts of the Versailles states to maintain peace in Europe, relations between Moscow and Warsaw began to deteriorate.

The reasons were manifold. The most fundamental among them was the contradiction between Stalin's conception of Poland's place in any future security system and Pilsudski's political strategy. Poland needed Soviet support to resist German expansionism, but hoped to survive without becoming a Russian satellite. Nor could her leaders forget about the possibility of the USSR and Germany easing tensions between them by partitioning Poland. These considerations led Warsaw to sophisticated maneuvering between its great neighbors and postponing talks about an alliance with the Soviet Union until the moment when other options would finally be blocked. Poland's determination to build her relations with Russia on equality basis to secure steady and mutual rapprochement was received in Moscow with dissatisfaction and mistrust.

The Soviet leaders wished to reserve for themselves the benefits of a non-committal course like the one pursued by Poland. Their deeper motives, however, differed significantly. Litvinov, the most highly-placed and ardent proponent of the collective security in the Soviet ruling elite, resisted Polish opposition to new political commitments as presenting tactical difficulties for his diplomatic course and posing an obstacle to winning the Kremlin's agreement to pursue a consistent policy of collaboration with the Western powers. Having realized that from political and strategic points of view the vital importance of Poland's participation in any scheme that should have linked Russian interests in containing Nazi Germany with those of the Western powers, the Foreign Commissar was inclined to look for a compromise solution in Soviet-Polish relations and to meet some of Warsaw's wishes half-way.

For isolationists, supported by Stalin, acquiescence to Poland's conditions for her continuing rapprochement with the USSR proved to be completely unacceptable. The leading group of the Soviet Political Bureau feared that France and Poland might use their rapprochement with the USSR merely to achieve *détente* in their respective relations with Germany. According to this logic, the isolated Soviet Union would then become the object of a Polish-German crusade. In this respect, Moscow considered the Ukraine to be the most vulnerable region of the USSR. The forceful centralistic campaign, started by the central government in 1933 to suppress passive resistance in the Soviet Ukraine, was further stimulated by the Nazi propaganda of the dismembering of the USSR and by solidarity actions among the Ukrainian population of Poland. Instead of calming down Soviet fears, the "Bolshevik Ukrainization" steered them up and helped to create the impression of a joint Polish-German threat to the USSR.

These apprehensions were fortified by a declaration on non-use of force in disputes between Poland and Germany which they signed in January 1934.

Moreover, had Moscow agreed to proceed towards collaboration with Poland step by step and on the basis of equality, this would have drastically reduced Russia's chances to find a basis for a mutually advantageous deal with Germany. This seems to have been the crucial argument in inner debates among Soviet leaders. By committing themselves to friendly relations with Warsaw, the Soviets would have made a definite choice in favor of collective security instead of balancing between two alternative solutions. Such a shift might have given real guaranties of Soviet interests in Europe only if both France and Poland had assumed definite obligations to the USSR. Operation of any Soviet-French mutual assistance agreement depended on Poland's readiness to allow the Soviet army to fulfill its obligation to France, as was fully confirmed by the actual history of Soviet-French relations after the conclusion of such a pact in May 1935. Poland's non-participation in this agreement changed the essentials of the Soviet-French alliance and made it senseless from a strategical point of view. Retaining as long as possible freedom of actions and avoidance of commitments to Russia that could facilitate her intervention in Poland, constituted, however, the fundamental principles of the Polish foreign policy. Given the stubborn Polish reserve, Moscow's agreement to withdraw from seeking isolationist solutions in favor of consistent collective security policy proved to be virtually impossible. For the Russians, the costs of such a new departure seemed likely to exceed decisively its future gains.

In early 1934, the head of the Bureau of International Information, Carl Radek, published a collection of his articles about Polish foreign relations under the title: "Bourgeois Poland — a barrier or a *place d'armes*?" This question embodied the main worries and aims of Stalin's Russia. Although this study (due to limitations in the sources available) had to leave the major problem of Soviet minimal and maximal aims in Central Europe largely unsettled, it appears that the minimal aims of the USSR consisted in forming a solid barrier on her western border. Intermediate solutions of the "Polish problem" being rejected by Soviet leaders, Poland's refusal to reduce her ambitions to those of a protective wall and to serve this purpose was understood by them as her agreement to become eventually a spring-board for a German attack on the Soviet Union.

Radek's formula may also have been revealing Moscow's far-reaching aspirations to turn Poland into *place d'armes* for the Soviet forces as well as fears that she would happen to be as firm a barrier for the Red armies, heading to the west, as she had been in the summer of 1920. Whether or not such plans really existed and what were the main directions of Soviet military planning and the role played by the high command in formulating Russia's foreign policy in the 30s — these are the questions which remain unanswered.