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History 133B

Professor Marcuse

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Source Exploration: The German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact

* <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1545>. Treaty of Non-Agression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Scoialist Republics (August 23, 1939).
* Source of German text: “Nichtangriffsvertrag zwischen Deutschland und der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken” und “Geheimes Zusatzprotokoll” (August 23, 1939). In German Foreign Ministry, *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918-1945*. Baden-Baden: Imprimiere Nationale, MCMLVI. Series D: 1937-1945. Volume VII: *Die letzten Wochen vor Kriegsausbruch*, 9. August bis 3. September 1939.

The **Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact** (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), signed by Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov in Moscow on **August 23, 1939**, asserted that the two nations would not go to war with each other for ten years (Miller 1939). Hitler intended to avoid a two front war, while the Soviets anticipated the partition of Eastern Europe between themselves and Germany. Intriguingly, a **secret protocol** of the agreement detailing this partition only became public knowledge during the Nuremberg Trial in 1946 (Matthews 1939).

The treaty was enumerated in seven articles with the first setting the tone for the entire agreement stating, “…to refrain from any act of violence, any aggressive action, or any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other powers.” (Treaty of Non-aggression 1939). Articles 2 and 4 also discuss acts of violence with or without a third power, while articles 3 and 5 refer to future amicable foreign relations between the two countries. The final two provisions of the agreement state a **ten-year length with five year extension** without notice of cancellation and immediately place the agreement into effect upon signature. The addition of the secret protocol reveals plans to divide Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, as well as Poland into **spheres of influence** between the Nazis and Soviets (Remnick, 1989).

The agreement took shape in August of 1939 on the eve of World War II. Foreign ministers met in Moscow in the utmost secrecy to discuss future relations between the Nazis and Soviets (Wheeler-Bennett 1939, 39). Hitler, on one hand, sought to avoid a **two front war** with the allies in the west and Soviets in the east, as he mobilized Germany for war, while Stalin’s weariness of Hitler’s goals spurred non-aggression talks (Poole 1946, 141). The secret protocol of the pact came to light during the **Nuremberg Trial** in 1946 (Daniell 1946). The details of this portion of the agreement show Hitler’s awareness of Germany’s vulnerability to a **two front war** and Soviet interest in eastern Poland and southeastern European territories (Keiji 2014, 1150).

Newspaper articles discussing the signing of the pact, as well as articles covering the Nuremberg Trials, provide insight into the motivation behind the agreement and the revelation of the **secret protocol**. A 1939 article describes international relations as coming to a brink after the signing by escalating tension over Poland, “…signing of the pact brought Europe to the brink of the inevitable showdown over Hitler’s Polish demands” (Miller 1939). Two 1946 articles review the secret protocol and its intentions, “…the text of an agreement supplementary to the German-Soviet non aggression agreement has been found…”, the article continues, “…the text [secret protocol] had certainly not been published” (Matthews 1946). The second article provided that “Frederick Gauss, chief of the legal department in the Reich Foreign Office, who drafted the secret protocol as well as the nonaggression pact that secured Germany’s eastern frontier during the Polish campaign” (Daniell 1946). The Nuremberg Trials brought the **secret protocol** to light in Germany, but Soviet Russia did not acknowledge the existence of the protocol until 1989 because, “…Baltic activists insist that the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were the illegitimate basis of the **Baltic’s annexation** and should be declared null and void” (Remnick, 1989). The Soviet Union intended to hold onto to the territory they **annexed** during the war by denying the existence of any secret protocol, but 50 years later the call by Baltic activists led to the Kremlin **finally acknowledging** the secret aspect of the agreement (Keiji, 2014).

Bibliography

“Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” (August 23, 1939). In United States Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy: From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1956. Series D (1937-1945), *The Last Days of Peace*, Volume 7: August 9 – September 3, 1939. Document Numbers 228 and 229, pp. 245-47. (English translation accredited to the U.S. Department of State Division of Language Services and slightly edited by GHI staff)

* Full text of the original document including the secret protocol. GHDI also provides some background information regarding the political milieu of Europe before the act was signed.

Miller, Webb. (1939, Aug 24). Nazi-soviet pact signed; Europe on war brink.*Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)* Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/164946811?accountid=14522>

* This article provides headlines a day after the pact was signed and gives information regarding the preparation for war in Europe. It places the signing of the pact in historical context by discussing the position and mobilization of France and Britain response to the heightened threat of war. The article also articulates the impact the agreement had on any future diplomatic relations between the Soviets and the allies. Smith, R. A.. (1941). The

Smith, R.A. (1941). Triple-Axis Pact and American Reactions. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *215*, 127–132. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1022609>

* Instead of a focus on Germany and the Soviets, this article describes events in Europe and the American response. It gives further analysis of the non aggression pact but due to the American focus it gives further depth to understanding how the agreement came into effect. Although this article discusses relations with Japan and Italy, it has a section dedicated to German relations the impact the nonaggression treaty had on America’s preparations for World War II.

Herbert L. Matthews. (1946, Oct 15). Britain has data on split of Poland.*New York Times (1923-Current File)* Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/107681072?accountid=14522>

* This article describes the approach prosecutors during the Nuremberg Trials took in proving that the pact indeed contained a secret protocol detailing the partition of Eastern European territory. It also offers a glimpse into how the Soviets vehemently denied the existence of any secret protocol during their defense. Further, this article indicates the revelation of the agreement during the Nuremberg Trials in Germany.

John Wheeler-Bennett. (1946). “Twenty Years of Russo-German Relations: 1919-1939”.*Foreign Affairs* 25 (1). Council on Foreign Relations: 23–43. doi:10.2307/20030017.

* This journal article analyzes foreign relations between Germany and the Soviet Union from the end of World War I to the outbreak of World War II. Wheeler-Bennett discusses how Poland played a crucial role in how the two powers dealt with one another because, he argues, that the countries were friendly when they had a buffer zone between them. He details how German-Russo relations can be characterized by periods of isolation and opposition, as well as periods of amicable relations as seen through the nonaggression agreement. Although Hitler betrayed Stalin, Wheeler-Bennett’s article gives historical information as well as critical analysis of foreign relations.

Raymond Daniell by cable to New York Time (1946, Mar 26). Russian wards off Hess’ story of Pact.*New York Times (1923-Current File)* Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/107469622?accountid=14522>

* This newspaper article gives further legitimzation to the fact that the secret protocol of the pact became public knowledge during the Nuremberg Trials. It also indicates how some people, without knowledge of the secret protocol, still realized Hitler’s goal to protect his eastern flank and Stalin’s interest in the Baltic states in Eastern Europe.

Dewitt C., Poole. (1946). “Light on Nazi Foreign Policy”. *Foreign Affairs* 25 (1). Council on Foreign Relations: 130–54. doi:10.2307/20030025.

Poole discusses Nazi foreign policy through the lens of the highest-level leaders such as Ribbentrop, lower level officials and finally the experience of the common people. He begins with the Nazi’s coming to power and proceeds all the way until the end of World War II. During his section on the 1937-1940 years, Poole describes Hitler’s motivation to protect himself on the east through the nonaggression pact. He also points out how during this time Nazi foreign relations were primarily focused on preparing for aggressive positioning and ultimately war.

Remnick, D. (1989, Aug 19). Kremlin acknowledges secret pact on baltics.*The Washington Post (1974-Current File)* Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/139985487?accountid=14522>

* Newspaper articulating acceptance by the Kremlin of the existence of the secret protocol in 1989. This article also describes the political relationship between the Baltic States annexed during the war and the Soviets. It shows existence of how the Germans and Soviets intended to divide and maintain spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

Weinberg, Gerhard L. (1989). “The Nazi-Soviet Pacts: A Half-century later” *Foreign Affairs* 68, no 4 (Fall 1989): 175-189. *Academic Search Complete,* EBSCOhost (accessed march 10, 2016).

* Weinberg gives a description of the events leading up to the signing of the pact by following Ribbentrop’s movement throughout Europe during the time. He also discusses further Russian attempts to deny the secret protocol and opponents to that policy. He also reflects on the political outcomes of the pact and Hitler’s eventual betrayal.

Sato, Keiji. (2014). “Acknowledgement of the Secret Protocol of the German-Soviet Non- aggression Pact and the Declaration of State Soveriegnty by the Union Republics of the USSR.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 7: 1146-1164. *Academic Search Complete,* EBSCO*host* (accessed February 16, 2016).

* This article, written 75 years after the signing of the pact, describes the response of Germany and the Soviet Union to the revelation of the secret protocol. On one hand, Keiji points to the German acceptance of the protocol after Nuremburg. On the other hand, she argues that the Soviets denied the protocol in order to maintain a legitimate claim to Baltic territory gained during the war. Keiji’s work also gives analysis from a different point of view looking back on relations, rather than contemporary scholars cited earlier in this bibliography.