The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact

A diplomatic history, 1941–1945

Boris Slavinsky

Translated by Geoffrey Jukes

Nissan Institute/RoutledgeCurzon Japanese Studies Series

The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact

This book provides a detailed account from the Soviet Foreign Ministry archives of the neutrality pact between Japan and the Soviet Union, signed in April 1941, which was breached only 9 months before its expiry date of April 1946 when the Soviet Union attacked Japan. Japan's neutrality had enabled Stalin to move his Far Eastern forces to the German front where they contributed significantly to Soviet victories from Moscow to Berlin. The Soviet Union's violation of the pact and its retention of the southern Kurile Islands, seized in 1945, created a sense of victimization in Japan to the extent that there is still no formal Peace Treaty between the two countries to this day.

The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact, previously published in Russia, appears here for the first time in English. In his translation of this book, Geoffrey Jukes has revised and updated this important work, which Dr Slavinsky was unable to complete before his untimely death in April 2002. In an additional chapter, Jukes provides evidence that, in 1944, the Soviet government provided Japan with information, obtained by espionage, about American, British and Australian intentions and capabilities. Jukes suggests that the most likely explanation of this is Stalin's desire to be seen as a great military leader by keeping Japan in the war until he was ready to attack, then avenging Russia's defeat in the war of 1904–5, and by taking more territory than Nicholas had lost – precisely what he did in 1945.

Dr Boris Slavinsky (1935–2002) graduated from Kiev Institute of Technology in 1958, and until 1967 worked in engineering design, receiving his DSc degree in 1966. From 1967 to 1971 he was in the Japanese section of the USSR State Science and Technology Committee before becoming Deputy Chief Scientific Secretary, Far Eastern section, USSR Academy of Sciences, and simultaneously head of the 'Soviet Foreign Policy in the Far East' Section of the Institute of History. From 1996 until his death in 2002 he was a Senior Research Fellow of IMEMO (Institute of World Economics and International Relations), Russian Academy of Sciences.

Geoffrey Jukes, after graduating from Oxford in 1953, spent many years researching Soviet foreign and defence policies with the UK Foreign and Colonial Office (1953–6 and 1965–7) and the Defence Intelligence Staff (1956–65). He then moved to Australia where he is now an Associate Fellow of the Australian National University and a Senior Fellow of Melbourne University. Mr Jukes has written numerous articles, books and contributions to collective works on Russia/the Soviet Union in Russo-Japanese (1904–5) and both World Wars as well as on Soviet strategy, the Sino-Soviet dispute and the Soviet Union in Asia.

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Translator's note

One of the regular charges made against the Soviet Union during the Cold War was that it could not be trusted to observe any treaties that it signed. Instances cited in support of this allegation often centred on its relations with its western neighbours. In the inter-war years it signed non-aggression treaties with them, then in 1939–40 invaded five of them, annexing parts of Poland and Finland, and swallowing Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania whole. But the West's accusations never touched on one particularly flagrant violation, the declaration of war on 9 August 1945 on an eastern neighbour, Japan, despite the existence of a Neutrality Pact between them that was not due to expire until 13 April 1946.

The reason why this particular transgression was not cited as evidence of Soviet perfidy is simple. Until the dropping of the two atomic bombs the United States and United Kingdom had long been actively soliciting Soviet entry into the war against Japan as the quickest way of bringing Japan to its knees. Moreover, Roosevelt and Churchill underestimated Stalin's personal ambition to avenge Russia's defeat in the war of 1904–5, and wooed him more than they need have done. In particular, they not only acquiesced in his recovering everything that had been lost in 1904–5, but lightheartedly accepted his claim on the entire Kurile Islands chain which, unlike Korea, Formosa or Southern Sakhalin, Japan had not acquired by war. The three islands and a group of islets closest to Hokkaido had never been Russian, the rest had been recognised as Russian only from 1855 to 1875. Russia then ceded them to Japan in exchange for Japan's relinquishing its claims to Sakhalin. Inclusion of the South Kuriles among Stalin's gains added to his violation of the Neutrality Pact and detention of Japanese prisoners of war for anything up to 10 years after the end of the war created in Japan a sense of victimisation which has lasted to this day. Fifty-eight years after the war's end, there is still no formal peace treaty between Japan and Russia.

Both sides were guilty of breaches of the Pact, but neither chose to make any breach an occasion for denouncing it, because it served their mutual interests. While Japan fought in the south and the Soviet Union in the west, neither wanted to open an additional front in the north-east. But

at the Tehran conference in November 1943, Stalin gave his allies an undertaking to join the war against Japan within 2 to 3 months from the end of the war in Europe. From then on the date of Germany's surrender would determine whether or not the Neutrality Pact would be violated. And in mid-1945, while Japan was frantically seeking Soviet mediation to end the war, and the Soviet Foreign Ministry stalling as only it knew how, Red Army troops, tanks and guns were already streaming eastwards.

By attacking the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, then invading British, Dutch and American dependencies in South-East Asia, Japan placed Hitler in an awkward position. Germany was already at war with the USSR, but had not sought Japan's assistance, despite being allied to it in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936 and the Tripartite Pact of September 1940. The latter obliged Germany to assist Japan only if the United States attacked it, but Hitler, for reasons never explained, declared war on the USA a few days after Pearl Harbor. By so doing he made it easier for Roosevelt to overcome isolationist opposition to US involvement in the war in Europe, and follow his inclination to give priority to defeat of Germany, the strongest enemy, over defeat of Japan.

As Dr Slavinsky demonstrates, Japan had at various times between the two World Wars invaded or contemplated invading the Soviet Far East. However, the Red Army defeated it in tests of strength in 1938 and 1939, so its expansionist ambitions turned southwards. There the colonies of defeated France and Holland and hard-pressed Britain offered easier and richer spoils, particularly the oil, rubber and valuable minerals, such as tungsten and tin, that Japan sorely lacked.

Only the United States could offer strong opposition to Japan's southward push. In late 1940 Germany, victorious in Europe but unable to invade Britain or force it to make peace, and planning to invade the Soviet Union, sought only to keep the USA out of the war. However Japan, at war with US- and Soviet-backed China since 1937, had to choose between the prospects of deterring US intervention or of crippling its ability to intervene.

The Tripartite Pact appeared to provide a solution, in the form of an alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan (with other countries, including the Soviet Union, to be invited to join later) aimed at intimidating the United States into staying out of the war. Italy's dictator, Mussolini, and Japan's Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, were assured that such was its sole purpose, and Article 5 of the Treaty indeed stated specifically that it was not directed against the Soviet Union. Germany therefore actively misled both its co-signatories, because when they signed the Pact on 27 September 1940, its preparations to invade the USSR were already under way.

The Tripartite Pact thus purported to give Japan some insurance against American intervention in its projected southward expansion, and at that time its expansionist plans did not include an attack on the USA. However, it saw a risk that the Soviet Union, not then at war, might

exploit its entanglement in war in the south to invade its northern possessions, Manchukuo, Korea, Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. To insure against that possibility, Japan sought a non-aggression pact. An insuperable obstacle to that was that a treaty the USSR already had with China precluded signing a non-aggression pact with any country with which either was at war. However, the increasing signs that Germany was preparing to invade prompted Stalin also to seek some assurance against a two-front war. So he took a personal hand in negotiating a Neutrality Pact with Japan, and it was signed on 13 April 1941, just 10 weeks before the invasion. The course of Soviet–Japanese relations from then until the Japanese surrender on 2 September 1945 is examined in this book.

In translating the work I have shortened some of the extracts from meetings successive Japanese ambassadors in Moscow and Soviet ambassadors in Tokyo had with officials of the respective Foreign Ministries, and from the diary notes of Soviet ambassadors Smetanin and Malik. However, the extracts cited by Dr Slavinsky from the most important records of conversation, for example, between Stalin and Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka in 1941, and Stalin and Roosevelt in 1945, have not been curtailed. In translating Soviet terms I have discarded 'People's Commissar' and 'People's Commissariat' in favour of the shorter and more familiar 'Minister' and 'Ministry', a change the Soviets themselves made in 1946. At a few places where Dr Slavinsky's account requires some elaboration or qualification, I have added some comments.

A chapter has also been added to take account of materials, mostly archival that became available only after the book had already been published in Russia. Some additional evidence that Stalin's desire for military glory was becoming obsessional at this time has been included. However, the most important addition is of a finding by two Australian scholars of evidence suggesting that in late 1944 the Soviet Union was passing to the Japanese information obtained by espionage about American, British and Australian force strengths, deployments and intentions in the Pacific. This supports Dr Slavinsky's contention that Stalin rejected Japan's requests for mediation because he wanted to enhance his reputation as a military leader, by succeeding where Tsar Nicholas II had failed in 1904–5. To that end he was apparently prepared to pass on information about his allies' capabilities and intentions, in order to keep Japan in the war until he was ready to attack it.

For students of international relations, the account illustrates the difficulty of creating theories that can accurately model the activities of apparently irrational actors and of leaders who practise deception to the extent that it becomes self-defeating. Germany deceived Japan and Italy into signing the Tripartite Pact in the belief that it was intended to deter the USA, and deceived the Soviet Union by suggesting it would be welcomed as a fourth member of the Pact. Then, without consulting either of its co-signatories, it attacked the Soviet Union, which Article 5 of the Pact

specifically stated was not its target. Japan's unilateral decision to attack the United States, as well as the British and Dutch colonies in South-East Asia, was not based on any evidence of a US intent to attack Japan that needed to be pre-empted. It completely destroyed the ostensible rationale of the Tripartite Pact, and Germany's policy of trying to deter the USA from joining the war. And when the failure of 'blitzkrieg' prompted Germany to seek the Japanese aid against the USSR that it had initially spurned, the distrust each had already sown in the other ensured that each continued to fight a separate and losing war.

Similarly, Hitler's decision to declare war on the United States was not required by the Tripartite Pact. It gave Germany an enemy far stronger than the Japanese ally it had just acquired, and eased Roosevelt's task of concentrating US power first against Germany.

Stalin deceived his allies into cajoling him into a war he was all along determined to enter when the time was ripe. His success enabled him to set a high price of massive material aid, and of acquiescence in his seizing far more territory after three and a half weeks of fighting than his allies that had fought Japan for over three and a half years.

Dr Slavinsky points out that Soviet-period historiography had little to say about the 'Strange Neutrality', and that much of what it did say was tendentious and/or untrue. Western scholarship devoted even less attention to the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact, mainly because of lack of access to Soviet archives. Dr Slavinsky was the first scholar to dive into the flood of material on Soviet–Japanese relations during 1941–5 released from Soviet archives since 1991. His account sheds new light on the ways they developed between the signing of the Pact in April 1941 and the formal Japanese surrender on 2 September 1945. While this translated version was being prepared for publication, Dr Slavinsky died. The account that follows is dedicated to the memory of a notable scholar and valued colleague in the study of the often complex and sometimes turbulent interactions between Japan and Russia. It could not have been completed without the generous help and excellent academic resources provided by the Slavic Research Center, for which I am deeply grateful.

G. Jukes

Slavic Research Center,
Hokkaido University,
Sapporo, Japan,
15 January 2003.

Series editor's preface

The Nissan/RoutledgeCurzon Japanese Studies Series was begun in 1986 and has now passed its sixtieth volume. It seeks to foster an informed and balanced, but not uncritical, understanding of Japan. One aim of the series is to show the depth and variety of Japanese institutions, practices and ideas. Another is, by using comparisons, to see what lessons, positive or negative, can be drawn for other countries. The tendency in commentary on Japan to resort to out-dated, ill-informed or sensational stereotypes still remains, and needs to be combated.

Since the ending of the Cold War international relations in the Asia Pacific have been slowly evolving to conform to new global realities. No doubt the most important adjustment has been towards a world dominated by the United States as the sole 'hyperpower'. But in what takes on the appearance of a unipolar world the United States shows some surprising vulnerabilities. This is most obvious in respect of international terrorism, but also in its failure to construct a convincing coalition to effect regime change in Iraq.

By comparison with the Middle East, the Asia Pacific generally receives less media attention (with the current exception of North Korea). The Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, and then the Middle Eastern crises of the early 2000s (so sharply involving the United States), tended to reduce coverage of the region for a prolonged period. Meanwhile, however, the Asia Pacific was regaining much of its economic dynamism, manifested especially in the spectacular development of the Chinese economy. Japan, after a decade of relative economic stagnation, was gradually resuming its economic growth and showing some signs of greater political activism in relation to external threats. The crisis over North Korean nuclear weapons (real or imagined, but probably real) that emerged in the later months of 2002 gave a sense of urgency to the task of rethinking the international politics of the Asia Pacific region. Despite the extreme reticence of its foreign policy since the 1950s, Japan, as the second largest economy in the world, seemed destined to play a pivotal role in such a reassessment.

The Japanese, being a proud people and heirs to an ancient civilisation,

have long been concerned to map out their own path in the world. It is too simple to assume that they will simply follow a road designed for them by Washington, even though current Government policy is broadly pro-American. There is a pattern in Japanese history whereby adaptation to external norms of behaviour is tempered by the maintenance of structures and practices based on indigenous cultural experience. Little in the currently fashionable debate about globalisation would appear likely to negate this approach.

Japanese reluctance to engage in active foreign policy initiatives emerged as the result of defeat in war, the atomic bombing of two major cities, the Peace Constitution of 1946, widespread pacifist sentiment among the people and reliance on security guarantees provided (in return for military bases) by the United States. There is some evidence today of more positive policies emerging, but foreign policy reticence is deeply entrenched. Indeed, the influence of the War and its aftermath upon Japanese attitudes can hardly be underestimated, and persists even today.

One of the more opaque areas of Japanese external relations during the War was the relationship with the Soviet Union. Until the ending of the Cold War, Soviet archives were effectively closed, so that much on the Soviet side of the equation was a matter for speculation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union access to archives greatly improved, and the veteran Russian diplomatic historian Professor Boris Slavinsky was able to explore them for insights into wartime relations between his own country and Japan. During most of the Asia–Pacific War Japan was protected from Soviet attack by a neutrality pact, though this was broken by Stalin in August 1945. This book concerns the neutrality pact, its negotiation and maintenance, as well as its unilateral violation and the subsequent blitzkrieg invasion by Soviet forces of what had been Japanese territory on the mainland of Asia and offshore islands. Professor Slavinsky tells a gripping and little-known story on the basis of exhaustive archival research. He has filled in one of the major gaps in our understanding of the Asia–Pacific War.

Very sadly, Boris Slavinsky died while the translation of this book, originally published in Russian, was in preparation. The book has been ably translated and adapted by Geoffrey Jukes, a specialist on Russian and Soviet military history based in Australia. As Series editor, I wish to dedicate it to the memory of a fine historian, Boris Slavinsky.

J.A.A. Stockwin

Preface

At the end of the 1980s, while preparing a monograph on the 1951 San Francisco peace conference with Japan,[1] I found N.B. Adyrkhayev's name in the stenographic record among the members of the Soviet delegation. I soon found that he was alive and well, and we met. Again and again.

He had a truly remarkable career. After graduating from the Japanese section of the Institute of Oriental Studies in May 1940, he was recruited by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and sent to the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo, where he worked with no time off, including all the war years, until May 1947. He had excellent Japanese, and was personal interpreter to the Soviet ambassador, Yakov Malik. After he returned to Moscow he often used to interpret for the highest Soviet leaders, for example in 'secret' meetings between Prime Minister Bulganin and Japanese Fisheries Minister Kono,[2] and at Stalin's April 1951 meeting with Japanese Communists.[3]

Because of this book's subject, I would like to dwell in some detail on a wide-ranging discussion about the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941, which I had with Adyrkhayev in summer 1990 in the academic journal *Problems of the Far East (Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka)*. We called it 'Diplomatic Trap or Diplomatic Phenomenon?'.[4] At that time my knowledge of the Pact was superficial.

At the outset I reminded Adyrkhayev that in late 1940 and early 1941 Japan had sought to conclude a non-aggression pact with the USSR, but Moscow had rejected this proposal, and instead insisted on a Neutrality Pact. What motivated the Japanese proposal and the Soviet refusal?

> To understand the Japanese position better, [Adyrkhayev began] we must recall what the world situation was at that time. First, in Europe in 1939–40 the war unleashed by Germany was raging. The anti-Hitler countries had suffered severe defeats. In summer 1940 Paris fell, and the British and Dutch forces were seriously mauled. They were compelled to concentrate in Europe, leaving their colonies and possessions in South-East Asia defenceless. All this presented great temptation and

favourable conditions for Japan to seize these areas, rich in various strategic raw materials that Japan always acutely needed. In other words, the conditions were maturing for Japan to establish its domination in Asia in accordance with the 'Tripartite Pact'.

Japanese–American relations, on the other hand, were by then becoming noticeably troubled. Trade between them was shrinking, especially deliveries of American oil and scrap metal. The USA was becoming the main obstacle to Japan's southward penetration. Second, it was understood in Japan that as soon as Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the USSR and USA would become allies, and might act together against Japan.

Taking account of all that, Japan wanted to secure itself from the north, and specifically to that end its then Foreign Minister, Yosuke Matsuoka, sought to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union.

Then I asked whether there was any link between the Tripartite Pact and Japan's effort to conclude a non-aggression or neutrality pact with the USSR. In response Adyrkhayev recalled the fundamental propositions of the Tripartite Pact:

Article 1. Japan recognises and respects the leadership of Germany and Italy in establishing a New Order in Europe.

Article 2. Germany and Italy recognise and respect Japan's leadership in establishing a New Order in Greater East Asia.

Article 3 obliged the signatories to support each other 'by all political, economic and military means, if one of the contracting parties is subjected to attack by any power not at present participant in the European war or Sino-Japanese conflict'.

This was a direct threat to the USSR and USA, the only major states not at war in Europe or involved in the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1940. It was an overt demand: do not obstruct our seizing Europe and Asia, Adyrkhayev emphasised.

But the Tripartite Pact also related directly to the conclusion of a Soviet–Japanese neutrality pact. The Japanese ruling circles, oriented southwards, towards the Europeans' Asian colonies, wanted to secure their northern frontiers by a non-aggression or at least a neutrality pact with the USSR.

I remarked:

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Soviet government was uneasy at Nazi Germany's expansion in Europe. It also had information that

> Germany was preparing to attack the USSR, and it would seem that Matsuoka's offer of a non-aggression pact gave us more guarantee of security.

Adyrkhayev replied that indeed the USSR's desire to sign a neutrality pact instead of a non-aggression pact seemed illogical. But as later became clear, this policy was far-sighted, and pursued the following aims. First, we had to free ourselves of the humiliating Japanese oil and coal concessions in North Sakhalin and fishing rights in our territorial waters which had been imposed upon us; second, we had to create the conditions for recovering South Sakhalin. Third, we had somehow to resolve the question of transit for our ships through the straits between the Kurile Islands, then entirely under Japanese control, which closed all exits from the Sea of Okhotsk to the ocean. Fourth, we had to liquidate the focus of permanent tension and military danger on our borders with Manchuria, which Japan had turned into a bridgehead for a war.

We went on to discuss what Japan's attitude to the pact was in practical terms. Adyrkhayev said:

> It very soon became clear to us that Japan's leadership did not even intend to adhere to the neutrality pact and fulfil the obligations it had accepted. Just one example. When signing this pact, Matsuoka gave a written promise to liquidate the Japanese oil and coal concessions in North Sakhalin. That was in April 1941, but by June, after Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, Matsuoka had already ceased to think it necessary to fulfil his official promises. Furthermore, in July of that year, a plan, codenamed 'Kantokuen', to attack our country, was adopted at the very highest level in Japan, including by the Emperor.

I objected that this was only a plan, and never implemented. But Adyrkhayev continued to insist that Japan considered the Neutrality Pact a mere piece of paper, and constantly violated it, giving priority to its obligations under the Tripartite Pact. He recalled that at Matsuoka's first meeting with Soviet ambassador Smetanin after the start of the Soviet–German war, Matsuoka said Japan's foreign policy was based on the Tripartite Pact, and therefore, should contradictions arise between it and the Neutrality Pact, the latter would not remain in force.

Even this small part of our discussion disclosed a series of very interesting problems which flowed from the Neutrality Pact. I realised that Adyrkhayev was a 'career diplomat of the Stalinist school', a 'true patriot', who stoutly defended Soviet foreign policy. But many of his thoughts needed rethinking.

His assertion that the concessions in North Sakhalin were imposed on us by force was at odds with the truth. The Soviet side offered them, and they were profitable for us, because they aided the development of Soviet

oil and coal production. Adyrkhayev was silent about the Tripartite Pact's Article Five, which stated that it was not directed against the Soviet Union; and furthermore, Matsuoka, like Ribbentrop, had attempted to recruit the USSR as its fourth member.

So what was the Neutrality Pact? If it was a diplomatic trap, whose trap, Japanese or Soviet? And was there ever such a phenomenon in the history of international relations? For in 1941–5, with the whole world engulfed by war, Japan and the Soviet Union were able to preserve normal, business-like, peaceful relations!

These questions so seized me that I decided to examine them carefully. Besides, the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet denunciation of the Pact was approaching. I wanted to understand how legitimate were Moscow's actions.

World historiography allots only a small space in the international relations system to the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact. The American scholar George Lensen called it 'The Strange Neutrality'.[5] For whom was it strange? Most of all for the Americans, who tried throughout those years to drag the Soviet Union into the war against Japan. They indeed thought it strange that with all the world at war, the USSR and Japan maintained normal relations.

After my conversation with Adyrkhayev I decided to go deeper into the vicissitudes of pre-war and wartime international affairs in the Far East. The deeper I delved, the more clearly I saw that Soviet historiography of that period was tendentious, based on falsification, tacit suppression of facts, and sometimes even downright lies. Furthermore, it had been rewritten several times, dependent on the state of relations with our main 'class enemy', the United States, and our most important neighbour, China. On the other hand, Soviet foreign policy was traditionally linked to the first person in the state, the First or General Secretary of the Communist Party. In the years that I examined, this was Stalin's foreign policy, structured exclusively on the basis of his personality.

After March 1953, and especially after the Twentieth Party Congress (1956) 'Stalin's personality cult' and repressive policies within the country were condemned. But Soviet foreign policy remained above criticism, roughly on the grounds that because of it we were victors in the Great Fatherland War, the Soviet Union became the world's greatest state, and reinforced its security. The end justified the means!

Today, as a result of democratisation, many former secrets of our foreign policy's history have become available to researchers and the public. They facilitate a different approach to understanding Moscow's actions towards Japan.

I was among the first Russian researchers given access to the Russian Foreign Ministry's Russian Federation Foreign Policy Archive (FPA). Declassification is in progress, and users can be shown documents only after it. Enciphered messages between ambassadors and the People's Com-

missariat of Foreign Affairs remain secret. But in 3 years' work, I was able to examine the files of the Secretariats of People's Commissar (Minister) Molotov, his deputies Lozovskiy, Malik, Vyshinskiy and Gromyko; the Departments dealing with Japan, the USA, China and Korea; the Press Section, International Conferences, and others.

I have also used: the diary notes of K.A. Smetanin and Ya.A. Malik, Soviet ambassadors in Tokyo from 1939 to 1945; notes of their conversations with Japanese Foreign Ministers, their deputies and other important Japanese figures; Soviet ambassadors' reports on the situation in Japan, their evaluation of current political events, analyses of Japanese press items, and their policy recommendations.

Particular value attaches to materials from 'Molotov's Special File', which contains notes of his conversations with Japanese ambassadors Tatekawa and Sato, and materials relating to Foreign Minister Matsuoka's visit to Moscow. I have studied the notes of Molotov's talks with Matsuoka on 24 March, 7, 9 and 11 April 1941.

Thus I was able to study original documents from Matsuoka's visit to Moscow and decisions based on them. I must specify that they are the Soviet version, so it is very important to compare them and supplement missing documents by using other sources. George Lensen[6] worked with similar documents in the Japanese archives, but since he was forbidden to reveal his source, he mentioned only that they were 'secret'. A Japanese researcher, Kudo Michihiro,[7] had access to documents from Matsuoka's negotiations in Moscow, and so did some others.

A pleasant surprise was the Foreign Policy Archive's publication of three documents under the heading 'The USSR's Policy in the Far East on the eve of the Great Fatherland War. J.V. Stalin's contacts with Chinese and Japanese politicians'.[8] They are Stalin's message to Chiang Kai-Shek of 16 October 1940, and notes of his two conversations with Matsuoka, on 24 March and 12 April 1941.

The manuscript of this book was already complete when I became acquainted with these documents in early February 1995. They were extremely important to me, because they confirmed conclusions I had already drawn from other sources. I therefore decided to incorporate and evaluate them, but not otherwise amend my text.

The total of new documents from the Foreign Policy Archive coming into scholarly circulation through publication of this book is about two hundred; but gaps in the FPA's declassified documents should be noted. I was unable to examine the notes of ambassador Smetanin's conversation with Foreign Minister Toyoda on 13 August 1941, at which Smetanin handed him the statement that the USSR would not provide the United States with naval or air bases. The content of the Soviet statement is clear from subsequent conversations but I could not obtain the document itself. There is, apparently, a feeling that its contents might cast a shadow over relations with the USA.

The book has eleven chapters. The first is historiographical, fundamentally describing Soviet publications. In Chapter 2 I analyse the prehistory of the Neutrality Pact, beginning with the Pekin Convention of 1925, since problems were created then which the next generation of politicians had to resolve. The core of this chapter is the question of what kind of treaty the USSR and Japan wished to conclude, a Neutrality Pact or a Non-Aggression Pact, and why, a problem little studied in world historiography.

In Chapter 3 there is an account of the two governments' aims in signing the Pact. Here, for the first time, all the documents relating to the Soviet–Japanese negotiations, including Matsuoka's discussions with Stalin, are brought fully into the public domain.

In Chapter 4 I show what a dilemma confronted the Japanese government in determining Japan's future course after the outbreak of the Soviet–German war.

Chapter 5 shows that Moscow knew about the attack on the United States that Japan was preparing, and did not tell Roosevelt. It is also suggested that the NKVD, the predecessor of the KGB, perhaps had a hand in drafting the 'Hull Memorandum' of 26 November 1941, which helped push Japan towards its strike at Pearl Harbor.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the Neutrality Pact in the period of Japanese successes in the South-East Asian war, 1941–2. In those years the Soviet Union had more often to remind Japan of the need to observe the pact than vice-versa.

In Chapter 7 I discuss the serious tests which beset the treaty when fortune began turning its back on Japan. At that time the Japanese government was already seeking a way out of the war, and attempting to maintain relations with the USSR at a normal level, but no higher.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the last year of the war with Germany and the Neutrality Pact. In this period the Soviet Union gave secret undertakings to the USA and Great Britain to join the war against Japan within 2 to 3 months after the defeat of Germany. And although on the surface Soviet–Japanese relations were normal, Moscow had already begun preparing for war.

Chapter 9 deals with the denunciation of the Neutrality Pact. Although the treaty permitted denunciation, it evoked a very pained reaction in Japanese ruling circles, which, nevertheless, hoped the USSR would maintain relations at the level that had existed since 1941.

Chapter 10 discusses Japan's peace initiatives of May–July 1945, aimed at securing Soviet mediation to end the war. Ignorant of the decisions taken at Yalta, the Japanese government vainly hoped that by offering significant concessions to the Soviet Union it could obtain its agreement to mediate a compromise peace.

In the eleventh and final chapter, on the Soviet Union's violation of the Neutrality Pact, I attempt to answer three questions:

1 Were there contradictions between the USSR and Japan which could only be resolved by war, that is with Soviet and Japanese blood?
2 Who needed the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan?
3 Precisely who decided the USSR should enter the war on Japan, i.e. who was guilty of violating the Neutrality Pact?

I also analyse the question whether the Neutrality Pact could have been preserved until it expired, i.e. until 25 April 1946.

Undoubtedly 1941–5 was a difficult period in Soviet–Japanese relations; but both countries were able then to preserve normal, business-like, peaceful relations. It is regrettable that Stalin nevertheless sanctioned violation of the Neutrality Pact, bowed to his Allies' pressure, and involved the Soviet Union in the war against Japan.

In conclusion I note that readers can acquaint themselves with the socio-political life of wartime Japan, the press of those years, utterances by the highest state and military figures, their views of the world, and their assessments of the international situation, including Japanese–Soviet relations.

The author dedicated the Russian edition of this monograph to the memory of Soviet diplomat Yakov Alexandrovich Malik, who became Soviet ambassador in Tokyo in July 1942, and held that post until the last days of the war. At that time he was only 36 years of age, the youngest ambassador not just of the USSR, but in the entire world (Figure 1).

Malik was one of the most talented Soviet diplomats, distinguished by profound erudition, and by ability to penetrate to the essence of current world problems and foresee the course of historical development. I became acquainted in detail with Malik's reports and diary notes, made first as Counsellor and then as Ambassador from the end of 1939 to the summer of 1945, and cite them extensively. Of great scholarly value is his report 'On the Question of Japanese–Soviet relations (now and in the light of the prospects in the Pacific war between Japan, the USA and England)'. It was prepared in July 1944 for the Soviet government, at whose summons he spent almost 3 months in Moscow, where he was received by Stalin.

While working on the book, I had several opportunities to talk to Malik's grandson, Sergey Yur'evich Malik, who followed in his grandfather's footsteps by becoming a career diplomat. He told me many interesting facts, and provided a number of photographs from the family album. They are reproduced in this book. It was published in Russia with financial support from Malik's family.

As already noted, this book has been written on the basis of documents from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In recent years an enormous amount of work has been done in declassifying and providing documents. An ever-increasing number of researchers can work in the Archive's new Reading Room.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Arthur Stockwin

Figure 1 Yakov A. Malik, Soviet Ambassador to Japan (Malik family album).

for his recommendation of my book for publication, and to Geoffrey Jukes for translating it. I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr Shinjiro Mori, Head of the Moscow bureau of the *Asahi Shimbun*, for photographs from the magazine 'Asahi Gurafu' reproduced in this book.

I express especial thanks to my wife, Ludmila Slavinskaya, for her carrying out the huge task of computer-setting the manuscript and other painstaking assistance, and also to my son Dmitriy Slavinsky for preparing the original proofs.

B.N. Slavinsky
August 1995

1 Historiography of the problem

In Soviet historiography there was not one book entirely devoted to the Japanese–Soviet neutrality pact, even though studies by the American scholar George Lensen[1] and the Japanese researcher Kudo Michihiro[2] dealt with the subject. The theme is analysed broadly in various Soviet books on Japanese–Soviet relations, but only individual isolated sections deal with it. A few articles have also been published.

The basic source for elucidating Japanese policy towards the USSR, and justifying Soviet policy towards Japan in the pre-war and wartime years, is the 'Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East', held during 1946–8 in Tokyo. These total 100,000 pages of text, not counting materials prepared before the trial.

The Soviet Government approached the Tokyo trial very seriously, as the USSR's position there was radically different from that in the Nuremberg trials of the principal German war criminals. The Soviet Union had a moral right to judge the latter, because they had invaded it. But Japan had not attacked the USSR; quite the reverse, it was the Soviet Union that on 8 August 1945 declared war on Japan, in breach of a Neutrality Pact supposed to remain in force until April 1946. To justify this, Soviet propaganda had to show, first, that Japan from the outset had been insincere in signing the Pact, since it wished to use it to mask preparations to attack the USSR, and second, that over all those years Japan systematically violated the pact by cooperating with Germany.

On Communist Party Central Committee instructions, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, State Security, the Interior, Marine and Fisheries, Red Army General Staff and Frontier Force Headquarters, USSR Procurator's office and various research institutes prepared dozens of notes, documents and maps. These distorted figures, twisted facts and falsified the history of Soviet–Japanese relations. They were then disseminated and published as separate books.[3] In later years, and until quite recently, highly tendentious and maliciously anti-Japanese books were added,[4] indicating that there are still those who need to foster anti-Japanese attitudes among our people.

The tragedy of post-1945 Soviet–Japanese relations is that the Tokyo trial materials were placed as 'historical truth' at the foundations of Soviet

policy towards Japan. Then accusations of militarism, complicity with American imperialism, territorial ambitions and revanchism, i.e. attempts to revise the results of the Second World War, were added. So images of Japan as aggressive and anti-Soviet were copied from one book to another. The roots of these attitudes go back to pre-war and Second World War years. To restore historical truth and flush out Cold War ideological sediment necessitates careful scholarly analysis of everything written about Soviet–Japanese relations in the post-war years.

Soon after the war, in 1951, a fundamental work *International Relations in the Far East (1870–1945)* was published in the USSR. A team of the most authoritative Soviet scholars of those years examined Soviet–Japanese relations, but touched only indirectly on the Neutrality Pact, which they did not think merited even a separate section, much less a chapter. Here is what they wrote.

> The Soviet government, which had been offering Japan a non-aggression pact since 1931, agreed to conclude a neutrality pact with Japan. This was signed on 13 April 1941. It played a positive role in restraining the spread of the war to Soviet Far Eastern borders, even though the Japanese imperialists viewed it as a mere manoeuvre. Foreign Minister Matsuoka, who signed the pact when he came to Moscow from Berlin, already knew of the attack Nazi Germany was preparing against the USSR. News of the signing of the Japanese–Soviet pact evoked extreme dissatisfaction in Washington, where they were very disappointed at the collapse of their hopes that war between Japan and the USSR was imminent.[4]

From there the assertion that for Japan the Neutrality Pact was just a cunning manoeuvre began making its way through Soviet publications.

An entire section was allotted to 'investigating Japan's provocative acts and violations of the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality pact'. Although written by 'respected' Soviet scholars, the book was weakly argued. Their sources were basically the press and Soviet leaders' speeches. No archive materials were cited.

The weightiest scholarly work in the Soviet literature is L.N. Kutakov's *History of Soviet–Japanese Diplomatic Relations*.[5] Kutakov worked for many years in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, and used archival documents extensively. But the book's spirit, and the way facts were analysed and conclusions drawn, were intended exclusively to justify all Soviet actions towards Japan. Kutakov expressed no view of his own about any event in Soviet–Japanese relations. Like other Soviet Japanologists, Kutakov justified the USSR's Japan policy on the basis of the Tokyo trial materials.

G.V. Yefimov and A.M. Dubinskiy's book *International Relations in the Far East (1917–1945)*, published in 1973,[6] is considered one of the most 'authoritative', and views the Neutrality Pact at the general level of

the region's international affairs. Its scholarly apparatus is very comprehensive, and includes works by both Soviet and foreign scholars. But the Tokyo trial's fundamental judgments remain unchallenged, and all the argumentation is the same as in other Soviet books. They claim, for example, that 'while signing the Neutrality Pact, the Japanese imperialists were hatching a treacherous plan to seize the Soviet Far East'. Following their account of the Yalta conference, they write 'The deterioration in militarist Japan's military situation did not change its policy's general aggressive, anti-Soviet course'.[7] This assessment can only be termed tendentious and, putting it mildly, unproven.

Another fact deserves attention. This book, published in 1973, says that 'over the period 1941–1944 Japanese armed forces detained 178 Soviet merchant ships, using weapons in a number of cases'.[8] And on page 595 of another book, published in 1951, we find exactly the same phrase.[9] So the same material, borrowed from the Tokyo trial, and aimed at instilling a negative attitude towards Japan and its people among Soviet readers, has migrated from book to book. Such uniformity is scarcely achievable unless directed. And this continues even now. At the end of 1994 A.A. Koshkin again mentioned the mythical 178 ships, citing a 1946 publication.[10]

There is also confusion about which treaty the USSR and Japan were discussing in mid-1940. Thus the *History of Diplomacy* says that at the beginning of July Japanese ambassador Togo proposed opening negotiations for a Neutrality Pact.[11] But the aforementioned Koshkin writes that in the same month Togo officially proposed negotiating a non-aggression pact.[12]

Although Koshkin's monograph *The Collapse of the Ripe Persimmon Strategy* was published during the 'new thinking' period (1989), it conveys a particular, I might even say malicious, anti-Japanese spirit. The third of its six chapters is entitled 'Preparation to strike at the USSR'. Well, yes, the 'Kantokuen' and other plans did exist. Any country with an army and General Staff drafts all kinds of military plans. But the next chapter's title, 'The reasons for changing the dates for Japan's attack on the USSR', is puzzling. After all, Japan did not attack the USSR, quite the reverse.

Koshkin devotes one whole paragraph to the Neutrality Pact, and writes there that after conclusion of the Tripartite Pact, Japan's desire to 'neutralise' the Soviet Union increased. 'It was a question not of establishing normal relations with the USSR and rejecting an aggressive anti-Soviet policy, but of increasing political pressure on it.'[13]

Koshkin asserts that in concluding the Neutrality Pact, Japan's leaders were least of all trying to 'stay out of the German–Soviet war', nor, as Japanese historians write, aiming to 'secure' the northern axis. He says that Kimura, Kwantung Army Chief of Staff, said something quite different, and here or there someone or other also wrote something different.

This epitomises the rubbishy methodology of many Soviet scholars, who were guided by Marxist-Leninist theory and the class approach, and

did not analyse the actual course of events, state policy as affirmed by a government, or the views prevalent among a country's leaders. Instead they justified the predetermined answer required of them by selecting this or that utterance from among many, and saying 'here, see what he said', although in fact there were many differing viewpoints, and a final decision came only after tumultuous debates and sharp clashes of views. In the summer of 1941 that was precisely the situation in the Japanese Cabinet; there were profound differences over whether Japan should attack northwards or southwards.

As for the Neutrality Pact, the attention all Soviet publications give to Matsuoka's reply to Ambassador Smetanin after Germany's attack on the USSR is typical. Kutakov wrote,

> On 23 June 1941 Matsuoka refused a direct answer to the Soviet Ambassador's question about Japan's position on the Soviet–German war. He emphasised there and then that 'the basis of Japan's foreign policy is the Tripartite Pact, and if the present war and the Neutrality Pact find themselves in contradiction with that basis and with the Tripartite Pact, then the Neutrality Pact will have no force'.[14]

Thus, Kutakov concludes, Matsuoka pronounced the Pact null and void.

Of course, Matsuoka's reply cast doubt on the obligations Japan had earlier accepted under the Pact, because he was Japan's Foreign Minister, and had personally signed the Pact only 2 months previously. But we also know that this was very much just Matsuoka's personal opinion. The overwhelming majority of cabinet ministers and the military opposed an immediate attack on the USSR, and Matsuoka was soon dismissed from Konoe's cabinet, because of his fundamental disagreements with most of its members.

We should note that Koshkin's interest in the Neutrality Pact was maintained into the future. At the end of 1993 he published an article 'The prehistory of the conclusion of the Molotov–Matsuoka Pact (1941)', and a year later 'The Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941 and its consequences'. Like his monograph, these articles retained the tendentious, one-sided approach. For example, he affirmed that the Pact enabled Japan to gain time to prepare carefully for war against the USSR. And he 'juggled' with Prince Konoe's statement that 'Japan will need another 2 years to reach the level of equipment, armaments and mechanisation displayed by the Red Army in the Khalkhin-Gol battles', so as to have Konoe saying that in 2 years' time Japan would attack the USSR.[15] But it is well known that Konoe was firmly against war with the USSR, defended his view after Germany attacked it, and even demanded dissolution of the Tripartite Pact because of Hitler's treachery.

Soviet publications hardly ever mentioned that one of Japan's main reasons for concluding the Neutrality Pact with the USSR was to induce

Moscow to cease giving military aid to Chiang Kai-Shek. This is proved by the specific instructions Matsuoka received for his journey to Europe, and statements by people who accompanied him. For example, his secretary, Toshikazu Kase, wrote

> ostensibly our intention was to meet Hitler and Mussolini, but in reality our covert objective was a meeting with Stalin and improvement in Japanese–Soviet relations. . . . By negotiating with the Soviets, we hoped to stop Soviet aid to China, and thus deal a strong blow at Chiang (Kai-Shek)'.[16]

This was also mentioned in a book *Notes on the Soviet Union*, by Maeshiba, special correspondent of the *Nichi-Nichi*, published in 1942. He wrote that after signing the Neutrality Pact, Ambassador Tatekawa said: 'When a non-aggression pact was concluded between Germany and the USSR, I thought then that for Japan, striving to resolve the China conflict, there was also no alternative to rapprochement with the Soviet Union.'[17]

I suppose this omission has to do with reluctance by those who directed Soviet propaganda to cast any shadow on the 'decency' of Stalin's foreign policy, always carefully protected by Soviet censorship, under which the USSR always gave China 'disinterested internationalist help in the struggle with Japanese aggression'. However, it is openly mentioned in the memoirs of A.S. Panyushkin, a Soviet ambassador in China, issued by the Soviet Institute of the Far East 'for official use' only.

> I would like to amplify this. During Khrushchev's 'thaw' several books were published, that enabled those who so wished to take an entirely fresh look at the assessments of specific persons and events of the prewar and war years hitherto dominant in historiography. Although printed only in small editions, and intended for academic libraries frequented only by the intelligentsia, the appearance of these works was an important event in the stifling, dogmatic atmosphere then dominating Soviet historiography. For researchers concerned with Far East problems, publication (1957–8) of a five-volume *History of the War in the Pacific*, by a group of Japanese scholars, was particularly significant. Although all pro-Soviet by inclination, their views on a series of key events in Far East history sounded a discord in the 'harmonious choir' of Soviet publications. So they were utilised to confirm the 'correctness' of Soviet foreign policy, but otherwise simply ignored, or sometimes even falsified.
>
> Thus in the *History of the War in the Pacific* is the statement 'In the decision of the Council of five ministers it was indicated that "in the given region, it is essential to create an anti-Communist, pro-Japanese, pro-Manchukuo zone, to strive for acquisition of strategic resources

> and extend transport installations, thereby *preparing ourselves against possible aggression from the Soviet Union's side* [my emphasis – B.S.], and creating a base for achieving Japanese–Manchurian–Chinese cooperation." '[18]

This is how that quotation is rendered in the *History of Diplomacy* written by Soviet researchers: 'In the decision of the five ministers it is stated that "in the given region ... extension of transport installations", *thereby preparing Japan for a possible struggle against the Soviet Union*.'[19]

See the difference? In the first case, as laid out by the Japanese researchers, the issue is defence of Japan against possible Soviet aggression, in the other the Soviet authors are already speaking of the direct opposite, Japan preparing for aggression against the USSR!

While I was 'processing' the five-volume Japanese work, I at once turned my attention to the difference in interpretation of the Tripartite Pact (September 1940) between that work and Soviet publications. Since correct understanding of the 'pact of three powers' is of fundamental importance for our investigation, let us dwell on it in more detail.

In the *History of the War on the Pacific Ocean* it is said that a special German envoy, G. Stahmer, was sent to Tokyo to reconcile Germany's and Japan's positions on a military alliance between them. On 9 and 10 September 1940 he met Matsuoka, with whom the following agreement in particular was achieved:

> 5. After conclusion of an alliance agreement between Japan, Germany and Italy, it appears extremely profitable to establish closer relations with the USSR immediately. On the question of improving Japanese–Soviet relations, Germany expresses its readiness to play the role of 'honest broker'.

On 27 September the Tripartite Pact was signed in the Reichschancelry in Berlin. Its Article 5 contained a clause placing the Soviet Union outside the Pact's field of operation. That showed clearly that it was pointed at the USA.[20]

But here is what we see in the *History of Diplomacy*: 'Signature of the Pact finalised the formation of the military bloc of aggressive powers. This pact was aimed at all peace-loving states, above all the USSR, although its anti-Soviet character was carefully camouflaged'.[21]

The same assessment of the pact is found in Kutakov's monograph. Nevertheless, he does put forward some alternative utterances, though he casts doubt on their sincerity. Here is what he writes: 'Konoe strains to convince us in his memoirs that the Tripartite Pact had as its main aim the regularising of Japanese–Soviet relations, in that Germany, Italy and Japan allegedly pursued the aim of attracting the Soviet Union into that bloc'.[22] Former Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu also speaks of this.[23]

Konoe, Matsuoka, Nomura and even Tojo assert that the Tripartite Pact was concluded to deter US entry into the war. Togo gives a somewhat different treatment, insisting that the true sense of the treaty amounted to coordinating the actions of the three powers against Britain and the USA.[24] American ambassador Grew[25] and British ambassador Craigie[26] support similar versions in their memoirs.

Although Kutakov used expressions such as 'allegedly' or 'strains to convince', and uses the word 'prove' in inverted commas, i.e. ironically, nevertheless for the dark Soviet years of the early 1960s, when books by foreign authors were kept only in special storage, even mentioning them like this was very significant for the thoughtful reader.

Let us turn now to diplomatic documents. On 1 October 1940 Matsuoka summoned Soviet envoy Smetanin and handed him the following statement:

> The current Japanese–German–Italian pact is of historical significance in defence of extending world order on the basis of consolidation of the three countries and establishment of perpetual peace for mankind through constructing a just new world order that ensures for every nation an appropriate, necessary place.
>
> The above-mentioned pact, as is clearly spelled out in its conditions, not only does not consider the Soviet Union its target, but places its hopes on cooperation with the USSR in building the new world order and achieving full understanding between Japan and the USSR.
>
> Thus the Japanese government, on the basis of the above, wishes to create the basis for perpetual peace in East Asia through sincerely exchanging views with the government of your country, removing all issues that have previously created misfortune between our two countries, and radically regularising diplomatic relations.[27]

In another conversation, on 8 October 1940, Matsuoka said that 'The Tripartite Pact is a decisive step in the matter of changing Japan's foreign policy', after which the next step would be taken, as a result of which he intended 'to open a new page in Japanese–Soviet relations.'[28]

Volume 3 of the *History of Diplomacy* concedes that during Molotov's visit to Berlin on 12–13 November 1940 Hitler and Ribbentrop proposed the Soviet government join the 'pact of three powers' as a fourth member for carving up the British inheritance. In doing this it was assumed that Soviet territorial aspirations would be 'aimed southwards from the Soviet Union's state border in the direction of the Indian Ocean'.

The 'History' goes on to say that the Nazi dictator counted on isolating the Soviet Union in the world arena before invading it, but his plans failed.[29]

Among the authors and editors of the book we see a Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, a Head of the historical-diplomatic directorate of the Foreign Ministry, with charge of all archival documents, and

many MFA colleagues; and we see these exceedingly competent people engage in open falsification. They assert that 'the Soviet delegation decisively rejected Hitler's programme for dividing up the world. It demanded withdrawal of German forces from Finland, and an end to German expansion in areas directly affecting the USSR's security, above all the Balkans, and also the Near East.'

It should be noted that in world historiography there is no unanimous view of what happened at the Soviet–German negotiations in Berlin in November 1940. Most scholars incline to the belief that Molotov heard out his interlocutors politely, asked some questions, but displayed no enthusiasm. For example, Dr Theo Sommer's view is that 'he met the Fuehrer's triumphal tales with sceptical irony, and skilfully declined the invitation to dance an international 'quadrille in the blue'.[30]

In fact events unfolded quite otherwise. In Berlin Molotov told the German leaders that it was possible in principle for the USSR to join the 'pact of three'. When he returned to Moscow and told Stalin the gist of his discussions, Stalin's reaction was also positive. He saw a rational core in the German proposals, and told Molotov to answer the Germans with acceptance.

As the Soviet documents on this question are kept strictly secret, our only source is the evidence of V.M. Berezhkov, Molotov's personal interpreter. He wrote:

> On the morning of 25 November, that is ten days after Molotov's return from Berlin, he sent for me. 'Today at ten p.m. I am receiving Schulenburg (the German ambassador). Notify him in advance. It will be a serious conversation. You will interpret . . .' I rang the German Embassy, and said the Minister would await the ambassador in his office that evening at 21.00 [sic].
>
> Molotov greeted his guests, invited them to sit at the long table set along the wall and covered with a green cloth, then said: 'I have invited you, Mr ambassador, to tell you the following. The Soviet government has attentively examined the proposal made on 13 November by German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, and is prepared under certain conditions to react positively to conclusion of a 'pact of four' about political and economic collaboration. . . .
>
> He went on to list the conditions. They amounted to: immediate withdrawal of German forces from Finland, ensuring the security of the USSR's Black Sea frontiers through conclusion of a Soviet–Bulgarian mutual assistance treaty, establishment of bases for military and naval forces of the USSR in the area of the Bosporus and Dardanelles, on the basis of a long-term lease, recognition of Soviet predominant interest in the area south of Batumi and Baku, in the direction of the Persian Gulf, and surrender by Japan of its concessionary rights to the coal and oil of Northern Sakhalin.

> In accordance with these wishes, Molotov continued, amendments must be made to Herr Ribbentrop's proposals regarding protocols. We assume that in the event of Turkey's refusal of Soviet bases in the Straits, the three powers – Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union – must devise and implement the necessary diplomatic and military measures. The Soviet government therefore considers that a quadripartite treaty must be accompanied not by two secret protocols, as the Reichsminister envisages, but by five. . . .
>
> After briefly outlining the content of these protocols, Molotov asked the ambassador to send the Soviet views on a 'pact of four' urgently to Berlin, and concluded 'We hope for a speedy reply from the German government.'[31]

But no reply came from Hitler. He was infuriated by Stalin's attempts to curb German appetites and, in the next month, blinded by his military successes in the West, signed his own death warrant by confirming the 'Barbarossa' invasion plan.

Stalin's agreement to joining the 'three-power pact' is a disgraceful page of the history of Soviet diplomacy in the eyes of the USSR's future allies in the anti-Hitler coalition. It was a matter of forming an alliance of dictatorships – the USSR, Germany, Italy, Japan – against the Western democracies – Great Britain, the USA, France; therefore everything that touches on this theme is kept profoundly secret in Soviet diplomatic history.

A Russian military historian, D.A. Volkogonov, essayed something of a breakthrough on 21 February 1995, in a Moscow Television broadcast in the series 'Secrets of Old Square' (Communist Party Central Committee headquarters). Based on documents from the Presidential archive, he discussed the Soviet–German talks. In summary, Hitler invited Stalin to Berlin, but Stalin refused to go, and sent Molotov. He had two meetings with Hitler, lasting altogether 6 hours. The Fuehrer said that Britain would soon collapse under blows from German forces, and proposed to divide the British legacy, which would be left ownerless, between the members of a Berlin–Rome–Tokyo–Moscow axis, and officially invited the Soviet Union to become the fourth member of the Tripartite Pact. Molotov replied that the USSR could include itself in a four-power pact, but only on a basis of equal rights. We are ready for partnership, he said. This meets the Soviet Union's interests.

Volkogonov went on to confirm on a documentary basis what interpreter Berezhkov had related earlier; on 25 November Molotov told German ambassador Schulenburg that the Soviet government agreed to conclude a pact of four on certain conditions, including five secret protocols, one of which concerned Japan's abandonment of its right to concessions in Northern Sakhalin. It is thus entirely beyond doubt that in the period under review the Soviet Union expressed willingness to join the 'three-power pact' as fourth member. We shall return to this theme in the

next chapter, in connection with Matsuoka's discussions with Stalin in Moscow.

Matsuoka's discussions in Moscow with Stalin and Molotov, on the question of concluding a neutrality pact, merit particular attention. In Soviet historiography this question is fundamentally distorted, although it is important for correct understanding of the signed documents. So let us see what light has been shed on these discussions in Soviet publications.

L.N. Kutakov wrote that 'on 24 March 1941, during his stopover in Moscow, Matsuoka invited the Soviet leaders to review the question of concluding a Japanese–Soviet non-aggression pact. In reply, the idea of the desirability of concluding a neutrality pact was expressed.'[32] We shall show in the next chapter that this was not mentioned at the first meeting.

Although it is known that Russian Academician S.L. Tikhvinskiy was familiar with MFA archive documents (he cited them extensively in his article about the Neutrality pact), about the conversation on 24 March he wrote the same as Kutakov.[33]

In the *History of Diplomacy*, volume 4, it is said that Matsuoka expressed a wish on his return from Berlin to begin discussions about improving Japanese–Soviet relations.[34] That is nearer the truth. But in the same solid book, devoted to the history of diplomacy, only in one paragraph, and in passing, is it mentioned that 'up to the last moment – the day of his departure from Moscow, Matsuoka refused to agree to liquidate the Japanese concessions in Northern Sakhalin. Only on the day of his departure, 13 April, did Matsuoka finally concede, and the discussions concluded with signature of the Neutrality pact.'[35] That is blatant falsification.

Tikhvinskiy writes about the same thing: 'On 12 April there was a meeting of the Japanese minister with Stalin, after which Matsuoka yielded on the question of liquidating Japanese concessions in Northern Sakhalin.[36]

Nearer the truth was Kutakov, who wrote that 'Matsuoka gave a promise to apply maximum efforts to ensure that the Japanese government and public opinion accepted his agreement to give up the concessions in Northern Sakhalin'; but he, too, sinned against the truth by asserting that 'in the end, the Soviet government proposed the Japanese minister give a written undertaking to resolve the question of the concessions in Northern Sakhalin within a few months.'[37]

God, how we Russians like showing everything positive came from the Soviet government! In fact this was Matsuoka's idea; he was very proud of it and subsequently called it 'brilliant diplomacy'.[38]

Even these few observations show the need to bring the content of the Soviet–Japanese negotiations and the agreements they reached into scholarly circulation, based on original documents from the Foreign Policy Archives.

2 Non-aggression pact or neutrality pact?

The October Revolution of 1917 and the consolidation of Soviet power in Russia were received with hostility by all the major countries, including Japan. To avert the 'Bolshevisation' of one-sixth of the world, they embarked on massive military interventions, both on the western borders and in the Far East. In January 1918 Japanese, British and American troops landed in Vladivostok Bay.

However, the peoples of Russia at that time followed the Communists, believed in the socialist idea, and saw in it a bright future for themselves. They rose against the interventionists and White Guards, and threw them out. The last detachment of the Japanese Expeditionary Corps left Vladivostok in October 1922. But Japan's intervention left a deep scar on the souls of the people living in the Russian Far East.

Normal life on the planet was unthinkable without maintaining political and economic links with Russia, so gradually one country after another established diplomatic relations. During 1924–5 Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Greece, Austria, Sweden and other European countries recognised the USSR. In May 1924 it concluded an agreement with China, which served as the basis for establishing political and commercial relations between the two countries.[1] The needs of daily life – fishing, processing Sakhalin's natural resources, questions of shipping and trade – insistently demanded normalisation of Soviet–Japanese relations. Japanese troops remained in Northern Sakhalin, and for the USSR their withdrawal was a most urgent foreign policy objective. Therefore official discussions on normalising relations began between Karakhan, Soviet ambassador in Peking, and his Japanese counterpart, Yoshizawa, in May 1924.

After long and tough negotiations, the Peking Convention on the basic principles for mutual relations between the USSR and Japan was signed on 20 January 1925. Article 1 stated that diplomatic and consular relations would be established when it came into force. This Convention was very important for stabilising the situation in the Far East. To normalise its relations with Japan, when there was no possibility of liquidating the consequences of Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, the

USSR had to acknowledge the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth as still in force, particularly its territorial clauses, which ceded Southern Sakhalin to Japan.[2] But to show that the Soviet government's attitude to that Treaty was negative in principle, a special Declaration was enunciated when the Convention was being signed. It said 'acknowledgment ... of the validity of the Treaty of Portsmouth of 5 September 1905 in no way signifies that the government of the Soviet Union shares any political responsibility with the Tsarist government for conclusion of the aforesaid treaty.'[3] The Declaration testified that acceptance of the Treaty was provisional, and that the Soviet people had not abandoned hope that in time it would be annulled.

Soviet agreement to recognise the Portsmouth Treaty also derived from the fact that a number of the obligations it imposed on Japan were advantageous for Russia. In particular it banned stationing of Japanese forces in North-West China (Manchuria), construction of military fortifications or installations on Sakhalin or islands adjacent to it, or any military measures aimed at hindering free navigation in the La Perouse and Tatar Straits. The Treaty acknowledged Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria, and bound the signatories to abstain from 'any measures on the Russian–Korean frontier capable of threatening the security of Russian or Korean territories'. Also both sides were to exploit 'railways belonging to them in Manchuria exclusively for commercial and industrial purposes, in no way for strategic purposes'.[4]

In the Peking Convention the USSR and Japan proclaimed a wish to live in peace and friendship, binding themselves to base mutual relations on the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, and to refrain from overt or covert hostile acts against each other. The Convention also envisaged need for a treaty on trade and navigation, principles of freedom of entry and movement, rights of private property and freedom to engage in trade, navigation or crafts and other peaceful occupations, in accordance with each country's legislation. The Soviet government declared its readiness to provide Japanese subjects with concessions to exploit mineral, forest and other natural resources. In that way the USSR attracted Japanese capital for processing oil, coal and forest wealth to help accelerate restoration of the Far East's economy, ravaged by the interventionists and the Whites.

Most relevant here was Northern Sakhalin. The timetables for concession contracts and withdrawal of Japanese forces were interdependent; concession agreements were to be concluded within 5 months from the date Japanese forces completed evacuation of Northern Sakhalin, defined by Protocol 'A' as 15 May 1925.[5] It was specifically noted that the 1907 fisheries convention must be re-examined, and changes in the general situation taken into account.

Protocol 'B' dealt specifically with the concessions, and envisaged providing the Japanese with concessions over half the area of each oil-bearing location in Northern Sakhalin. Concessions were also offered for the coal deposits. Payment conditions, proposed by the Soviet Union, allocated the

USSR 5–8 per cent of the gross output of coal, and 5–15 per cent of that of oil.[6]

As the Convention stipulated, negotiations about the concessions began in July 1925, and the agreements were concluded in December. Half a year later two large associations with government participation, the North Sakhalin Oil and Coal Joint Stock Companies, were set up in Japan, each with a capital of 10 million yen. Kidjuro Shidehara evaluated the agreements as expressing the Soviet Union's interest in Russo-Japanese economic cooperation, and as 'evidence of the good-neighbourly feelings uniting the two nations'.[7]

After establishment of diplomatic relations, the Soviet government actively sought a bilateral non-aggression pact, to stabilise the situation in the Far East, and reinforce the security of the Soviet Union's eastern regions. In August 1926 and May 1927 it proposed a non-aggression pact similar to the Soviet–German pact of April 1926. However, the Japanese government refused. On 16 July 1927 Prime Minister Tanaka told Soviet Ambassador Dovgalevskiy that in view of the tense international situation he considered conclusion of a pact premature, and assumed it possible to return to the question depending on how Soviet–Japanese economic relations increased.[8]

Full normalisation of Soviet–Japanese relations was not in the Japanese leadership's plans in those years. Their attitude was that 'in relation to the non-aggression pact proposed by the USSR Japan must take a position which will ensure the Empire full freedom of action'.[9]

By mid-1927 Japan had already decided in principle to incorporate Manchuria and Mongolia into its sphere of influence. A.A. Koshkin suggests[10] that in those circumstances a Soviet–Japanese non-aggression pact could have aroused serious suspicions among the Western powers about Japan's strategy on the Asian continent, and prompted them to oppose its expansion into Manchuria. Therefore, when on 8 March 1928 Soviet ambassador Troyanovskiy again raised the question of a non-aggression pact, Prime Minister Tanaka replied 'the time for this has not yet arrived'.[11]

The Japanese Army's occupation of Manchuria in the autumn of 1931 had important influence on subsequent Soviet–Japanese relations. The Soviet leadership saw the presence of Japanese forces on the Soviet border as increasing the danger of a military clash. It therefore reactivated its proposals for a non-aggression pact, indicating that without one Japan could not demonstrate intent to pursue a peaceable policy. In conversation with his Japanese counterpart Yoshizawa, Foreign Minister Litvinov remarked that the USSR already had non-aggression or neutrality pacts with Germany, Lithuania, Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, and was negotiating them with Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Romania. He also emphasised that 'preservation of peaceful and friendly relations with all our neighbours, including Japan, is the basis of our foreign policy.'[12]

Yoshizawa expressed a wish to hear Litvinov's thoughts on bilateral relations. Litvinov agreed that they could and should be improved, and said this could be achieved by some new act, such as concluding a non-aggression or neutrality pact similar to those the Soviet Union already had, was negotiating, or was about to negotiate. Litvinov stressed that when those negotiations were complete, the Soviet Union would have non-aggression pacts with all its neighbours except Japan, and proposed that the Japanese enter into discussions. Yoshizawa promised to put that proposal to his government.[13]

The Japanese government did not reply for almost a year, despite several Soviet reminders,[14] which it shrugged off with evasive replies that it had not yet studied the question. Only on 13 December 1932 did Foreign Minister Uchida hand to ambassador Troyanovskiy a strictly confidential note, declining the Soviet proposal for a non-aggression pact, under the excuse that both countries were signatories to the Briand-Kellogg Pact, rendering a bilateral pact between them superfluous.[15]

Tokyo did not doubt that the Soviets were sincere in wanting to conclude a non-aggression pact. A secret memorandum composed by Togo Shigenori, Head of the Foreign Ministry's Europe-America section, said 'the Soviet Union's wish to conclude a non-aggression pact with Japan stems from its desire to secure its Far Eastern territories from the ever-increasing threat it is experiencing since Japan advanced into Manchuria.'[16] However, Japan could need a non-aggression pact with the USSR if its relations with the USA, Great Britain and France deteriorated sharply in the course of the struggle for influence in China. Refusal to conclude one came only a year later, when it had become clear that the Western powers would not only not oppose Japan in China, but would also continue to supply Japan with strategic raw materials and military materiel.

At the end of 1932 the Japanese Emperor approved the General Staff's plan for a war against the USSR in 1933. It took account of the changed strategic situation; following Japan's seizure of Manchuria, a vast expanse of Soviet territory east of Lake Baikal had become vulnerable to Japanese occupation.[17] To expedite the realisation of this plan, the Japanese military increased tension along the Soviet–Manchukuo border, and organised frequent 'frontier incidents' and provocative acts against the (Soviet-owned and operated) Chinese Eastern Railway.

The question of war against the USSR was considered in detail by a regular conference of Japanese Army heads in June 1933. War Minister Araki insisted on preparing for war against the USSR above all, and attacking it in 1936, when 'there will be reasons for war, and international support, and foundations for success'.[18] Generals Nagata and Tojo, on the contrary, considered that for a war against the USSR 'Japan must assemble together all the resources of the yellow race, and prepare itself for total war.' Tojo also spoke of the risk inherent in premature action. In support

of that viewpoint Nagata, Head of the Second Directorate of the Army General Staff, said that for a war against the USSR 'we must have at our backs the 500 millions of China, who must stand behind the Japanese samurai as an enormous labour battalion, and significantly raise Japan's and Manchuria's powers of production.' But since it was difficult to effect such a programme by 1936, renewal of negotiations for a non-aggression pact was contemplated. Thus the main thrust of the proposals by those who supported preparation for war against the Soviet Union was first to create a powerful military-economic base in Manchuria, and to subjugate China.

After Hitler came to power, the Soviet Union, in addition to concluding bilateral non-aggression treaties, displayed diplomatic initiative towards creating a system of collective security against the threat of world war emanating from Nazi Germany. To this end it joined the League of Nations, concluded treaties and agreements with France, Czechoslovakia and other countries, strongly condemned Fascist Italy's aggression against Abyssinia, and actively assisted Republican Spain against the German and Italian interventionists. Germany's unhindered 'Anschluss' of Austria, conducted with the tacit connivance of the Western powers, and the British and French ruling circles' conspiracy with Hitler at Munich, showed clearly that they wanted to avoid war with Germany, and to direct German aggression eastwards against the Soviet Union.

In the Far East the USSR helped strengthen the defence capacity of the Mongolian People's Republic, under threat from the Japanese-Manchukuo militarists. The USSR was the only country that gave all-round assistance to China after the so-called 'China incident' of 7 July 1937. In those years, Soviet diplomacy advanced an initiative for creating a collective security system in the Far East as well. As early as the end of 1933, the Soviet government advanced the idea of a non-aggression pact between the USSR, USA, China and Japan.[19] Soviet diplomacy sought, through US Ambassador Bullitt, to ascertain President Roosevelt's attitude to the Soviet proposal. On 12 March 1934 Bullitt told V.S. Dovgalevsky, Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry, that Roosevelt was inclined towards a multilateral non-aggression pact involving the USA, USSR, Japan, China, Britain, France and Holland. However, further discussions on a Pacific Pact, aimed at rebuffing Japanese aggression, were not crowned with success, because of the negative attitude of the Western powers, which distrusted Stalin's regime, and did not want to tie themselves to it militarily. To Litvinov's arguments that 'a pact between us will have the significance of a certain solidarity, especially if the pact includes a point about consultation in the event of a threat to one of its signatories'[20] Roosevelt replied by telling the Soviet ambassador on 29 June 1937 'I have no faith in pacts. The main guarantee is a strong Navy . . . let's see if the Japanese can win a maritime competition'.[21]

The Japanese government, while hatching plans for a military onslaught

on the Soviet Union, on 25 November 1936 signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany, accompanied by a secret protocol that nominated the Soviet Union as the principal target for joint struggle by both countries. Article 2 of this protocol declared 'The contracting parties bind themselves for the duration of the current agreement not to conclude without mutual agreement any political treaties with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics contradictory to the spirit of this agreement'.[22] Samuel N. Harper, a leading American expert on Soviet foreign policy, wrote, in a confidential report of 26 June 1939 to the State Department, that 'the Soviet leaders have grounds to treat this pact as a declaration of hostility against the Soviet Union by its two aggressive neighbours, and also as cover for a general joint approach by the aggressors.'[23]

From today's position, when the Communist idea is condemned throughout the world, and the bastion of communism in the USSR has crumbled, perhaps the historical role of the Anti-Comintern Pact should be re-evaluated. But that is a different subject.

At the end of the 1930s Soviet–Japanese relations remained tense. Japan was experiencing great difficulties in its war against China, and saw the substantial Soviet military aid to Chiang Kai-Shek as one reason for this. Soviet pilots were fighting Japanese aircraft in China's skies, Soviet advisers drafting military operations on Kuomintang staffs, Soviet aircraft, tanks, artillery, small arms, ammunition and other military equipment flowing into China in an unending stream.

Tokyo attempted to combat Soviet intervention in the Sino-Japanese War by military means. Border conflicts increased along the Soviet–Manchurian frontier. Especially fierce clashes took place in the Lake Hasan area (near Vladivostok) in July 1938, and along the border with Mongolia on the Khalkhin-Gol (Nomonhan) River in August 1939. The Japanese Army's crushing defeat at Khalkhin-Gol, and the conclusion on 23 August 1939 of the Soviet–German non-aggression pact, led to a change in Japan's war plans, compelling it to strive for reconciliation with the USSR, and then to seek in it an ally for further southward expansion. Plans for aggression against the USSR were indefinitely postponed.

On 13 September 1939 Tokyo issued an official document, 'The Bases of the State's Policy', which indicated:

> The basis of policy comprises regularisation of the China incident. In foreign policy it is necessary, while firmly occupying an independent position, to act in accordance with the complex international situation ... and within the country, to concentrate attention on completing military preparations and mobilising all the state's power for war.[24]

The Japanese leaders soon learned that the Soviet government agreed to normalising bilateral relations. This information came from Berlin. During the Soviet–German negotiations for a non-aggression pact, Molotov asked

whether Germany was prepared to exert its influence on Japan to improve Soviet–Japanese relations and resolve the border conflicts. At a meeting with Stalin, Ribbentrop assured him that German–Japanese relations 'do not have an anti-Russian basis, and Germany, of course, will make a valuable contribution to solving Far Eastern problems'. Stalin warned him:

> We want improved relations with Japan. However, there is a limit to our patience towards Japanese provocations. If Japan wants war, she will get it. . . . But if Japan wants peace, that would be good. We shall think how Germany could help normalisation of Soviet–Japanese relations. However, we would not wish Japan to get the impression that this is a Soviet initiative.[25]

Normalisation of Soviet–Japanese relations for the period of Germany's war with the Western powers was to Germany's advantage, as it would make it easier to incite Japan to action against Britain in the Pacific. In Hitler's calculations, Japanese attacks on Britain's Far Eastern possessions might 'neutralise' it. 'If it finds itself in a difficult position in Western Europe, the Mediterranean and the Far East, Great Britain won't fight', he said.[26] At meetings with Japan's ambassador in Berlin, Oshima, Ribbentrop said 'I think the best policy for us would be to conclude a Japanese–German–Soviet non-aggression pact, and then act against Great Britain. If that succeeds, Japan will be able to spread its power and influence unhampered in East Asia, and move on the south, where its vital interests are'.[27]

Tokyo understood the importance of German mediation in regularising Japanese–Soviet relations. A Japanese newspaper wrote: 'If necessary, Japan will conclude a non-aggression pact with the USSR, and will have the possibility to move southward without feeling constraints from other countries,'[28]

Normalisation of Soviet–Japanese relations suited Japan's task of completing the war in China. In this connection, how to end Soviet aid to China was actively discussed in Tokyo, where the government's assessment was that if this could be done, it would strengthen the influence of elements within the Kuomintang that favoured capitulating to Japan. The Japanese government began inclining towards securing an end of Soviet aid to China in exchange for a non-aggression pact. This idea found expression in the 'Basic Principles of the Political Course in Relation to Foreign States', drafted on 28 December 1939 by the Foreign Ministry jointly with the War and Navy Ministries. It said: 'A necessary preliminary condition for concluding a non-aggression pact must be official acknowledgment of the cessation of Soviet aid to China.'[29] At the same time, supporters of a non-conciliatory attitude towards the USSR, primarily the military, began making statements opposing the very idea of a non-aggression pact, and asserting that it 'undermines Japan's ideological

bases'.[30] On 16 January 1940 Foreign Minister Arita stated: 'Complete regularising of the frontier problems is equivalent to a non-aggression pact. Conclusion of such a pact is a matter for the distant future, and not very useful.'[31] Advocacy appeared in the press of hardening Japan's policy towards the USSR, solving fisheries questions by force, etc. So a warning was sounded at the USSR Supreme Soviet's Sixth Session (March–April 1940): 'Japan must finally understand that the Soviet Union will in no case permit violation of its interests. Only with such an understanding of Soviet–Japanese relations can they develop satisfactorily.'[32]

How the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo viewed Japan's agonising reappraisal of its policy towards the Soviet Union can be well illustrated by ambassador Smetanin's diary entries for 11 October 1939.

> Publication here of official though understated data about Japanese Army losses in the Nomonhan (Khalkhin-Gol) area, to the number of 18,000, produced an extremely strong impression on all circles of Japanese society. Above all, the press unambiguously emphasises that such 'unprecedented' manpower losses by the Japanese Army firstly 'will be an enormous jolt to peoples' conscience', and, secondly, these events will serve as a good lesson to the 'appropriate authorities' to be careful in future, and of the need to let the people know what is happening.

Publicising of this partial truth about the real dimensions of the Japanese Army's defeat merits speculation as to the government's motives. If we omit the need to explain a defeat too obvious to be concealed altogether, and also that mentioning the Japanese Army's low level of mechanisation compared to the Soviet provided an opportunity to demand additional allocations, then the ongoing struggle between court circles and militants for influence on military policy, hence the former's willingness to go as far as compromising the militants by publicising their failure, played a not insignificant role. The lesson of Nomonhan served to sober Japanese would-be Marlboroughs,[33] who began to change their tone. Even a Fascist newspaper such as *Kokumin*, previously particularly conspicuous for anti-Soviet outbursts, began writing quite often about the need to normalise relations with the USSR.

After publication of the data on Japanese losses, and of conclusions drawn from them, these were discussed at various assemblies, for example of Seyyukai and Tohokai, which carried resolutions rebuking the government for permitting this conflict. War Minister Shunroku Hata recently went to the area of military operations for a special investigation, on which, the newspapers said, 'he will report today to the Privy Council'.[34]

Japan's attitude towards the USSR changed only after the defeat of France in May–June 1940 and the British Army's evacuation from Dunkirk. Japan's rulers feared 'missing the bus', by letting slip the

favourable moment for seizing the Western powers' Asian colonies. Once they had finally decided on aggression against Britain and the USA in the Pacific and South-East Asia, Japan's rulers prudently resolved to safeguard their rear in the north against any potential threat from the Soviet Union. To secure Soviet neutrality for the duration of the fighting, the Japanese government sounded Moscow out in the summer of 1940 about the possibility of a Neutrality Pact.

On 9 June 1940 the Japanese government signed an agreement with the USSR about the border in the Khalkhin-Gol area. On 2 July, in conversation with Molotov, Ambassador Togo (Figure 2) mentioned Japan's desire to maintain peaceful, friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and mutual respect for territorial integrity. He said Japanese–Soviet relations would be stabilised when the principle was observed that if either was subjected to aggression by a third power, the other would not aid the attacker. He developed this theme by proposing a draft three-article neutrality agreement.

> Article the First. 1. Both contracting sides affirm that the basis of mutual relations between the two countries remains the Convention on basic principles of mutual relations between Japan and the USSR signed on 20 January 1925 in Pekin.
>
> 2. Both contracting sides must maintain peaceful and friendly relations and respect their mutual territorial integrity.
>
> Article the Second. If one of the contracting sides, despite its peace-loving mode of action, is subjected to attack by a third power or several other powers, the other contracting side will observe neutrality for the entire duration of the conflict.
>
> Article the Third. This agreement is concluded for five years.[35]

Togo indicated that the Japanese government felt such an agreement was appropriate at this time, and could satisfy both sides. The Japanese had compiled the draft as a copy of the Neutrality Pact concluded in 1926 between the USSR and Germany. He expressed a desire for agreement to conclude a neutrality treaty to be reached as soon as possible.[36]

I personally hold to the view that in planning to resolve the 'China incident' the Japanese government was not then contemplating attacking the USA or Great Britain. On the contrary, it thought that on clashing with Japanese expansion in China and its encroachment on their national interests, those countries might declare war on Japan. A Neutrality Pact with the USSR might then save Japan from being encircled and having to fight on two fronts.

While with Molotov on 5 August 1940, Togo reminded him of the proposal he had made on 2 July. He said that there had been a change of government in Japan, that the new Cabinet, headed by Konoe, wished for speedy conclusion of a Neutrality Pact, and had instructed him to find out

Figure 2 Shigenori Togo, Japanese Ambassador in Moscow (Japanese Foreign Ministry Archives).

the Soviet government's answer. He asked for study of his draft to be expedited, and a reply given.[37] But it was 14 August before Molotov summoned Togo and told him that since it concerned extremely important matters, the Soviet government's response was in written form. The document handed to Togo stated in particular:

> The Soviet government confirms its positive attitude to the idea of concluding the Neutrality Pact between the USSR and Japan proposed by the Japanese government, provided that not only Japan's interests but those of the USSR will be taken into account, as stated on 2 July by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs V.M. Molotov to Japanese ambassador Mr Togo.
>
> The Soviet government comprehends the Japanese government's present proposal as meaning that, as is clear from its content, the proposed agreement will be not merely a neutrality treaty, but in essence a treaty of non-aggression and non-adherence to hostile coalitions. At the same time, the Soviet government considers it necessary to state that the USSR's and Japan's interests, including their interests in an agreement on neutrality, require before all else the settling of several essential questions of Soviet–Japanese relations, which in an unresolved state will be a serious obstacle on the road to the desired improvement of mutual relations between the two countries.

The Soviet note went on to evaluate specific statements in the Japanese draft. In the Soviet government's view the current situation did not correspond to Article the First, which envisaged retention of the Peking Convention and Treaty of Portsmouth as the basis of mutual relations, the more so as Japan had unilaterally violated the Treaty by sending occupying forces up to 500,000 strong into Manchuria, and thereby trampling on China's sovereignty. A number of Articles of the Peking Convention were also out of date. Thus Paragraph 6 envisaged providing concessions to Japanese subjects. Time had shown that the concessions in Northern Sakhalin were unviable. It was proposed to liquidate them on condition of just compensation for investments made by the concessionaires. The Soviet government was prepared to guarantee delivery of 100,000 tonnes a year of oil from Sakhalin to Japan, equal to the average annual output of the concession over the previous 2 years.

At the same time the Soviet government expressed readiness to accept the Japanese government's proposal contained in the Second and Third Articles of the Japanese draft neutrality treaty. The Soviet government also thought it necessary to mention that the proposed treaty gave Japan maximum benefit, improving its position in the north so that it could develop active operations in the south, whereas the USSR, a country not at war, derived only insignificant benefit, and complicated new questions would arise in its relations with other powers. By concluding a neutrality treaty with Japan,

the USSR was risking some deterioration in its relations with China and a number of other powers that had important interests in the Pacific Ocean and South Seas. This, consequently, could deal the Soviet Union significant economic and other damage. The Japanese government, in putting forward a proposal for a Neutrality Pact, was paying no attention to this circumstance that touched on the vital interests of the USSR, whose peaceful policy always also took account of the interests of neighbouring states.

In view of the above, before concluding a neutrality treaty, the Soviet government wished for clarification of the Japanese government's position on steps to be taken to reduce to the minimum the harm which concluding a Neutrality Pact could do to the Soviet Union's interests.[38]

By the time the Soviet reply reached Tokyo, the Konoe Cabinet had already approved the 'Programme of Measures Responsive to the Changes in the International Situation'. In this document, approved on 27 July 1940, the most important task was defined as 'establishing the New Order in Greater East Asia', for which it envisaged 'application of military power at a convenient moment'. The programme envisaged:

1 Strengthening the alliance of Japan, Germany and Italy.
2 Concluding a non-aggression agreement with the USSR, so as to take preparation of the armed forces for war to a point that would exclude their defeat.
3 Taking active steps to incorporate the colonies of Britain, France, Holland and Portugal into the sphere of the Japanese 'New Order' in East Asia.
4 Being firmly resolved to eliminate armed intervention by the USA in the process of establishing the 'New Order' in East Asia.[39]

The Japanese government and Armed Forces Command drafted possible variants for Japan's entry into the Second World War: a 'southern', against the USA and Western European states, and a 'northern', against the USSR. Preference was given to the 'southern', and resolution of the 'northern problem' postponed. As the 'Programme of Measures' stipulated a requirement 'to avoid a war on two fronts', conclusion of a Neutrality Pact with the USSR became a priority for Japanese diplomacy. A Japanese newspaper wrote:

> Relations with the USSR must be regularised on the basis of the Soviet–German non-aggression pact. In that way Japan can achieve security for its northern frontier, and that will give it the possibility to carry out its policy of expansion towards the south. This will also enable it to prepare for war against the USA.[40]

On 27 September 1940 Japan, Germany and Italy signed the Tripartite Pact of political and military-economic alliance for 10 years. Following

that, the Japanese Foreign Ministry drafted conditions for concluding an agreement with the USSR. To facilitate negotiations, it proposed to sign a pact similar to the German–Soviet one, and settle matters in dispute after concluding it.

The eighth of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's conditions said 'Subsequently, at an appropriate time, to include Northern Sakhalin and the (Soviet) Maritime Province in Japan's sphere of influence by peaceful means (as a result of purchase or exchange of territories).' If the Soviet government declined to do this, demilitarisation of these territories would be sought. To prompt the USSR to review its position on the Sino-Japanese war, it was planned to agree with it to demarcate spheres of influence in China. The Japanese went so far as to say:

> The USSR recognises Japan's traditional interests in Inner Mongolia and the three provinces of Northern China. Japan recognises the Soviet Union's traditional interests in Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang. The USSR agrees to Japan's advance in the direction of French Indo-China and the Dutch Indies. Japan agrees to the Soviet Union's future advance in the direction of Afghanistan and Persia [India was added later].[41]

In Japan's calculations, Soviet participation in this carve-up of Asia could help involve it in a four-power coalition with Japan, Germany and Italy. This would assist the fight against the Western democracies. The policy of 'turning the enemy in the north into a friend' was also meant to exclude the prospect, very worrying for Japan and Germany, of war against an alliance of the USSR, USA and Great Britain. On the eve of signature of the Tripartite Pact Matsuoka explained to the Privy Council, 'While we are building the New Order, we must not allow ourselves to let the Soviet Union see us as its enemy.' It would be better to reach agreement with it. On 7 September 1940 Matsuoka said to German representative Stahmer: 'We must recognise that Russia will remain a great power after the war in Europe ends. This will create a threat to the New Order in East Asia. Japan and Germany must stand side by side and devise a common policy against Russia.'[42] German ambassador Ott telegraphed Berlin on 4 October 1940: 'The innermost aim of the Tripartite Pact amounts to creating a new distribution of power in Europe by destroying Great Britain's world-wide empire. A rebuff to the USA and removal of the Soviet Union from the game may serve as means for achieving this aim'.[43]

Matsuoka, Foreign Minister in Prince Konoe's government, took a most active personal part in attempts to improve relations with the USSR. He arranged his first meeting with ambassador Smetanin (Figure 3) on 27 July at his own home. The hall was hung with pictures by Russian artists. The host dilated at length on the excellent qualities of the Russian people's soul, and their affinity to the Ainu. He said he understood and loved the

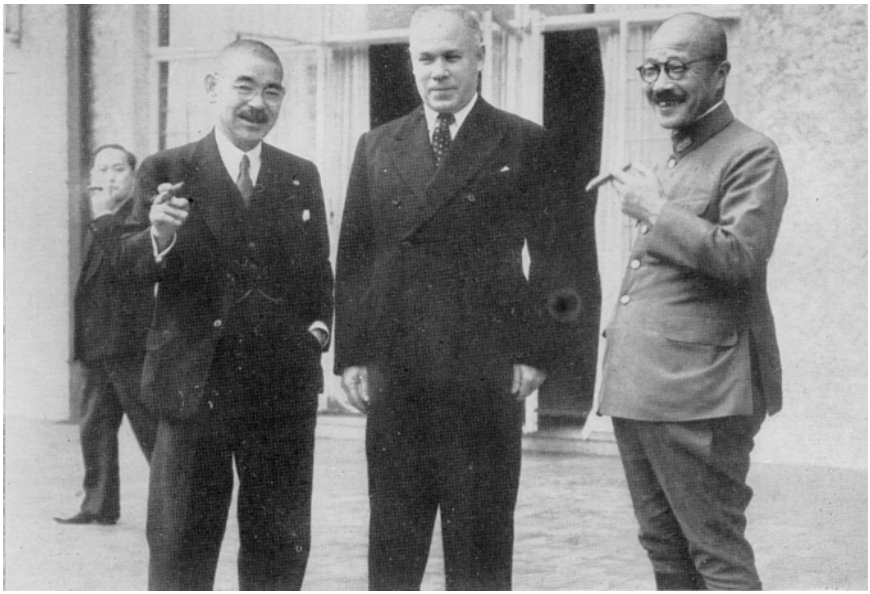


Figure 3 Soviet Ambassador in Japan Smetanin (centre) with Foreign Minister Matsuoka and Prime Minister Tojo.

Russian people, spoke of his service as Second Secretary of the Japanese Embassy in Saint Petersburg, recalled that he had had dealings with former Foreign Minister Litvinov, and had supported the idea of concluding a Soviet–Japanese non-aggression pact. Such meetings and hours-long 'heart to heart' conversations became very frequent. The next was only a week later, on 3 August. Then again and again . . .

For better understanding Matsuoka as a person, and clarifying how the Soviet side perceived him, let us turn to Smetanin's notes of the conversation of 15 November 1940.

> By special invitation I was at Matsuoka's home. It looks quite opulent, and is surrounded by a large garden, testifying that the Foreign Minister's means are not bad. Apparently his work on the South Manchurian Railway enabled him to acquire a large plot of land in the centre of Tokyo, and a European-style house. The conversation took place in the 'family room'. On the walls were pictures by Russian artists – Repin, Makovsky and the little-known Petrov. Our conversation lasted exactly three hours, and if I had not left Matsuoka would have gone on philosophising indefinitely.
>
> As in previous conversations, Matsuoka again poured out 'his soul' in love for Russia and the Russian people, emphasising that what form

of rule, Tsarist or Soviet, prevailed in Russia, or what ideas dominated were matters of indifference to him. He simply loved the Russian people who, in his words, were close to and understood by the Japanese people.[44]

He called himself a revolutionary, citing facts about 'smashing the Foreign Ministry' by replacing pro-British and pro-American ambassadors, and reconstructing Japan's whole foreign policy. Then he began trying to show that the new Cabinet and he personally intend to turn capitalist Japan into imperial Japan, and that the new non-capitalist Japan will fight the capitalist countries which are hindering Japan's establishment of the New Order in East Asia. He said he personally held the view that the New Order in East Asia could be implemented by only two countries – Japan and the USSR.[45] Speaking of the affinity of souls of the Russian and Japanese peoples, Matsuoka asserted that the Japanese people never harboured malice or enmity against the Russian people, that the Japanese have good attitudes towards Russians to this day, and that these will continue. I remarked that in the last ten years some representatives of Japanese authorities and public have been inciting the people against the Soviet Union and Soviet people, by propaganda, speeches by individuals, and press campaigns. Matsuoka said that that was all in the past, and there would be no more of it.

He again pontificated about the need to regularise relations with the Soviet Union, but as always these judgments were general in character. I tried to steer him towards specifics; in particular I asked how the Japanese government reacted to Comrade Molotov's proposal of 14 August. Matsuoka repeated the desire he mentioned in his previous, also long, conversation with me, the desire to 'burn' all the old treaties and start again from scratch.[46]

Now let us return to the Moscow negotiations. For a long time the Japanese government did not reply to the Soviet proposal of 14 August. On 30 August Togo notified that he was leaving Moscow, and requested agrément for a new Ambassador, retired Lieutenant-General Tatekawa.[47]

On 30 October 1940 Tatekawa told Molotov that the Konoe government wanted to conclude a non-aggression pact similar to the Soviet–German pact of 23 August 1939. In that connection, negotiations about a Neutrality Pact were being terminated, and all questions in dispute between the two countries would be resolved after conclusion of a non-aggression pact.

When Molotov asked what was the difference between the Japanese government's two proposals, Tatekawa explained that a Neutrality Pact was inadequate because it did not clearly express the question of non-aggression. After Japan had concluded the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, the government considered it appropriate to conclude

a non-aggression pact with the USSR. Once this was done, Japan would be prepared to begin negotiations for review of the Peking Convention, and to consider other questions.

The Japanese draft non-aggression pact, handed over by Tatekawa at the 30 October 1940 meeting, contained the following provisions:

> Article I. The two sides bind themselves to mutually respect each other's territorial rights and not to undertake any aggressive action in relation to the other side, neither separately nor in conjunction with one or several third powers.
>
> Article II. If one of the sides becomes the object of military action by one or several third powers, the other will not support these third powers in any way.
>
> Article III. The governments of both sides will in future maintain close contact with each other for exchange of information or for consultations on matters touching the common interests of both governments.
>
> Article IV. Neither side will participate in any grouping of powers directly or indirectly aimed against the other.
>
> Article V. If any disputes or conflicts of any kind arise between the sides, they will be resolved exclusively by peaceful means through amicable exchanges of views or if necessary by appointing a commission to regularise the conflicts.
>
> Article VI. This pact comes into force from the day of signature, and remains in force for ten years. If neither side denounces it a year before its expiration, the Pact will be considered automatically extended for the following five years.[48]

Japan was not optimistic about the draft's acceptability, and asked the Germans to cooperate in effecting it. As already mentioned, Molotov was in Berlin at German government invitation from 10 to 14 November, and there it was suggested that the Soviet Union become the fourth member of the Tripartite Pact. On returning to Moscow, he invited Tatekawa to see him on 18 November, and referring to his conversation with Ribbentrop, told Tatekawa he welcomed Japan's desire to normalise its relations with the USSR, but that Soviet public opinion could not favour concluding a non-aggression pact unless it was accompanied by restoration of territory lost by Russia in the Far East, specifically the loss at different times of South Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. If Japan was not yet ready to examine these questions, the Soviet government offered to conclude a neutrality pact instead of a non-aggression pact, and simultaneously a protocol liquidating the concessions in Northern Sakhalin.

Molotov pointed out that a neutrality pact gave Japan everything it needed for a free hand in the south, and was also a significant step towards improving Japanese–Soviet relations. However, for a non-aggression pact

it would be necessary to touch on both the question of returning some of the territories previously lost by Russia, and the question of the Mongolian People's Republic and Sinkiang.[49]

Molotov then handed the ambassador drafts of a Neutrality Pact and of a protocol liquidating the Japanese concessions in Northern Sakhalin. The draft Neutrality Pact comprised four Articles.

1 Both sides state that they will maintain peaceful and amicable relations and mutually respect territorial integrity.
2 If either is subjected to military actions by one or more third powers, the other will observe neutrality for the entire duration of the conflict.
3 The Neutrality Pact will come into force immediately on the day of signature, and remain in force for five years. Unless denounced by either side one year before its expiration, it will be considered prolonged automatically for the next five years.
4 The Pact is to be ratified as soon as possible. Exchange of letters of ratification must take place on ..... [date left blank – G.J.] The Pact comes into force immediately after signature.[50]

The draft protocol liquidating the Japanese concessions in Northern Sakhalin provided that the coal and oil concessions would be abolished within one month of signature of the Neutrality Pact, and the concession treaties concluded on 14 September 1925 annulled. The Soviet government agreed to provide just compensation to the concessionaires, and to guarantee delivery to Japan of 100,000 tonnes a year of Sakhalin oil for 5 years, on normal commercial terms.[51]

Tatekawa, who considered Molotov's proposal acceptable as a basis for discussion, at the same time asked the Soviet government to increase the annual oil deliveries to 200,000 tonnes, which he said would help him recommend the proposals to the Japanese government.

At that time, autumn 1940, Japan began to implement its southern expansionist plan. On 22 September it occupied Northern French Indo-China. Further southward advance could aggravate its relations with the USA and Great Britain, and in that situation it was unprofitable for Japan to prolong its negotiations with the USSR. Japan was in a hurry, and Tatekawa handed its reply to the Soviet proposal of 18 November to Molotov on 21 November. The Japanese government considered the draft Neutrality Pact merited examination, but the draft protocol liquidating the concessions absolutely unacceptable. Instead it proposed the Soviet Union resolve the dispute by selling Northern Sakhalin to Japan. Molotov's response was to refer to a speech he made at the Supreme Soviet on 29 March 1940, and dismiss the Japanese proposal as a joke. At the end of the conversation Molotov expressed the hope of receiving a Japanese government reply in the spirit expressed by Tatekawa on 18 November,

but emphasised that if Japan did not consider it necessary to reply, no agreement would be concluded.[52]

The Soviet government also took a hard line over the fisheries convention. When Molotov received Tatekawa on 13 December 1940, he said that if Japan thought it could leave the Treaty of Portsmouth forever unchanged, it would be making a big mistake. Besides, since that treaty had been concluded after Russia's defeat, it must be subject to review, especially on the fisheries question. The Soviet side could not agree to see Japanese fisheries in Soviet waters satisfied at the expense of Soviet state interests.[53]

Confronted with this stand, the Japanese government launched a noisy anti-Soviet press campaign.[54] A 'Council for Development of the Kurile Islands' was created, leadership of which went to military and political figures well-known for their acute hostility to the USSR.[55] The Japanese government began seeking pretexts to make claims on fisheries questions, the concessions in Northern Sakhalin, etc. Thus at the end of 1940 negative impulses in Japanese–Soviet relations were increasing, in neither Soviet nor Japanese interests. Urgent steps had to be taken to correct the situation.

At that time Hitler confirmed the 'Barbarossa' plan. Although its content was kept profoundly secret, information that Germany was preparing for war against the Soviet Union soon began reaching Tokyo through various channels. One such was the Japanese–American negotiations on reducing tension in relations between them, which opened in autumn 1940. American diplomats shared US intelligence data about an imminent German attack on the Soviet Union with the Japanese. Secretary of State Cordell Hull subsequently admitted 'Information that we had about Hitler's preparations to invade Russia was especially useful to me in the negotiations with the Japanese. It excluded all possibility of an agreement between Russia and Japan.'[56]

A situation was shaping in which Japan could be faced with a fait accompli. Tokyo had not forgotten the shock it experienced when the Soviet–German non-aggression pact was concluded while the fighting at Khalkhin-Gol was in full swing. In preparing to expand southwards, Japan was uneasy at the prospect of being dragged into war on Germany's side against the USSR because of signing the Tripartite Pact. This was discussed on 16 January 1941 by the Army section of Imperial General Headquarters. Although Tanaka, Head of the Operations Directorate of the Army General Staff, reported 'the Soviet Union cannot prepare for a war on two fronts', it was decided to begin appropriate preparations. When the War Minister asked how long it would take to redeploy forces designated for war against the USSR, Tanaka replied 'about four months'.[57]

The uncertainty of the situation persistently raised a need for Matsuoka to travel to Europe, to seek first-hand information in Berlin, Rome and

Moscow. On 3 February 1941 Matsuoka presented 'Principles for conducting negotiations with Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union' to the Coordinating Committee of the government and Imperial GHQ. This document in particular outlined a plan for a non-aggression pact with the USSR. The action programme contained the following postulates:

> Sale of Northern Sakhalin to Japan (aided by German pressure on the USSR) or, if that proved impossible, delivery to Japan of 1.5 million tonnes of Soviet oil, even if this necessitated Japanese government help to the USSR in extracting it.
> Japanese acknowledgment of Soviet influence in Sinkiang and Outer Mongolia, in return for Soviet acknowledgment of Japanese influence in Northern China and Inner Mongolia.
> Termination of Soviet assistance to Chiang Kai-Shek.
> Establishment of a commission of representatives of Manchukuo, the USSR and Outer Mongolia to demarcate the frontiers and resolve conflicts.
> Conclusion of a fisheries agreement on the basis of Tatekawa's proposals of a convention or cancellation of Japanese fishing concessions, if that proved necessary for regularising diplomatic relations between USSR and Japan.
> Soviet provision of railway wagons and rebates on transit charges for handling large-scale Japanese-German trade.

The coordinating conference agreed that Japan should retain dominant positions in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and maintain order there. It would provide independence to nation-states, and liberate the peoples living in the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese colonies, providing them with as much independence and self-government as they themselves wanted.

The conference divided the world into four spheres of influence, to be secured at a post-war peace conference: Greater East Asian, European (including Africa), American and Soviet (including Iran and India). It agreed that the basis of Japanese policy must be to deter US involvement in the war. At the same time Germany, whose approval must be obtained, and Italy, should monitor Soviet actions closely.

If the USSR (mutual understanding with which was regarded as desirable but clearly doubtful) attacked Japan, Germany and Italy must immediately enter the war on Japan's side. If Japan became involved in the European war, it was to receive guarantees from Germany and Italy that they would not conclude a separate peace.[58]

To agree strategic plans within the framework of the Tripartite Pact and, if necessary, conclude appropriate treaties, including a non-aggression pact with the USSR, the Coordinating Conference decided to send Matsuoka to Berlin, Rome and Moscow.

At that time, 23 February 1941, a heart-to-heart talk between Ribbentrop and Japanese ambassador Oshima took place in the gloomy fortress of Fuschl. After heartfelt greetings, Ribbentrop got down to business:

> The war is already won in the military, economic and political aspects. We want to end the war as quickly as possible, and make England ask for peace as soon as possible. The Fuehrer . . . has decided to bring the war to a swift and victorious end. Cooperation with Japan is extremely necessary in order to translate this intention into life. However, Japan must also enter the war as soon as possible, in its own interests. Thus England would lose its key positions in the Far East, and Japan, on the contrary, will thus gain a convenient position in the Far East. But this can be done only by means of war.

There and then Berlin for the first time suggested the so-called 'Singapore variant' to Japan.

> A decisive blow must be struck at Singapore, to destroy England's key position in East Asia. Seizure of Singapore must take place like lightning. . . . All this will decide the war quickly, and deter America from entering. Seizure of Singapore would mean a decisive blow at the heart of the British Empire. America will not enter the war, because she is not ready yet, and won't risk sending her fleet further than the Hawaiian Islands. But if she does enter the war, she will just have to look on helplessly while Japan takes the Philippines from her.

Ribbentrop well knew Japan needed assurance that her new aggression in the south would not prompt any Soviet counteraction in the north. For that reason Ribbentrop was prepared here also to instil calm and confidence into his Far Eastern ally. But before painting the glowing, seductive picture with broad strokes, he did not forget to mention that this glittering gift had been created by the iron hand of the Wehrmacht. 'France no longer exists as a Far East power [a hint that Indo-China awaited a new 'boss' – B.S.]. England is also significantly weakened, and Japan can now gradually fortify itself in Singapore. So Germany has already done much for the future of the two peoples.'

A meaningful pause followed, designed to emphasise how significant and confidential was what he was about to tell the ambassador of a friend and ally. Then, 'in view of our geographical situation, if the undesired conflict with Russia eventuates, we will have to take the main burden on ourselves . . . a Russo-German conflict would have a gigantic German victory as its outcome, and would mean the end of the Soviet regime.'

Could Oshima, a fanatical partisan of Nazism, resist such a seductive proposition? Of course not! Not by chance does the record of conversation, confirmed by Ribbentrop's own signature, end:

> Ambassador Oshima agreed fully with my arguments. . . . He observed that he had asked Japan's Foreign Minister to come to Berlin with more specific and acceptable proposals. I told Oshima that it would be good if the Japanese Foreign Minister brought with him a final decision for a speedy attack on Singapore. . . . I explained further that closest cooperation in all spheres, especially the press, cooperation such as had already been established with Italy, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria, was essential to joint conduct of the war. Oshima told me in confidence that Konoe and Matsuoka think the same as he, and were agreed on attacking Singapore as soon as possible.

However, something else clear to Matsuoka and to Konoe's Cabinet as a whole was that the conversation with Ribbentrop in Fuschl was extremely important. Obviously Germany was energetically preparing for war with the USSR in the very near future. But strangely, while preparing for a clash with the Russian giant, Germany not only was not seeking Japan's help, but, on the contrary, was trying to direct it southwards to Singapore, further away from the line of contact of Japanese and Soviet forces in Manchuria. What could this mean? Did they know, and to what extent, what was going on in Berlin, and how that might impact on Soviet–Japanese relations? What did Rome think and intend to do? Clarification of all these matters was yet another reason for Matsuoka to make an urgent trip to Europe. There could be no further delay.

On 12 March 1941, 17 days after Oshima's conversation with Ribbentrop, Matsuoka set off on his long journey. For the third time in his life he saw the limitless expanses of Siberia. The wheels of his saloon carriage clicked softly. Beyond the window stretched the austere and majestic wintry landscape. But Matsuoka was deep in thought. The time had come when the fate of the world was being decided, perhaps for centuries ahead. He, Matsuoka, must go down in history as one who in this giddy time played the cleverest, most careful and, of course, most successful game . . .[59]

3 Matsuoka's negotiations in Moscow

Signature and evaluation of the Neutrality Pact

The Soviet government learned of Matsuoka's intention to go to Europe on 11 February 1941, after a conversation with Smetanin. The latter wrote in his diary:

> Yesterday at Matsuoka's special invitation I was at his home 'for a cup of tea'. Matsuoka said he intended to go via Moscow to Berlin and Rome at the end of February, for meetings with Hitler, Ribbentrop, Mussolini and Ciano, to greet them in the Japanese government's name in connection with the signing of the Tripartite Pact, and exchange views on matters of mutual interest. At the same time he said that he proposed to meet in Moscow with heads of our government and our leaders. When I asked how long his trip would be, Matsuoka replied that on first passing through Moscow he proposed to stop there for one day, so as to meet and get to know Comrade Molotov. On his return he intended to stay in Moscow for 3–4 days, to meet and have detailed discussions both with Comrade Molotov and with other heads of the government and Soviet leaders.
>
> Matsuoka several times stressed that the main aim of his journey to Europe was to meet the Soviet government's leaders. He several times asked me to keep secret his communication of his wish to meet the Soviet leaders in Moscow. He motivated his request by the alleged existence in Japan of a significant number of opponents of rapprochement with the Soviet Union, who, if they knew of his intention to meet Soviet leaders, would put great obstacles in the way of Japan's rapprochement with the USSR. Nor, on the other hand, did he want England and the USA to know of this meeting. Matsuoka then added that nothing about his journey to Moscow or his stay there would be published in the Japanese press, and therefore asked me yet again to keep this part of the conversation secret.

Smetanin replied that he would tell Moscow of Matsuoka's wish to meet the Soviet government's leaders, and gave his personal opinion that Matsuoka's meeting with them would be fuller and more productive if he told

them Japan's specific proposals for normalising relations, especially if he took the Japanese government's reply to the questions Molotov had posed to the Japanese ambassadors in 1940.

Matsuoka replied that he intended to speak in more detail with the Soviet leaders on returning to Moscow from Berlin and Rome, and then remarked that he could talk more specifically to them if trade and fisheries agreements were concluded before he left for Europe. Smetanin replied that he would transmit the request to Moscow, but doubted whether two agreements could be signed in so short a time.

Matsuoka explained that in his view a trade agreement could be concluded within the next few days, since, he claimed, Japan had accepted a number of Soviet proposals, and had sent appropriate instructions to its ambassador in Moscow. In particular, the Japanese government had accepted the USSR's proposal on status of the Soviet trade delegation in Tokyo, something Matsuoka felt 'will cause a big storm in the Privy Council'.

Matsuoka went on to observe that in the Privy Council and Japanese Parliament there were many opponents who frequently made speeches or comments on the Japanese–Soviet negotiations, and that he, Matsuoka, applied much effort and labour to persuading them of the need for Soviet–Japanese rapprochement. But he had to work particularly hard in the 'fight with the Interior and Justice Ministries', which, he claimed, were right up to the present obstructing his efforts to establish amicable relations with the USSR.

Matsuoka told Smetanin that seven or eight advisers, secretaries and military experts 'of Colonel's rank' would accompany him, and that on 12 February he would send all the necessary documents for obtaining visas to the Soviet Consulate. However, Matsuoka's appetite grew while preparing for the visit. He requested one saloon carriage with a kitchen for himself, and one passenger carriage for his suite, which grew to twelve–fifteen, including several Generals, not Colonels.[1]

On hearing from Tokyo, Moscow set about preparing carefully for the forthcoming negotiations. On 22 February 1941 Deputy Foreign Minister Lozovskiy sent an aide-memoire to Molotov. It said:

> It can be expected that the Japanese government will again raise the question of concluding a non-aggression pact between Japan and the USSR. In this connection I think it necessary to mention the following. Article 2 of the non-aggression treaty concluded between the USSR and China in Nanking on 21 August 1937 states: 'If one of the High Contracting Parties is subjected to attack by one or more third powers, the other High Contracting Party binds itself not to provide direct or indirect assistance to that third power or powers in prolonging any conflict, and equally to refrain from any actions or agreements [Lozovskiy's underlining] which could be used by the attacker or attackers to the detriment of the side subjected to attack.

In developing this Article during signing of the treaty, the plenipotentiaries of the USSR and China exchanged the following declaration:

> *'Oral declaration, strictly confidential, never for publication officially or unofficially.*
> In signing the non-aggression treaty today, the plenipotentiary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics declares in his government's name that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics *will not conclude any non-aggression treaty with Japan until the time when normal relations between the Chinese Republic and Japan are formally restored.'* [Lozovskiy's italics].

It is clear from the above documents that the USSR has undertaken an obligation not to conclude a non-aggression treaty with Japan while Japan and China are at war.[2]

Thus the decisive argument that the USSR could conclude only a Neutrality Pact with Japan was added to those which had guided the Soviet government in the Molotov-Tatekawa discussions. It would become central to the Molotov–Matsuoka negotiations.

Matsuoka's negotiations in Moscow

On 23 March 1941 the express slowly entered the Yaroslavl' station in Moscow. In accordance with protocol Matsuoka was met by Lozovskiy, S.K. Tsarapkin, Head of the Ministry's Second Far Eastern Department, Japanese Ambassador Tatekawa, his German and Italian counterparts, Schulenburg and Rosso, and others.[3] On the next day Soviet newspapers noted that Matsuoka had arrived in Moscow 'on his journey across the USSR', i.e. the information was released precisely as the Japanese had requested.

On 24 March Molotov, as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, received Matsuoka accompanied by Tatekawa.[4] Matsuoka explained the aims of his visit. He had decided to go to Berlin and Rome 'in connection with conclusion of the Tripartite Pact, and to exchange views with the leaders of Germany and Italy on matters touching on the Triple Alliance'. Matsuoka said that Japan had concluded a Tripartite Pact very important for its foreign policy, but there had been no personal contact between the leaders of the signatory states. They had exchanged views only by telegrams, which could not replace personal contact, and therefore the basic reason for his visit to Berlin and Rome was to establish personal contact with Hitler and Ribbentrop, whom he had never met, Mussolini and Ciano, whom he already knew.

Matsuoka went on to say that relations with the USSR were also important for Japan, and that he wanted to use his journey to meet the Soviet Union's leaders.

> He is convinced that Japanese–Soviet relations must be improved, and adds that he was engaged in improving relations even thirty years ago, when he was a sort of Chief of General Staff to Count Goto, whose views on establishing good relations between Russia and Japan he shared.

On his return journey he would like to talk with Molotov about improving Soviet–Japanese relations. Matsuoka noted that he had said much about this to Smetanin, with whom he had very good, friendly relations.

Matsuoka said he had asked Smetanin to inform the Soviet side that 'his journey should not be linked to Soviet–Japanese negotiations, because its official aim was to visit Berlin and Rome, and therefore he did not want it thought that it was linked to negotiations with the USSR.' When Molotov asked 'where should it not be thought?' Matsuoka replied that American and British journalists here were showing concern, and asking him how many days he would stay in Moscow on his way back from Berlin. He had told them he was 'passing through the USSR in transit, not on business'. 'Of course', Matsuoka added, 'it would be a different matter if I arrive in Moscow and conduct negotiations, but as yet there should be no talk of this.' Matsuoka said he expected to be in Berlin 3–4 days, in Rome 2–3 days, and 'on the way back would be bound to stay in Moscow for several days'.

On the same day, Matsuoka met Stalin. As already noted, the Russian Foreign Ministry's open files contain no record of this conversation. We therefore cite it as Matsuoka described it to Hitler and Ribbentrop 3 days later. The record turned up in the Nuremberg prosecution's hands, as did all the protocols of Matsuoka's conversations in the Reichs Chancelry, found by the Allies in the archives of Hitler's Foreign Ministry.

Matsuoka said that he had spoken with Molotov for about 30 minutes and with Stalin for an hour. He had explained to Stalin that morally the Japanese were Communists. This idea had been handed down from fathers to sons from time immemorial. But at the same time he stated that he did not believe in political and economic Communism.

To explain what he meant by 'moral Communism' Matsuoka cited his own family, but said the Japanese concept of moral Communism had been overwhelmed by liberalism, individualism and egoism from the West. However, there was still a minority of people in Japan strong enough to fight successfully to restore the old Japanese credo. This ideological struggle was very strong in Japan, but those fighting to restore the old idea were convinced they would win in the end. Basically it was the Anglo-Saxons who were responsible for penetration by the above-mentioned Western ideology. To restore the old, traditional Japanese ideal, Japan would therefore have to fight the Anglo-Saxons. In China, too, she was fighting not against the Chinese, but against Great Britain in China and capitalism in China.

He told Stalin that the Soviets were also fighting for something new, and that he believed the difficulties that had arisen between Japan and Russia could be regularised after the British Empire was defeated. *He depicted the Anglo-Saxons as the common enemies of Japan, Germany and Soviet Russia* (my emphasis – B.S.).

Finally Matsuoka got down to business. He had proposed a non-aggression pact, to which Molotov had responded by offering to sign a Neutrality Pact. During his time in Moscow he must have been the first man to offer a non-aggression pact. He also wanted to use this opportunity to persuade the Russians to cede Northern Sakhalin. There were oil sources there, but the Russians were making their exploitation very difficult. Matsuoka considered that 2 million tonnes of oil could be extracted from them. He had offered to buy Northern Sakhalin. When Ribbentrop asked whether the Russians were ready to sell it, Matsuoka replied that this was very doubtful. When the Japanese ambassador suggested it, Molotov asked him 'What is this, a joke?'

We shall now make a small digression, and for greater objectivity let us turn to the views of the aforementioned Smirnov and Zaytsev.

> Molotov's offer to sign not a non-aggression pact but a Neutrality Pact . . .: obviously the Soviet government already knew or suspected something about the German aggression then in preparation. For the second Article of the Neutrality Pact proposed by the Soviet Union contained the following firm obligation. 'In the event of one of the Contracting Sides becoming the object of military operations by one or several third countries, the other Contracting Side will observe neutrality for the entire duration of the conflict.' Among other things, that formulation clearly contradicted the third article of the 'Pact of Three', which bound Japan to enter the war on Germany's side if the latter 'is subjected to an attack by any power not at present [September 1940 – B.S.] participant in the European war or the Sino-Japanese conflict'.
>
> That Hitler's Germany treated the concept of 'attack' solely from the position of its own aggressive interests is well known. That is why the Soviet government considered that in the circumstances a neutrality treaty would bind Japan in respect of the USSR under international law comparatively more than a non-aggression pact, and cause divisions among the aggressors.[5]

The ideological attractions of such views, reached with the benefit of hindsight, are obvious. But we know the real reasons for the Soviet government's behaviour in the negotiations. As mentioned earlier, this book had already been written when I received the records of Stalin's conversations with Matsuoka. Naturally I had to use them.

Record of Conversation of Comrade I.V. Stalin with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Matsuoka, 24 March 1941

After the exchange of courtesies obligatory on such occasions, Matsuoka said that on his way back from Berlin he would like to have several meetings with Comrade Molotov about improving Soviet–Japanese relations.

Stalin replied that his desire was welcomed, he considered improvement of relations between the USSR and Japan not only necessary but entirely possible, and if another meeting with Matsuoka were needed, he would be at Matsuoka's disposal.

Matsuoka then said that he had two questions to put to Stalin, and asked him to think about them before his return from Berlin.

As is well known, said Matsuoka, supreme power in Japan is in the hands of the Tenno, usually translated as Emperor. But that is incorrect, since there has already long been communism in Japan, and he, Matsuoka, explaining its essence in terms of Japanese life, would call this 'moral communism'. Anglo-Saxon traditions had harmed Japan, the Minister continued, and the industrial revolution had put a brake on the development of moral communism. However, a group of individuals has now been established, though it is true that it is small, which is striving to diffuse its principles throughout the entire Asian space, and which calls its principles by the Japanese word Hakkoitsyu, which in translation means universal peace with justice. All this, Matsuoka indicated, existed earlier, but was constrained by capitalism and liberalism, so that now we are advancing the slogan 'down with capitalism and individualism'. But for this *it is necessary to wipe out the Anglo-Saxons* [my emphasis – B.S.]. It is with that aim, Matsuoka added, that the Tripartite Pact was concluded. . . .

After that, Matsuoka said that if Stalin understood what he was trying to say, and if the Soviet side had a similar understanding and a wish to proceed together, then, said Matsuoka, we are ready to go hand in hand with you.

On the Sino-Japanese war, Matsuoka said Japan is waging war not with the Chinese people, but with the Anglo-Saxons, i.e. England and America. Japan, he continued, is fighting capitalism and individualism, and Chiang Kai-Shek is the servant of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. The Sino-Japanese conflict must be viewed from precisely that viewpoint. . . .

Stalin and Matsuoka agreed to consider these questions after the latter's return from Berlin. In conclusion Stalin said, 'whatever the ideology in Japan or the USSR, this cannot hinder practical rapprochement of the two countries, if both sides have a mutual desire'. And further, 'No ideology shall hinder practical posing of the question of mutual improvement of relations. As for the Anglo-Saxons, Comrade Stalin said, the Russians had never been their friends, and now were perhaps not very keen to befriend them.'[6]

Comparing the actual content of the Stalin–Matsuoka conversation with what was known already from paraphrases, memoirs and other sources, important scholarly conclusions can be drawn. By 26 March, when Matsuoka reached Berlin, German–Soviet relations had deteriorated to the point that the friendly mediation by Germany sought by the Coordinating Conference had been removed from the agenda. Japan would have to look to its own security in the event of a German–Soviet war. Although the Tripartite Pact did not envisage Japan's entering the European war if Germany attacked the USSR, she could, as a strategic ally of Germany, be dragged into it automatically. Now, when Matsuoka knew or at least guessed Germany's plans relative to the USSR, agreement with the latter was extremely important for Japan's foreign policy.

On 7 April 1941, Matsuoka again stopped in Moscow, and had a conversation with Molotov on that day.[7] 'Matsuoka said that one of the major tasks of his journey to Europe . . . was to implement rapprochement with the USSR. He said that the series of negotiations currently being conducted by Tatekawa (on trade and a long-term fisheries convention) were progressing, and he hoped they would conclude satisfactorily. Therefore today he would touch not on them, but on other questions.

Matsuoka recalled his talks with Smetanin about his wish to achieve rapprochement between Japan and the USSR, and stated that he looks for improvement of relations with the USSR not from the viewpoint of temporary interests and temporary policy, but from that of improving relations for 50–100 years. In doing this, Matsuoka said, the following questions arise. First, how to preserve such relations between the two countries. Second, what relations between our countries can help peace in the whole world, especially in Asia; and third, what relations with the USSR will benefit Japan, taking the other partner's interests into account?

Matsuoka went on to say 'Two forces are deciding the fate of Asia–Japan and the USSR. What is better for Asia? For these two forces, the decisive elements in Asia, to quarrel among themselves, or to be friends? There could be no doubt it would be better if the two countries were friends, as the opposite meant only darkness and gloom.' Matsuoka said this was his personal opinion and prognosis. If we took Japan's and the USSR's interests as our starting point, a quarrel between them would be a great misfortune, and no use to either. Friendship, Matsuoka emphasised, was profitable to both. Matsuoka then said that in over 20 years that had passed since the October Revolution, Japanese–Soviet relations had been not always good, and sometimes deplorable. He had already long been striving to improve Japanese–Soviet relations. If one viewed improvement of relations from a certain height, he continued, it was not to be approached short-sightedly. It must be viewed from the angle of large problems. For improving relations firm resolve was required, then the ways to improvement would find themselves.

Matsuoka recalled that while passing through Moscow in 1932 he had

several talks with the then leader of USSR foreign policy (Litvinov). At that time the Soviet Union had offered to conclude a non-aggression pact. Although he, Matsuoka, was then a private individual, he had telegraphed Tokyo, but the Japanese government had not agreed to conclude a pact, believing public opinion was not ready for it. On returning from Geneva to Japan, Matsuoka continued, he had worked as an individual towards conclusion of a non-aggression pact. And when at the end of July last year he was appointed Foreign Minister, he concluded that a non-aggression pact must be proposed to the USSR. Matsuoka indicated that he had an ardent desire to conclude a non-aggression pact, without touching on other matters.

Matsuoka said that his attitude to a non-aggression pact was the same as 8 years ago.... In the last 8 years there had been divergent opinions among political figures in Japan about the Soviet offer of a pact. Some proposed that all questions (fishing and other) be resolved first, and a pact then concluded, others proposed to conclude a pact and resolve the questions simultaneously. But Matsuoka himself, in his own words, stood for initially resolving the question of improving relations in a general political sense, and then resolving all the other questions. Matsuoka thought that given the situation in Europe and Asia, the Soviet side had no reason to change its attitude to a non-aggression pact. If the present was compared with the period when the Soviet Union first proposed one, it could be said that to conclude a pact now would be a master stroke, what in baseball is called a 'king hit' ...

Matsuoka then went on to discuss specific questions. In its counter-proposals, the Soviet side mentioned the Treaty of Portsmouth, now rather a historical document, and the Peking Convention. Much of their content has already been implemented. 'There can be no question of denouncing the Treaty or Convention.' But if another treaty were concluded, satisfying both sides, he would not object to it.

In the Soviet counter-proposals there is an impasse over liquidating the concessions in Northern Sakhalin and compensation for them.... Matsuoka expounds his view on this. 'Granting concessions in Northern Sakhalin to Japan was connected with the Nikolaevsk incident, hence is closely linked to the Japanese people's national feelings. These ... cannot be ignored. Besides, Japan received these concessions about 15 years ago, and the Japanese think that but for various Soviet-created obstacles in that period the concessionaires would have been able to utilise the concessions fully. Speaking frankly, Matsuoka continued, if the Soviet authorities had collaborated normally with the concessionaires, that would have made it possible to utilise the concessions, and there would also have been more use and profit to the Soviet side.

Matsuoka went on to talk of selling Northern Sakhalin to Japan. This, he said, Tatekawa had proposed on his instructions, and now he asked Molotov to hear out his personal viewpoint. The Japanese people, said

Matsuoka, think thus. In the sixteenth century the Japanese arrived in Sakhalin. However, at the beginning of the Meiji era, Russia took Sakhalin from them. Thus the Japanese people retained the feeling that some day Sakhalin must be returned to Japan. Half of Sakhalin was returned under the Treaty of Portsmouth. The Japanese people thinks of return of the second half of Sakhalin as well. Therefore Matsuoka considered that for rapprochement of the two peoples, and to liquidate a situation that hurts Japanese national feelings, the Northern Sakhalin question must somehow be resolved. For the Soviet Union . . . the sale . . . would be nothing special, because compared to its enormous territory Sakhalin is a mere drop in the ocean. Japan could buy Northern Sakhalin at an appropriate price.

Matsuoka then turned to the question of the frontier between Manchukuo and the USSR. There had recently been negotiations on this, but they had not been crowned with success, though the frontier question should be settled quickly, and Japan favoured this. If a non-aggression pact were concluded, plenipotentiaries of the USSR and Manchuria would be able to find a just solution in a favourable atmosphere.

Matsuoka then said he had no intention of Japan attacking the USSR alongside Germany. He had never spoken to anyone in Germany about doing so. It went without saying that Japan would be loyal to its ally, Germany, but it did not at all follow that Japan would quarrel with the USSR. Matsuoka added that his view amounted to working on improving relations with the USSR in such a way that there would be no quarrels between Germany and the USSR. If, he said, there should unfortunately be a case of the Soviet Union and USA cooperating to treat Japan as common enemy, Japan was ready and willing to attack the Soviet Union before that cooperation could take effect.

Although, Matsuoka continued, there were differing newspaper accounts, and he did not know the nature of the negotiations going on between the USSR and USA, he asked that his views be conveyed to Stalin, to avoid misunderstandings. The question was not whether Japan would win or lose, but one of life or death for Japan; it went without saying that Japan would not await the moment when an alliance was forged between Japan's enemies, but would be compelled to defeat its enemies individually. And as the USA is far away, strategically Japan would first have to deal with the Soviet Union. If it is assumed that Japan could not handle one country, then why should she wait for the moment when both wage war on her? . . . Japan did not want to make war on the USSR, but in such an eventuality she would have no choice.

Further, as Matsuoka had already told Stalin in the previous conversation, 'In China Japan is fighting not the Chinese people but the USA and England. They want to swallow China, and Chiang Kai-Shek is their agent. Therefore Japan will fight Chiang Kai-Shek to the end. The USA and England are mistaken in assuming that Japan is exhausted after more than 3 years of war. Speaking frankly', Matsuoka continued, 'Japan is

exhausted, but not as exhausted as the USA and England think, and if Japan were to take the country to the same level of exhaustion as Germany and Italy, it could still fight for 10 years. . . . He hoped the Soviet Union would not be led into error about the extent of Japan's exhaustion, and would have a correct policy towards Japan.

Matsuoka said he proposed to leave Moscow on 10 April, but that if Molotov wished to talk to him he could delay his departure until 13 April, when the next express train left.

Molotov fully agreed that the most correct course was to examine the question of Japan-USSR relations from a height, i.e. not simply from the viewpoint of today or of small current questions. Of course, in so doing account must be taken of the interests of universal peace. The real interests of the interested parties, the USSR and Japan, must also be taken into account. In the 8 years mentioned by Matsuoka there had been changes in the world. 'Then the hand the Soviet Union extended by offering a non-aggression pact hung in the air, but now, when the question is raised anew, account must be taken of the attitude Japan took then to the Soviet offer, and also of the great changes in the international situation and in development of the USSR and Japan.' . . .

At that time (1932) there was no non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany, and Japan had no alliance with Germany. . . . About the USSR's 1939 non-aggression pact with Germany the following must be said. The essence of that agreement is not in what was published, but in what for understandable reasons was not published but nevertheless implemented. Since Germany, Molotov continued, in his view, correctly understood the Soviet Union's interests, and the Soviet Union, in his view, correctly understood Germany's interests, the treaty was an important matter, i.e. a treaty which established long-term relations between the USSR and Germany, and played a great positive role for both. Molotov added that if Germany does not breach this treaty, the USSR will also abide by it . . . Despite serious events, this treaty has proved stable, . . . has justified itself.

As for a non-aggression pact between the USSR and Japan, the Soviet side has a serious attitude towards this too, starting from the same basic postulates as it did when concluding the treaty with Germany. If that is acceptable to Japan, then there will be a basis for putting the question of a non-aggression pact on the same level as in concluding the non-aggression pact with Germany.

The issue was not on what sort of socio-political basis power rested in this or that country, as that, from the USSR's viewpoint, should not block establishment of good-neighbourly relations . . . what was established in relations between our countries after Russia's defeat in 1905 could not be left unchanged. Understandably Russia had approximately the same feelings about the Portsmouth Treaty as Germany had about the Versailles Treaty. So the Portsmouth Treaty was a bad basis for developing and

improving relations ... the more so as Japan had violated it in respect of Manchuria.

Matsuoka's reference to the Nikolaevsk events, the last stage in Japan's military intervention in the Soviet Far East, was also inappropriate, as that was a period of very bad relations between the USSR and Japan. As for Matsuoka's statement about selling Northern Sakhalin, Molotov said he regarded it as incredible or simply a joke. None among us would now understand the sale of Northern Sakhalin, because everyone remembered that Russia was compelled to cede the Southern half of Sakhalin only as a result of defeat in 1905. Our public opinion would be more understanding if in rectifying the Treaty of Portsmouth, a treaty concluded after a defeat, the question of our buying the southern half of Sakhalin were raised, and the price could be resolved by agreement. Now it would be more correct to raise the question of buying from Japan not only the southern part of Sakhalin, *but also a certain group of Northern Kurile Islands*[8] [my emphasis – B.S.]. That would be entirely comprehensible. Now it may be asked, should these issues be stirred up now, and will doing so help rapid improvement of long-term relations between the USSR and Japan? The Soviet government assumes that to raise now the question of buying a group of the northern Kurile Islands, or the southern part of Sakhalin, or other similar questions would be pointless, as not much has yet been prepared for this. But if that is not so, then, of course, it is a different matter.

As for Matsuoka's remarks about relations between the USSR and USA, and the possibility of an attack on Japan by both in alliance, he had the following to say.... We have no intention of concluding an alliance with the USA to attack Japan, but this is in no way dictated by cowardice, as there are many bold and decisive people in the Soviet government.... But, of course, the USSR will continue its discussions with the USA, and develop its relations with America in accordance with its own interests.

... However, if the Japanese government wants to take a major political step in relation to the USSR, and the Soviet government in its turn also wishes this, then both could agree to neutrality at this very moment, and matters requiring long consideration need not be touched upon. It would be necessary only to agree to liquidate the coal and oil concessions in Northern Sakhalin, with compensation for the investments the Japanese concessionaires have made there, and an undertaking by the Soviet Union to deliver a certain quantity of oil to Japan over a number of years. This would have great repercussions on the entire international situation, and be useful to both countries. Molotov added that during his meetings in Berlin with Hitler and Ribbentrop, and especially in his final conversation with Ribbentrop, it had been put to him quite specifically that Japan would meet the Soviet position on the Northern Sakhalin concessions.[9] Knowing the good relations between Germany and Japan, and considering that this would be a good move for Japan, he had made his offer to Tatekawa after returning from Berlin.

... Matsuoka said this was obviously a misunderstanding, as he had never spoken to any of the Germans about it. He went on to say that since Molotov spoke of a Neutrality Pact and he, Matsuoka, of a non-aggression pact, then he must ponder and study this question. Matsuoka and Molotov agreed to prolong their discussions, and to postpone Matsuoka's departure until 13 April.

On 9 April the discussions resumed.[10] Matsuoka stated that he had studied well and thoroughly what Molotov had said ... (and) ... had decided to withdraw his proposal of a non-aggression pact, and accept Molotov's proposal to conclude a Neutrality Pact. During his time in Moscow he and Tatekawa could sign only a Neutrality Pact without any additional conditions. Concluding it would have a good influence on improving relations between Japan and the USSR, helping resolve the other questions which divided them, and which after conclusion of the agreement could be resolved by negotiations between Matsuoka [obviously an error for Molotov – G.J.] and Tatekawa. If the Soviet government shared his view, he would ask the Emperor for powers to sign a Neutrality Pact.

Molotov: so as not to create difficulties over the signing of a Neutrality Pact, the Soviet government has confined itself to one additional proposal to the treaty, namely to liquidate the concessions in Northern Sakhalin. Molotov considered acceptance of this minimal condition necessary and sensible.... Experience had shown that the Japanese concessions presented no interest to Japan itself. Clearly it was difficult for the Japanese concessionaires to work in our conditions, because our labour laws contain certain requirements and conditions, and control by Soviet organs over their fulfilment.

There is yet another side to the matter. The existence of these concessions is spoiling relations between the USSR and Japan, since undesirable incidents have often occurred, badly affecting relations between them. Once both countries have expressed the desire to improve their relations and to take a major political step, all secondary issues creating difficulties must be removed. Japan will not suffer from abolition of the concessions. In recent years annual output from the oil concessions has not exceeded 100,000 tonnes; the Soviet government is prepared to accommodate Japan by concluding an agreement to deliver 100,000 tonnes of oil annually for 5 years, and to guarantee to deliver that quantity. This will also free Japan from trouble with the concessions, and unpleasantnesses connected with their exploitation.

Molotov then added

> the Soviet side can conclude a Neutrality Pact on condition that a protocol liquidating the oil and coal concessions is signed simultaneously. If it is convenient for Japan to sign an open protocol, published in the press, about liquidation of the concessions, that can be published. But

> if the Japanese side prefers to do this in the shape of an unpublished protocol, then it may be done as Japan prefers. . . .
>
> That Japan and the USSR conclude a political agreement will be good, but it will be bad if on the very next day incidents begin around the concessions, which will spoil political relations. Why leave that thorn in place in the flesh?

Summing up, Molotov said that without a protocol liquidating the concessions, it would be impossible to sign a Neutrality Pact.[11]

Molotov then observed: If a Neutrality Pact was concluded . . . the Soviet side wished for whatever in that pact applied to them to apply equally to their neighbours, Manchukuo and MNR (Mongolian People's Republic). So where it speaks of acknowledging and respecting Japan's territorial integrity, it must say that that applies equally to acknowledging and respecting the territory of Manchukuo. And where it speaks of acknowledging the USSR's territorial integrity, it must say that that applies equally to acknowledging and respecting the territorial integrity of the MNR. This stands to reason, and must be stated in the Neutrality Pact.[12]

Matsuoka replied that he had to say that the question of liquidating the concessions was not easy for Japan, it was really difficult. (Molotov had said earlier that Tatekawa shared his approach to liquidating the concessions). Matsuoka explained that Tatekawa had told him Molotov's opinion, and his acceptance of it. This last could be explained by Tatekawa's being an ardent supporter of rapprochement between Japan and the USSR. He, Matsuoka, had himself been an ardent supporter of rapprochement between Japan and the USSR for 30 years, but it was very hard for him to overcome the opposition that existed in Japan, even within the government. . . . To create a political situation favourable to resolving the concessions issue, Matsuoka proposed first concluding a Neutrality Pact without conditions. He again repeated that this would create a favourable atmosphere for subsequent resolution of major questions in Japanese–Soviet relations.

Matsuoka agreed that the Neutrality Pact should refer to acknowledging and respecting the territorial integrity of states allied to Japan and the USSR. He said there should also be a secret protocol on spheres of influence, to indicate that Japan's was Inner Mongolia and Northern China, and the USSR's the MNR and Sinkiang. He was ready for this. He also thought that when Molotov was in Berlin last November, Ribbentrop spoke to him about the need for the USSR to reach warm seas by way of India and Iran. In that connection he could say that when Germany's special envoy Stahmer was in Japan, he, Matsuoka, had asked him to tell Ribbentrop that the USSR's natural demand for access to warm waters must be recognised. Japan had no objection to the USSR's emergence into India. As for Iran, Germany must think about that. However, he thought it

possible to say that Japan had no objections to the USSR's reaching the sea via Iran also, although, he repeated, it is mainly Germany and also England that must think about that.[13]

In conversation with Stalin, Matsuoka continued, he had said that Japan's main aim was to chase the English, Asia's chief exploiters, out of Asia. If Japan could shake hands with Russia on this, Japan would like to do so. If we looked at things in broad perspective, the Northern Sakhalin concessions were a small matter, though, of course, unpleasant to have as a thorn in the flesh. To resolve this small matter an atmosphere must be created. Conclusion of a trade agreement and fisheries convention would create a good atmosphere. . . .

Matsuoka touched on the history of his advancement of a non-aggression treaty. Before leaving for Geneva he had spoken about Japanese–Soviet relations with the then Japanese ambassador to the USSR, Koki Hirota. Although Hirota held a different opinion, he had finally agreed with Matsuoka. . . . Matsuoka had also met the then War Minister, Sadao Araki. . . . Araki had agreed that Matsuoka might speak at his own risk in the USSR about concluding a non-aggression pact. At the same time he had also secured agreement from the then Foreign Minister, Count Uchida, to conducting discussions for a non-aggression pact with the USSR. However, it was not put to Cabinet, because . . . it would not have achieved a positive result. Matsuoka himself also continued at that time to work through the press. . . . For example, on the day he left Japan for Geneva, the *Asahi* newspaper carried a leading article agitating for a non-aggression pact, and by the time he arrived in Moscow much of the press already favoured a pact.

Initially he had planned to go to Geneva via Canada, but when Araki and Uchida gave him approval for discussions, he changed his route, went via Moscow, stayed there for 5 days, and spoke with Litvinov and Karakhan. The discussions progressed successfully, but when official assurances were needed, Araki and Uchida did not support him. . . . This put him in an awkward position. . . .

When Hirota, with whom Matsuoka was very friendly, was appointed Foreign Minister, Matsuoka went to see him, and asked to be sent to Moscow to sign a pact. But the atmosphere then was very bad; anyone signing such a pact risked being killed. . . . Hirota did not then give him the task, even though he was of the same mind. . . .

When Konoe's Cabinet was formed in July 1940, he agreed to join it as Foreign Minister, although he had several times previously refused offers of the post, believing he could not at that time implement his ideas for improving Soviet–Japanese relations. But in agreeing to join Konoe's Cabinet, he believed he could. . . . If he did not succeed in improving relations between Japan and the USSR, that would mean his acceptance of the post of Foreign Minister had become pointless.

Molotov replied: the USSR's and Japan's common interests amount to

not obstructing each other, at least where those interests do not clash. On spheres of influence and Manchukuo,

> the proposal to have, in the text of the pact, mutual recognition of and respect for the territorial integrity of Japan and the USSR extended to allied states, Manchukuo and the MNR, seemed to him an adequate response to Matsuoka's proposal to recognise Manchukuo. But as for other questions, more circumstantial preparation was needed. Therefore he thought it would be more correct to concentrate for now on one question, about which he and Matsuoka had spoken enough, namely the Neutrality Pact and a protocol liquidating the concessions.

Touching on Matsuoka's request not to forget his role in the matter of a political agreement, Molotov stated that it was precisely the circumstance that a man who had long adhered to a particular political line now stood at the head of the Japanese Foreign Ministry that gave him confidence in the Soviet government's proposal to throw out everything that might create superfluous arguments for postponing conclusion of an agreement.[14]

On that day, 9 April, Molotov gave a lunch in Matsuoka's honour. During the day Matsuoka inspected the 'Stalin' automobile plant, and in the evening went by the 'Red Arrow' train for sightseeing in Leningrad. On 11 April he returned to Moscow, and on that day had his third and final meeting with Molotov.[15]

At the outset Matsuoka repeated that he had already said all he had to say, and that if the Soviet government accepted his proposal, he would at once ask the Emperor for plenipotentiary powers to sign the Neutrality Pact.

Molotov recalled that the essence of his proposal was simultaneous signing of a Neutrality Pact and a protocol liquidating the concessions in Northern Sakhalin, and handed Matsuoka a draft of the pact and protocol. 'If the Japanese government cannot do this now, then obviously we must wait for another situation more favourable to signing a political agreement.' Molotov said that personally he thought it undesirable to postpone signing the agreement, but if there was no other way out, it was better to do so.

After reading the first Article of Molotov's proposed draft Neutrality Pact, Matsuoka said it would have to be amended, because there was no treaty between Japan and Manchukuo, whereas there was one between the USSR and MNR. Relations between Japan and Manchukuo were in fact a form of protectorate; such words could not, of course, be put into the text of the pact, so others must be found. Matsuoka proposed leaving the first Article as in the initial draft, and making a statement about Manchukuo and the MNR in the form of a Declaration. Besides, Matsuoka wanted to raise yet another question, of recognition of Manchukuo by the USSR. He would consider it very appropriate if on signing the pact the USSR would

recognise Manchukuo *de jure*, and exchange diplomatic representatives. This would help to improve the atmosphere between the USSR, Japan and Manchukuo.

Molotov replied, as in the previous discussion, that since the Soviet proposal for a Neutrality Pact mentioned Manchukuo, and the Soviet side did not ignore its existence, it seemed to him that at present this answered Matsuoka's question.

Matsuoka again repeated that if a Neutrality Pact was signed, and then a trade treaty and fisheries convention concluded, a favourable atmosphere would be created for resolving the question of the North Sakhalin concessions. Matsuoka said he did not have plenipotentiary powers to sign a protocol liquidating the concessions, and could not easily assume that the government was yet of one opinion on this. He therefore had to reject a 'blitzkrieg'. Matsuoka then said that on returning from Leningrad he had devised the following way out. *As a compromise Matsuoka handed over a draft letter addressed to Molotov, which spoke vaguely of the possibility of liquidating all contentious questions about the concessions in the future* [my emphasis – B.S.], and also expressed the desire for rapid conclusion of a trade treaty, a fisheries convention, and establishment of a mixed commission to examine contentious matters on the Manchurian and Soviet-Mongolian borders. Matsuoka said he would be obliged if Molotov would study his letter.

Molotov replied that he would, of course, do so, but that he stood by his previous view of the need to sign the protocol liquidating the concessions simultaneously with the Neutrality Pact, and did not doubt that this would expedite resolution of other questions, such as trade and fisheries. But on the frontier question, there was already a treaty between Japan and the USSR; all that was needed was to implement it. Molotov recalled that the trade agreement was already more or less ready for signing, and, of course, regularising the political question would be very important for resolving that issue.

At the end of the conversation Matsuoka, obviously reconciled to his failure to achieve agreement, regretted that he would be unable to sign the Neutrality Pact himself, but that that did not alter his desire to work for improvement in Japanese–Soviet relations. He invited Molotov to visit Japan.

Here is an extract from the letter handed to Molotov on 11 April 1941.

> In accordance with the Neutrality Pact signed today, I have the honour to state that I expect and hope that a trade agreement and fisheries convention will be concluded very quickly, and that you, Your Excellency, and I will at the first opportunity strive in a spirit of reconciliation and mutual concessions to resolve the question relating to the concessions in Northern Sakhalin, obtained by agreements signed in Moscow on 14 December 1925, so as to liquidate any

> questions that do not correspond to the maintenance of sincere relations between the two countries.[16]

The first Article of the Soviet-proposed draft Neutrality Pact, which mentions Manchukuo and Mongolia, is also of scholarly interest.

> Article the First. Both contracting Sides bind themselves to maintain peaceful and amicable relations and mutually to respect territorial integrity and inviolability, equally the territorial integrity and inviolability of adjacent states allied to the contracting Sides, Manchukuo and the Mongolian People's Republic.[17]

So it seemed the Molotov–Matsuoka negotiations ended in total failure, by being unable to reach a united view on liquidating the Japanese concessions. On the evening of 12 April, Matsuoka was at the play 'Three Sisters'. Suddenly a ring from Stalin's secretary; Matsuoka is invited to come at once to the Kremlin.

Record of Conversation between Comrade J.V. Stalin and Foreign Minister of Japan Matsuoka, 12 April 1941

Matsuoka expressed regret that he had been unable to sign the Neutrality Pact in a diplomatic blitzkrieg. But he felt personal acquaintance with the Soviet leaders would 'facilitate further development of relations between Japan and the USSR'.

Matsuoka then expressed himself on the following questions.

First. Japan has an alliance treaty with Germany. However, it does not follow that Japan must tie down the forces of the USSR. On the contrary, if anything happens between the USSR and Germany, he would prefer to mediate between them. Japan and the USSR are states with common borders, and he would like to improve relations between them.

Stalin asked: doesn't the Pact of Three prevent that?

Matsuoka replied that on the contrary, conclusion of the pact with Germany must improve Japanese–Soviet relations, and he had said so to Ribbentrop in Berlin.

Second. Fundamental resolution of relations between the USSR and Japan must be from the angle of the big problems, having in mind Asia, the whole world, not confining ourselves to, or being distracted by, trivia. If we thus approach a fundamental resolution of Japanese–Soviet relations, the small problems can be resolved by passage of time, or even be sacrificed. If a small islet like Sakhalin sank in the sea, Matsuoka said, that would have no influence on Japanese–Soviet relations. He went on to say that to speak thus did not mean he thought small questions need not be resolved. They too must be resolved, but later. 'If', Matsuoka continued, 'we approach, from the angle of big problems, the eventuality when the USSR will strive

to emerge through India to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, he thought this must be allowed; and if the USSR wanted the port of Karachi, Japan would turn a blind eye. Matsuoka further said that when Stahmer had been in Japan, he, Matsuoka, had told him that Germany should also look on in that way if the USSR tried to reach warm seas via Iran.

Third. To liberate Asia, the Anglo-Saxons must be removed, therefore when faced with this task we must reject small questions and cooperate in big ones.

Fourth. Japan today is fighting in China, but not with the Chinese people, whom Japan does not want to fight. What does Japan want in China? It wants to expel the Anglo-Saxons. Chiang Kai-Shek is an agent of Anglo-American capital, and is fighting Japan for that capital's sake. Japan is firmly resolved to fight Chiang Kai-Shek to the end, and therefore sympathy for Chiang Kai-Shek means helping Anglo-American capital. In this connection, Matsuoka indicated that in his view it would be more sensible to abandon support for Chiang Kai-Shek, and act so that expulsion of the Anglo-Saxons succeeds.

Fifth. This relates to so-called 'moral communism'. Matsuoka said that he did not agree with political and social communism, but basically also adhered to communism, and was decisively against Anglo-Saxon capital. Matsuoka there and then added that his proposal amounted to the USSR and Japan together expelling the influence of Anglo-American capitalism from Asia. . . .

Many of the evils of capitalism, which arrived in Japan over half a century ago, were expressed in the spread of individualism and capitalism among the Japanese people. An unseen but fierce struggle was going on in Japan between capitalism and moral communism, and he was convinced that Japan could return to moral communism.[18]

Stalin said 'the USSR considers cooperation with Japan, Germany and Italy on big questions permissible in principle. Molotov had told Hitler and Ribbentrop that, when he was in Berlin and the question arose of making the Pact of Three a Pact of Four. But Hitler had said, Stalin remarked, that he did not then need military assistance from other states. In view of that, Stalin thought that only if Germany and Japan's affairs were going badly could the question arise of a Pact of Four, and of the USSR's cooperation on big questions. Therefore, Stalin indicated, we confine ourselves now to the question of a Neutrality Pact with Japan. This question is undoubtedly ripe for solution. This will be the first step, and a serious step, towards future cooperation on big questions.'

Turning to consider the Neutrality Pact, Stalin said Molotov had already told him that Matsuoka had no objections to the Pact's text, and only one point, about Manchukuo and the MNR, aroused doubt. Stalin continued that he was not against removing that from the pact, but it might then happen that Japan and the USSR had a pact, but a field for conflict between Mongolia and Manchukuo continued to exist. Was that

sensible, Stalin asked, and said that in one shape or form something must also be said about the MNR and Manchukuo, otherwise Japan might attack the MNR, and the USSR might attack Manchukuo, and the result would be war between the USSR and Japan.

Matsuoka said that he did not object to the substance ... but since Japan and Manchukuo did not have alliance relations, he thought it better to mention Manchukuo and the MNR in a declaration. Stalin said all that was very good, and means that here also there are no disagreements; consequently disagreements remain only about the protocol on liquidating the concessions.

Matsuoka said he had no objections to the pact except for some editorial amendments. But as for the protocol, since a trade treaty and fisheries convention would be concluded soon, a good atmosphere was being created for resolving the concession question. So for the time being he would like to confine himself to handing the confidential letter to Comrade Molotov, and signing the Neutrality Pact now, without the protocol.

Stalin said that all the conversations Matsuoka had had with Molotov, and his second conversation with Matsuoka today, had convinced him that the negotiations about the pact were not a diplomatic game, but that Japan really wanted sincerely and honestly to improve its relations with the USSR. He had doubted this earlier, and had to admit that frankly. But these doubts had now vanished, and now we really had actual aspiration to improve relations, not a game. He did not wish to make the position more difficult for Matsuoka, who had to fight to the end against his antagonists in Japan, and was prepared to ease his situation so that Matsuoka could achieve a diplomatic blitzkrieg there.

Well, Stalin continued, let us concede that we replace the protocol liquidating the concessions by Matsuoka's letter, to which obviously there will be a letter from Molotov in reply. Matsuoka's letter should be attached to the agreement, not for publication. If that is done, then perhaps some editorial amendments could be made to this letter.

Matsuoka stated that he did not at all wish to say that he couldn't fulfil his promises. Therefore he had provided his letter, and asked Molotov to reply by letter. Matsuoka indicated that, as he had already told Molotov, the best and quickest way to resolve the question would be to sell the northern part of Sakhalin to Japan, but since the Soviet side rejected that, another way must be found to solve the concessions issue.

Stalin asked: liquidation of the concessions?

Matsuoka replied: yes, and added he would not put it in the pending file.

Stalin then handed Matsuoka the text of the letter with editorial amendments.

After Matsuoka had read it, he said that he could not take the responsibility of liquidating the concessions within 2 to 3 months, as he had to return to Japan and work there to make the government and people under-

stand the need for this. If he could agree only to liquidation of the concessions, [i.e. with no time limit – G.J.] that would be easier for him.

Stalin asked, in that case, what is the significance of Matsuoka's unamended letter?

Matsuoka said that in the conversations between him and Molotov both sides' viewpoints had become very clear. He had posed the question of selling Northern Sakhalin to Japan, which would have been a fundamental solution, but since the Soviet side did not accept that proposal, a way out had to be found along the line of a protocol. Matsuoka said that he would try to work in that direction. . . . Matsuoka asked to trust him and be satisfied with his initial letter. . . .

Stalin went to the map, pointed to the Maritime Province and its exits to the ocean, and said 'Japan holds in its hands all the Soviet Maritime's exits to the ocean – the Kurile Straits at the South Cape of Kamchatka, La Perouse Strait to the south of Sakhalin, the Tsushima Straits off Korea. You want to take Northern Sakhalin and completely bottle up the Soviet Union. What do you want to do, strangle us?', said Stalin, smiling. 'What sort of friendship is that?'

Matsuoka said this would be necessary to create the New Order in Asia. Besides, Japan does not object to the USSR's emerging onto warm sea via India. There are Indians in India whom Japan could guide so that they would not obstruct this. In conclusion Matsuoka, pointing to the map, said he could not understand why the USSR, with such enormous territory, was unwilling to cede a small territory in such a cold place. . . .

The conversation continued in the same key for some time, and Stalin said that to take Northern Sakhalin meant preventing the Soviet Union from living.

Matsuoka returned to the amendments in the letter, and said he had no objection to replacing the words 'over the course of 2–3 months' by 'over the course of several months'. Stalin agreed to that. Matsuoka went on to say that since the USSR does not want to sell Northern Sakhalin to Japan . . . another way out is left along the line of a protocol. As for how much oil the Soviet Union would deliver to Japan – 100,000 tonnes or somewhat more – they must speak about that later. In a word, Matsuoka said, he would apply every effort to resolving the concession question.[19]

So all contentious questions were resolved by compromise, and the way opened to concluding the Neutrality Pact.

The Soviet Union had great need of a Neutrality Pact. Moscow saw German divisions piling up on its western frontiers, and the USSR was doing the same, concentrating its best divisions on the frontiers with Germany and Romania. Moscow needed to stabilise its position in the Far East. It acutely needed a treaty of reconciliation with Japan. At any price. And it got it.

Japan was in the same situation. Mired in the bog of war with China, it was very important to deprive Chiang Kai-Shek of Soviet aid. We have

already mentioned what ambassador Kaze, Matsuoka's closest adviser, who accompanied him to Europe, wrote in his memoirs: 'His [Chiang Kai-Shek's] greatest benefactor was the Soviet Union. By negotiating with the Soviets we hoped to stop Soviet help to China, and by so doing deal Chiang a strong blow.'[20]

Japan was also preparing to advance towards the South Seas. During Matsuoka's stay in Berlin, both Hitler and Ribbentrop urged him to move against Singapore, where they said Japan's vital interests lay. Implementation of these plans would be a strong blow at the economic and political interests of Great Britain and the USA, which might in certain circumstances go to war with Japan. It was in precisely those circumstances that a Neutrality Pact with the Soviet Union could be beneficial, because otherwise the USSR might find itself allied with the Anglo-Saxons, in a situation that could threaten Japan with a war on two fronts. And an alternative, American military bases in the Soviet Maritimes or Kamchatka, created a mortal danger for Japan.

Matsuoka also sensed the tension in German–Soviet relations. During his stay in Germany, Hitler had given him a hint that war with the Soviet Union was imminent. 'When you return to Japan, you can not report to the Emperor that conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union is impossible.'[21] Hitler's interpreter, Schmidt, was worried whether Matsuoka had grasped the hint. 'But possibly he took this step [signing the neutrality treaty – B.S.] because he understood well in Berlin how heated the situation was between Germany and the Soviet Union, and wanted to secure his rear in the event of a possible conflict.'[22] Apart from that, the Japanese took into account that a complication in relations between Germany and the USSR could push the latter into the Anglo-Saxon camp, and that threatened Japan with possible encirclement.[23] That is why the Neutrality Pact was responsive to fundamental national interests of both the Soviet Union and Japan.

How today can we assess the Stalin–Matsuoka meeting of 12 April 1941?

The weightiest part of the conversation is Stalin's assertion that 'the Soviet Union considers cooperation with Japan, Germany and Italy on large questions permissible in principle. Molotov told Hitler and Ribbentrop this, when ... the question arose of making the Pact of Three a Pact of Four. But Hitler said he did not for the present need military assistance from other states. In view of this, Stalin thinks that only if Germany and Japan's affairs go badly can the question arise of a Pact of Four, and of cooperation by the USSR on large questions. Therefore, he indicated, we confine ourselves now to the question of a Neutrality Pact with Japan. ... *This will be the first step, and a serious step, towards future cooperation on big questions* (my emphasis – B.S.).

In this conversation 'big questions' undoubtedly means joint conflict against the Anglo-Saxons and division of the world on the basis of the

'New Order'. So it becomes completely clear that Stalin was amenable to joining the Tripartite Pact as its fourth member, something carefully concealed for 50 years, and considered 'unpatriotic' to mention in Russia even today.

We wish especially to underline Stalin's thought that the Neutrality Pact was a first step towards 'future cooperation on big questions', i.e. within the framework of the Tripartite Pact.[24]

I take the liberty of asserting that the central question in Stalin's discussions with Matsuoka was the Chinese problem. It was precisely because of the need to resolve the 'China incident' that Matsuoka came to Moscow and sought conciliation with the Kremlin, so that it would cease helping Chiang Kai-Shek. Therefore already in the first conversation he explained that 'Japan is fighting not the Chinese people, but the Anglo-Saxons', and 'Chiang Kai-Shek is an agent of the Anglo-Saxon capitalists'. On 12 April Matsuoka repeated this almost word for word, adding that 'sympathy with Chiang Kai-Shek [i.e. Soviet aid – B.S.] means assistance to Anglo-Saxon capital'. And further, in plain text, Matsuoka considers that it 'would be more sensible to abandon support for Chiang Kai-Shek, so that expulsion of the Anglo-Saxons from China succeeds'.[25]

I believe it is because of the 'Chinese sub-text' that the records of the Stalin–Matsuoka conversations were kept secret for 50 years. Even today, in publishing them, the Russian Foreign Ministry skilfully 'camouflages' them with an irrelevant document, Stalin's message to Chiang Kai-Shek, so as somewhat to gloss over among other things the anti-Chinese direction of the Japanese–Soviet rapprochement based on the Neutrality Pact. Of course, the 'Secret' stamp was also left on, to conceal the USSR's readiness, enunciated by Stalin, to join the Tripartite Pact.

So after Stalin's and Matsuoka's agreement in principle on all questions, began the necessary drafting of documents and preparing them for signature. The Soviet and Japanese delegations met for this purpose on 12 April 1941. Present were Vyshinskiy, Lozovskiy, Pavlov, Tsarapkin and Zabrodin of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Nishi, Miyakawa, Sakamoto, Saito and Hiraoka represented Japan.

The Japanese proposed adding the words 'between Japan and the USSR' to the heading 'Neutrality Pact'. Vyshinsky stated that the draft had been modelled on the pact with Germany, but if Japan insisted he had no objection. Lozovskiy pointed out that the Soviet–German pact spoke of it coming into effect 'from the day of signature', but the Japanese insisted that it be 'from the day of ratification'.

Sakamoto asked whether the declaration would remain in force if the pact did not come into effect. Vyshinskiy and Lozovskiy replied that since the declaration refers to the pact, it would be in effect for the duration of the pact.

It was agreed that the letters to be exchanged between Molotov and Matsuoka would be in English and Russian.[26]

The Soviet–Japanese documents

Signature of the Neutrality Pact and joint declaration, and the exchange of letters, took place in the Kremlin at 2.45 p.m. on 13 April 1941.[27] Present from the Soviet side were Stalin, Molotov, Vyshinskiy, Lozovskiy, Sobolev, Kozyrev, A. Pavlov, Tsarapkin and Zabrodin, and from the Japanese side Matsuoka, Tatekawa, Nishi, Miyakawa, Sakamoto, Saito, Kase, Fuji, Yamaguchi, Nagai and Yamaoka (Figure 4). The pact was written in Russian and Japanese, but the official translation was in English. There was also a procedure of exchanging letters not for publication. Here is Matsuoka's letter to Molotov.[28]

'Moscow, 13 April 1941
Top Secret
Dear Mr Molotov,

With reference to the Neutrality Pact signed today, I have the honour to state that I expect and hope that a trade agreement and fisheries convention will be signed very soon, and at the first opportunity we, Your Excellency and I, shall try, in a spirit of conciliation and mutual concessions, to resolve over several months the question relating to liquidation of the concessions in Northern Sakhalin which were obtained by agreements signed in Moscow on 14 December 1925, with the aim of liquidating any questions which do not facilitate maintenance of sincere relations between the two countries.

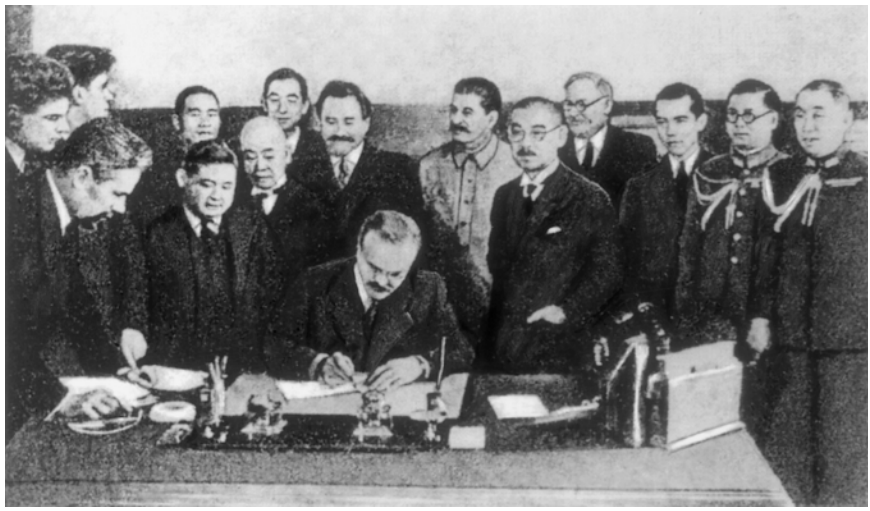


Figure 4 Signing of the Neutrality Pact in the Kremlin. Left to right: Pavlov, Kozyrev, Tsarapkin, Fuji, Miyakawa, Tatekawa, Sakamoto, Lozovskiy, Molotov (seated), Stalin, Matsuoka, Vyshinskiy, Kase, Yamaoka, Yamaguchi (Izvestiya).

In this same spirit I would also like to draw attention to the fact that it would be good for both our countries and also for Manchukuo and Outer Mongolia to find as soon as possible a way to establish joint and/or mixed commissions of the countries with an interest in regularising frontier questions and examining frontier disputes and incidents.

Yours very sincerely
Matsuoka.

Molotov replied by letter that he had taken note of the above, and agreed with it.[29]

On 14 April 1941 'Pravda' reported conclusion of the Neutrality Pact and Declaration, and published the texts of both documents.

Neutrality Pact between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan.[30]

Article the First. Both contracting sides bind themselves to maintain peaceful and amicable relations between themselves, and mutually to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the other contracting side.

Article the Second. In the event that one of the contracting sides becomes the object of military operations by one or several third powers, the other contracting side will observe neutrality for the duration of the entire conflict.

Article the Third. The present pact comes into force from the day of ratification by both contracting sides, and retains its force for a period of five years. If neither of the contracting sides denounces the pact a year before the date of expiration, it will be considered automatically prolonged for the next five years.

Article the Fourth. The present pact is subject to ratification in the shortest possible time. Exchange of letters of ratification must take place in Tokyo, also in shortest possible time.

Done in Moscow 13 April 1941, corresponding to the 15th day of the 4th month of the 16th year of Showa.

V. Molotov — Iosuke Matsuoka
Yoshitsugu Tatekawa

Declaration[31]

In conformity with the spirit of the Neutrality Pact concluded on 13 April 1941 between the USSR and Japan, the Government of the USSR and the Government of Japan, in the interests of ensuring peaceful and amicable relations between the two countries, officially state that the USSR binds itself to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of Manchukuo, and Japan binds itself to respect the

territorial integrity and inviolability of the Mongolian People's Republic.

Moscow, 13 April 1941.

On behalf of the USSR Government V. Molotov

For the Government of Japan Iosuke Matsuoka
Yoshitsugu Tatekawa

On the same day Matsuoka left for home. Shortly before the train left, Stalin and Molotov arrived to see him off (Figure 5).[32]

Japanese press reporting included comments that the Pact opened possibilities for improving relations between Japan and the USSR. Great importance was attached to the fact that Stalin personally took part in the negotiations, was present at the signing of the pact, and even went to the station to see his guest off. This was regarded as unprecedented. A colour photograph of Matsuoka's send-off appeared on the cover of the *Asahi Gurafu* illustrated magazine. The Japanese photographer succeeded in taking it in a way that Stalin appeared to be embracing Matsuoka.

Matsuoka also attached great importance to the results of the negotiations. Evidence of this is the telegrams he sent to the Soviet leaders from the train. When barely out of Moscow, he sent Molotov a telegram from Yaroslavl', in which in particular he said 'By the pact signed today we have set our nations on a new route of friendship. I believe this document will serve as a beacon in improving our relations'.[33] In his reply on 14 April, Molotov wrote 'I express the firm conviction that this pact will be a peak in development of new, friendly relations between the USSR and Japan, and will serve the interests of peace.'

Figure 5 Stalin and Molotov went to Moscow's Yaroslavskiy Station on 13 April 1941 to see off Matsuoka.

On 21 April Matsuoka sent a telegram to Stalin from the Manchuria (border) station. 'At this moment when I am leaving Soviet territory, I wish to thank Your Excellency for your kind reply, and request you to permit me to assure you that I take away the pleasantest recollections of my stay in your great country, brief, but the longest in my current journey, where I was given a heartfelt reception, and saw with rapture and understanding the progress achieved in the nation's life. The scene of ceremonial but sincere congratulations on the occasion of signing of the Pact will without doubt remain one of the happiest moments of my life; and Your Excellency's kindness, expressed in your personal presence at the station on my departure, will always be valued as a sign of genuine goodwill not merely towards me alone, but also towards our people. I may also add that the hallmark of my entire life has been and will be always to be true to my word.'[34]

At that time the diplomats were putting the finishing touches to the treaty's entry into effect. On 22 April 1941 A.P. Pavlov, Head of the Foreign Ministry's Legal Section, agreed the procedure for ratification and publication in the press in a conversation with Counsellor Miyakawa of the Japanese Embassy.[35] The two sides arranged that both would ratify the pact on 25 April 1941, and notice of ratification would be published in the morning papers on 26 April. Official notification would immediately follow ratification, in the form of personal notes from Tatekawa to Molotov and Smetanin to Matsuoka.

The following documents are not translated. They are routine administrative/congratulatory in content:

Tatekawa's note to Molotov, 25 April 1941.
Smetanin's note to Matsuoka, 25 April 1941.
Pravda mention of ratification, 26 April 1941.
Matsuoka telegram to Stalin, 25 April 1941.
Matsuoka telegram to Molotov, 25 April 1941.
Stalin /Molotov reply to Matsuoka, 26 April 1941.

The world's assessment of the Neutrality Pact

The negotiation and signature of the Neutrality Pact resounded broadly throughout the world. However, not one more or less major power welcomed it. As we have said already, Japan's allies, Germany and Italy, argued against it, because they understood it tied the hands of their Far Eastern partner at the very moment when they were planning the attack on the USSR. On the other hand, the USA, Great Britain and China understood that Moscow had strengthened its position in the Far East and redirected Japanese aggression away from itself towards the South Seas. The Soviet Embassy in Washington's report on 1941, signed by Counsellor A.A. Gromyko, noted that 'Significant cooling of Soviet-American

relations set in through the conclusion of the Neutrality Pact between the USSR and Japan.'[36]

The US government's reaction was similar to that which had occurred on conclusion of the Soviet–German non-aggression pact, namely economic sanctions against the Soviet Union. 'Immediately after conclusion of this pact', Gromyko wrote, 'the American government, by reinforcing economic repression against us, gave us to understand that it was displeased by the conclusion of this pact.'[37] The White House and State Department reacted very painfully to it. 'For Roosevelt the signing of the pact was just as unpleasant news as the earlier news of the signing of the Soviet–German pact.'[38]

Testimony to the US government's anti-Soviet attitude is that it overshadowed almost all aspects of economic ties with the USSR. The Soviet Embassy report noted that 'the American government in fact brought Soviet–American trade to zero by the end of the first half of 1941.'[39]

The signing of the pact aroused disappointment and dissatisfaction in ruling circles of China. Anti-Soviet propaganda increased and, in the words of Soviet ambassador A.S. Panyushkin, Chinese attitudes towards Soviet workers in China cooled noticeably. Instances were observed of isolation of Soviet military advisers, concealment of operational orders from them, denunciations, and plain sabotage in fulfilling contracts for mutual deliveries of goods. At various closed assemblies and conferences of Kuomintang members, or of military or other workers, accusations that the Soviet Union had entered the road to betrayal, etc, were widely voiced. The newspaper *Takungpao* came out on 15 and 16 April with anti-Soviet leading articles, accusing the USSR of facilitating Japanese aggression against Britain and America by signing the pact with Japan. In a conversation with Panyushkin on 19 April, Chiang Kai-Shek asserted that these publications represented the general attitude of the Chinese people and intelligentsia. He said the Chinese people and army had been shaken by the news of the pact. Panyushkin replied that the Soviet Union was actively fighting to narrow the sphere of war. The pact was confirmation of this basic line of Soviet foreign policy, which remained unchanged in principle. He referred to Molotov's conversation with the Chinese Ambassador, in which Molotov had given an exhaustive explanation of this pact's significance for further development of Soviet relations with China. Chiang said he knew the content of his ambassador's conversation, and confirmed that his attitude to the Soviet Union was unchanged, as if there was no such pact.

Even so-called 'leftists' in the Kuomintang expressed themselves negatively. Thus Sun Fo[40] said 'the USSR has concluded this pact with the aim of securing itself in the east so as to have a free hand in the west.' Only Yu Yuzheng and Feng Yuxiang opposed negative evaluation of the pact. The former said nothing particular had happened, and therefore there was no need to shout about 'betrayal' by the Soviet Union. It would continue to

help China. The latter said that China needed to pursue a more decent policy towards the USSR. In his view it was the fault of the Chinese that the USSR had concluded a Neutrality Pact with Japan, because, as he put it, 'we were unable to respond with thanks for the help the Soviet Union gave to China.'

Chiang Kai-Shek sent telegrams about the pact to important generals in all military regions, Kuomintang party committees and provincial governments, in which he said:

> From the moment of signature of the above-mentioned pact, the Soviet Union continues as before to help us with weapons as usual. On 15 April Foreign Minister Molotov invited our ambassador Shao Litzu to see him, and on 19 April USSR Ambassador Panyushkin visited me. Both stated that the Neutrality Pact between the USSR and Japan has nothing to do with the Chinese question, the USSR's policy and position towards China remain unchanged. The USSR will continue to provide help to China in its war of liberation, and by doing so will justify China's hopes. . . . For Japan this pact is essentially unprofitable. It increases her chances of defeat. The most profound sense of the current pact consists in that the Soviet Union by this action has shaken the foundations of the bloc of Germany, Italy and Japan. It has given Germany to understand that Japan did not hesitate to destroy the bloc and lose its trust. . . . Judging by reports from Germany and Italy, Japan can no longer enjoy Germany's trust. . . .. As a result of the pact Japan has fallen into great isolation, which cannot but be considered a great success for the Soviet Union.

At the end of the telegram was the assertion:

> Conclusion of the pact between the USSR and Japan on the one hand does not affect our war of liberation, and on the other intensifies the crisis that has already taken shape. Whichever way Japan goes, destruction awaits her . . . from the viewpoint of the general situation, the treaty between Japan and the USSR has more positive than negative significance.

Such was Chiang Kai-Shek's personal viewpoint, but it did not, however, dispose of the worsening of Soviet-Chinese relations brought on by conclusion of the pact. This was particularly noticeable in trade. Shipments to the Soviet Union began to be held up, not just in Rangoon and other southern cities, but even on the north-west route. Simultaneously attempts were made to worsen Soviet–Japanese relations. Thus despite the Embassy's requests to send Chinese orders to the Trade Delegation confidentially, government departments sent them as before, by ordinary post. For example, on 26 April 1941 they sent an order for 3.5 million rounds of

ammunition by ordinary post, evidently intending this to become known to the Japanese, who might then use it to accuse the USSR of breaching the Neutrality Pact.

On 15 May 1941 Stalin sent Chiang Kai-Shek a telegram, in which he explained Soviet policy towards China in the context of the Neutrality Pact.[41] For objectivity's sake we must turn to a book by the famous American writer, Ernest Hemingway, published after his death. In it he says that on the day the Neutrality Pact was signed, Dr Kung Syansi (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in his brother-in-law Chiang Kai-Shek's government) was lunching with ambassador Panyushkin, and this conversation took place between them.

> Kung asked 'We've heard it's intended to sign a Soviet–Japanese pact.' 'Yes, that's true', replied the ambassador. 'In what way will this pact influence provision of aid to China?' 'Not at all.' 'Will you withdraw your troops from the Manchukuo border?' 'We shall reinforce our divisions there', said the Soviet ambassador. And Lieutenant-General Chuykov, the chief military adviser in China, nodded in agreement.

Hemingway mentions that he did not want to write about this, since diplomats do not usually discuss bad news at the lunch table, and perhaps different information would come from Moscow. And further on he wrote:

> But time has passed since then, and I heard directly from Kung and from Chiang Kai-Shek's wife that Russian help continued to come, and that not a single Soviet adviser, aircraft designer or staff officer was recalled from the Generalissimo's armies. Up to now there is no evidence that the Soviet Union recalled its advisers from China or ceased the supply of war materials. Soviet Russia gave China more help than any other country. It supplied aircraft, pilots, lorries, artillery, petrol, military instructors and staff officers, who functioned as military advisers. Soviet Russia provided Chiang Kai-Shek's government with a loan of over 220 million US Dollars. A large part of this enormous loan was extinguished on a barter basis, and China paid for it with tea, tungsten and other Chinese products.[42]

This is the testimony of an American writer who sympathised with the Soviet Union for its support of the liberation struggle in Spain and China. However, also well-known is that in mid-1941 all Soviet volunteers were recalled from China, and supply of military power to that country practically ceased.

4 Germany's attack on the USSR, and Japan's position

Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 came as a surprise to Japan. Its leaders had heard from Berlin about Hitler's dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union, the tension between the two countries, and the concentration of German forces on the Soviet–German frontier, but believed this was camouflage for preparations to invade the British Isles. Tatekawa had also communicated from Moscow that a German–Soviet war was unlikely in the near future.

On 14 May 1941 Tatekawa asked Molotov about the recent spate of rumours that relations between the USSR and Germany were deteriorating. Molotov replied that he too had heard them, but their source was not in Moscow; he had the impression they were being spread by elements unfriendly to both the USSR and Germany, and that they were fading away.[1]

Tatekawa said he was very glad to hear they were only rumours, because if a sudden clash or war occurred between the USSR and Germany, the Soviet Union would perforce have to cooperate with England and the USA; but Molotov's explanation had reassured him; Molotov said firmly: 'There are no grounds for disquiet'. If anyone thought there was, both sides would have found a way to remove the causes. He added that if Germany and the USSR wished, they could take additional steps, in the interests of both countries, *and went on to say that even the neutrality treaty with Japan should now contribute to improving relations between the USSR and Germany, as well as between Japan and Germany* (my emphasis – B.S.).

Tatekawa responded that this indeed met the Japanese government's wish for the USSR and Germany to apply their efforts to removing any tensions which arose between them, and added that this was in the Japanese government's interests.[2]

At the beginning of June 1941, Japan's ambassador in Berlin notified Tokyo of a conversation in which he claimed Hitler had given him to understand that Germany intended to act against the Soviet Union. This telegram was considered by the Coordinating Committee, which immediately convened to define Japan's position in the event of war. However, the

Supreme Command representatives and Matsuoka decisively rejected the idea that a war between Germany and the USSR was possible. Konoe, Kido and a number of influential military insisted on retaining Japan's previous plan to advance southwards.

At that time Soviet–Japanese relations were developing successfully. A provisional trade treaty was initialled on 12 June, the commission to demarcate the frontier between Manchukuo and the MNR in the Khalkhin-Gol area was working smoothly, and successes had been noted in the fisheries negotiations.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, one question at once confronted Japan's highest leaders; whether to take advantage of the favourable situation which was being created, and attack the Soviet Far East, or to continue implementing the plan for southward aggression. The Coordinating Committee, which included leaders of the government and GHQ, sat almost uninterruptedly for a week.

Prince Konoe reckoned Germany had betrayed Japan's trust. He said that Japan's participation in the Tripartite Pact threatened to drag it into war against the USA, and hindered carrying its military operations in China to a victorious conclusion. In his view the Tripartite Pact pursued two objectives: first, to normalise relations with the USSR by bringing it in as fourth member and second, to prevent the USA from going to war. After the USA and Great Britain declared their support for Russia in its fight with Hitler, the (Tripartite) pact became meaningless. Konoe proposed to either re-examine Japan's obligations under the Pact, or reject it altogether. Several naval leaders supported him, particularly Admiral Nagano, Chief of Naval Staff, who reported to the Emperor, 'while this alliance exists, to regularise Japanese–American diplomatic relations is impossible.'[3]

On 23 June 1941 Matsuoka met Smetanin, who asked about Japan's position on the Soviet–German war. In view of the extreme importance of this, and the differing interpretations various publications have put on it, let us turn to Smetanin's diary. It notes:

> 23 VI. Yesterday at 3.30 p.m. I, together with Comrade Malik (then Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy), was at Matsuoka's. [The date is wrong; the meeting was 'today' – B.S.]. I put the fundamental question about Japan's position in relation to this war, and would Japan observe neutrality as the USSR observes it in accordance with the Neutrality Pact.... Matsuoka declined to give a direct answer, and said that his position had been outlined at the time (22 April) and in his statement after returning from Europe. Thereupon *Matsuoka emphasised that the basis of Japan's foreign policy is the Tripartite Pact, and if the present war and the Neutrality Pact found themselves in contradiction with this basis and with the Tripartite Pact, then the Neutrality Pact would have no force* [my emphasis – B.S.]. But what finally is

> Japan's position will be revealed after tomorrow's (25th) session of the cabinet.
>
> Matsuoka then began detailing how he had not expected this turn of events, and started defending Germany's position, emphasising that after British ambassador Stafford Cripps' departure from Moscow, he himself had begun thinking of 'a conspiracy of the USSR with the Anglo-Saxon bloc'. It was now hard for him to judge and clarify 'who was right and who was wrong', but he would re-acquaint himself with all the materials, especially Molotov's statement, and after that would have an opinion. I asked Matsuoka to be objective in his analysis of the facts, 'as befits a statesman whom the Soviet people received at home, considered and considers a supporter of improving amicable relations between the USSR and Japan'.[4]

So in those days there was simply no official Japanese position on the question put by Smetanin. Kutakov's assertions that Matsuoka actually spoke of cancelling the Neutrality Pact[5] (discussed in detail in Chapter 1) are, to put it mildly, unconvincing.

Let us now turn to the conversations between Molotov and Tatekawa in Moscow. On 29 June, in response to Molotov's request to be told Japan's position on the war, Tatekawa replied that as yet he had not heard from his government. If Matsuoka's opinion were to be discussed, he sincerely and wholeheartedly thought of establishing a bloc of powers, the USSR, Japan, Germany and Italy, and had wanted in every way to avert the outbreak of this war. Tatekawa said further that the Japanese government was in a difficult position, because on the one side it had the Tripartite alliance, and on the other the Neutrality Pact. He said that nowadays the Japanese Cabinet was meeting daily, trying to find a solution, and he thought his government's position would possibly be communicated within a few days, through him in Moscow or Smetanin in Tokyo. The Japanese government was in a difficult position, because it had neither expected nor desired the situation that had arisen.[6]

Molotov then asked Tatekawa if Matsuoka was told nothing at all during his trip to Europe about the possibility of war between the USSR and Germany. That meant that Matsuoka was left in ignorance.... Tatekawa replied that ... Matsuoka, leaving Berlin on 5 April, had been told nothing. It was true that at the end of April Oshima in Berlin had hinted in that sense, but at that time the Japanese had not believed him. However, rumours had later begun to spread more and more persistently, and that had prompted him, Tatekawa, to ask Molotov about them. However, Molotov had replied then that they were only rumours, and had attached no importance to them. Tatekawa thought that if the Japanese government did get to know of Germany's plans in relation to the USSR, it was only 2–3 days before the event. Confirmation of his belief that Japan had not been told was that the last diplomatic courier had left Japan for

Germany on 20 June, and that he, Tatekawa, had sent two of his secretaries on leave to Germany, where they were now stranded. Finally, said Tatekawa, on 21 June he had sent one Secretary of the Embassy, and an attache, to Iran, and since several days ago he had no news of them ... Thus, Tatekawa concluded, the Japanese government evidently had not been precisely informed.[7] Although no-one had told him anything, he believed Matsuoka had in some form given the Germans to understand that a war between Germany and the USSR was undesirable for Japan.

Taking up Tatekawa's reference to the Tripartite Pact, Molotov told him that that pact stated that it did not impinge on each participant's relations with the USSR. Hence it must be assumed that Japan had not assumed any obligations against the USSR under the Pact. Molotov then expressed the wish that the USSR and Japan, as two neighbouring powers, pay regard to their present and future interests, and take no steps whatsoever to worsen relations which, Molotov observed, had undoubtedly begun recently to improve.

Tatekawa assured Molotov that he personally and as ambassador, and as a signatory of the Neutrality Pact, expected that the Japanese government would observe it, and that he entirely endorsed Molotov's view that both sides should refrain from steps which would worsen their relations.[8]

On 2 July in Tokyo, the Coordinating Committee's final session, chaired by the Emperor, confirmed the Programme for national policy. It proclaimed that 'independently of the changes in the international situation, the Empire will adhere firmly to the policy of building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere; ... will apply its efforts as before to resolving the conflict in China; will continue its advance towards the south.'

Resolution of the 'northern problem' was made dependent on development of the situation in Europe.

> Although our attitude to the German–Soviet war is based on the spirit of the 'Axis' of three powers, we shall not intervene in it at present, and shall preserve an independent position, while at the same time secretly completing preparations against the Soviet Union. If the German–Soviet war develops in a direction favourable for the Empire, it will resolve the northern problem and ensure the stability of the situation in the north by resorting to armed force.

As for the southerly expansion, the conference decided that 'for achievement of the aims indicated, the Empire will go as far as war with England and the United States.'[9] These aims had been formulated on 12 June at the Coordinating Conference, and envisaged establishing military, political and economic 'cooperation' with French Indo-China and Thailand. Japan demanded of the authorities in French Indo-China rights to build military installations and a number of other privileges in the military sphere,

having in mind that if Great Britain, the USA and the Netherlands put obstacles in Japan's way, it would go to war with them.

This view was shared by Prime Minister Konoe, War Minister Tojo, Interior Minister Hiranuma, Custodian of the Imperial Seal Kido, Navy Minister Oikawa and other high-ranking government and armed forces representatives. Tojo said that the attack on the USSR must take place only when 'the Soviet Union is ready to fall to the ground like a ripe persimmon' at Japan's feet.

For objectivity's sake it must be said that some generals, especially in the Army, insisted on war against the USSR. Thus the influential General Yamashita urged Tojo to seize Russia's Far Eastern regions before the end of the German–Soviet war. 'The "ripe persimmon" theory's time has already passed', he said. 'To wait will speed up the joining of the USA and USSR. Even if the persimmon is still a little bitter, it is better to shake it from the tree.' Matsuoka advocated a 'campaign to the north'. His position is hard to explain, as it differs from his previous views and actions. Some researchers suggest that Matsuoka, a very sick man, was in a hurry to leave his mark on history. However that may be, his views parted company with those of most of the military-political leaders, and Konoe soon dismissed him.

So Japan did not immediately enter the war against the USSR. At this stage its leaders decided not to forego the operations planned in China and South-East Asia for the sake of a 'campaign to the north', a dangerous adventure with unpredictable consequences. Memories of how the incidents at Lake Hasan (1938) and on the Khalkhin-Gol River (1939) had turned out were still fresh. Besides, Japanese Intelligence had data on numbers and composition of the Red Army's Far Eastern detachments. The General Staff and Imperial General Headquarters held that the Kwantung Army was not yet ready 'to resolve the northern problem'. The Red Army was expected to have to redeploy significant forces to the European USSR, and then Japan's 'favourable moment' would arrive. Konoe wrote in his memoirs that in those anxious days he succeeded in curbing those 'who stubbornly insisted on immediate launching of war against the Soviet Union, although as a kind of compensation he had to confirm the Cabinet decision to occupy French Indo-China.'[10]

After the Imperial Conference ended on 2 July, Matsuoka summoned Smetanin, and told him that the Japanese government had seriously examined the question arising from the outbreak of the Soviet–German war. In his prepared oral statement, Matsuoka again expressed his regret that this conflict had broken out. War between Japan's allies and her Russian neighbour placed Japan in a complex and delicate position. He sincerely hoped that hostilities would cease, and especially that they would not spread to the Far East, where Japan had vital interests. The Japanese government did not wish its relations with the Soviet Union to complicate its relationship with Germany and Italy, in which Tokyo had no desire to

make any changes, believing it possible to defend Japan's interests while preserving good relations both with its allies and with the Soviet Union. He asked Smetanin to tell Stalin and Molotov that he did not want war with the USSR, and would do all he could to preserve amicable relations. Nevertheless, he affirmed that whether Japan would or would not observe the Neutrality Pact depended on how the situation developed.

Smetanin replied that it was hard to evaluate Matsuoka's statement there and then, but thanked him for his promise to work to preserve good-neighbourly relations. Matsuoka explained to German ambassador Ott at that time that 'the reason for thus formulating Japan's statement to the Soviet ambassador is the need to mislead the Russians, or at least to keep them in a state of uncertainty, because our military preparations are not yet completed. At present Smetanin does not know of Japan's accelerated preparations against the USSR.'[11]

During the conversation mentioned above, Matsuoka also raised with Smetanin the question of American military aid shipments to the Soviet Union via Vladivostok, i.e. past Japan. He said Germany and Italy might demand that Japan close that route. This applied also to Soviet–British relations, which created similar complications. Matsuoka asked him to ask Stalin and Molotov to study these problems seriously.

Less than 2 weeks had passed when Smetanin met Matsuoka again, on 12 July, and asked him whether it was true that he had told the American and British ambassadors that the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact had no juridical force, and that in current conditions Japan was not obliged to observe it. The treaty was concise, Smetanin said, but absolutely clear, and permitted no exceptions from the obligations to neutrality accepted by both states. No reservations had been made at the signing or subsequently about the permissibility of breaching the pact by virtue of Japan's obligations under the Tripartite Pact. Moreover, Matsuoka had told the Soviet government's leaders orally that the Tripartite Pact did not oblige Japan to act against any circumstances. 'My government considers that any breach of Japan's neutrality will mean blatant and totally unjustified violation of the pact with the USSR.' In conclusion, Smetanin expressed the hope of receiving 'assurances of the inviolability of the Soviet–Japanese pact'.[12]

On the next day Matsuoka handed Smetanin an aide-memoire, which defined Japan's position vaguely and contradictorily. It began by indicating that 'the (neutrality) pact remains in force, although it is not applicable to the German–Soviet war ... the pact retains force to the extent that it does not contradict the Tripartite Pact.' Here Matsuoka stated that 'up to today neither Germany nor Italy has presented any demands for Japan to participate in the war.... My personal assumption is that no future requests will follow.' In conclusion, the note stated: 'I am sure that at present Japan will take a position under which it can freely determine its own policy, not binding itself by either the Neutrality Pact or the Japanese-German-Italian Tripartite Pact.'[13]

Smetanin pointed out the contradiction. On 23 June and 2 July Matsuoka had said that the Neutrality Pact and Tripartite Pact were independent, and neither affected the other. But now Japan placed doubt on its obligations.... Matsuoka replied that there were no contradictions.... Germany had not asked, and was not asking, Japan to enter the war against the Soviet Union. And the Soviet Union was not providing the bases mentioned in the newspapers for the USA on Kamchatka or for the British in Siberia.

Japanese researchers concede Matsuoka's tendency to contradict himself, but reject the view that cunning was involved. Toshikazu Kase recalls that 'Matsuoka was a genius, dynamic and scatter-brained. His thoughts worked fast and clear as lightning.... He often contradicted himself. Well, consistency and regularity are the lot of a small mind.'[14]

Matsuoka, whose independent judgments and imperious behaviour annoyed the military, was forced to resign 3 days later. But this did not remove the problems confronting Japan. On 15 July 1941 Molotov again summoned Tatekawa, to inform him about the Anglo-Soviet agreement signed on 12 July. Molotov told him that to avoid rumours and misunderstandings, he must tell Tatekawa the agreement existed only in the form in which it had been published and announced. There were no other agreements. Molotov added that the agreement had in mind only Germany.... From our point of view, Molotov added, the USSR's relations with other neutral countries are not affected. He asked Tatekawa to inform the Japanese government accordingly.[15]

Molotov said that 'the USSR must live in peace with Japan and maintain friendly relations with her, in accordance with the Neutrality Pact.... The USSR's relations with Japan are defined by this pact for the future too.' He again emphasised that 'the USSR will observe and adhere to this pact'.

Tatekawa then said that the USSR's war with Germany was exceedingly undesirable for Japan, as Matsuoka, who had tried in every way to avert it, had said. In Tatekawa's opinion Matsuoka wanted the USSR to participate in the overall activities of Japan, Germany and Italy aimed at defeating England, and the Neutrality Pact was an expression of this desire. That war had broken out between the USSR and Germany was, Tatekawa said, greatly to be regretted. Of course he understood that once the war had begun, it was entirely natural that the USSR sought rapprochement with England, because their interests coincided. But England was almost an enemy for Japan, and the Japanese people so considered it. The USSR's concluding a pact with Japan's enemy could only tend to cool Japanese popular feelings towards it.... Japan very much desired the USSR to take no further steps which might give Japanese public opinion reasons to become anti-Soviet, as it would then be very hard for the Japanese government to restrain the natural expression of popular feeling.

Finally Tatekawa adverted to the preceding conversation, about Japan

not being told what Germany intended, and said that he could now speak quite authoritatively. Matsuoka had not known of Germany's intentions right up to 22 June, and had learned of them only at three in the afternoon Japan time.... Matsuoka had gone immediately from the theatre to the Palace, to tell the Emperor what had happened.

Molotov asked how could it happen that Germany confronted a Tripartite Pact signatory with a fait accompli? Tatekawa replied that he personally thought in all probability it happened because Germany thought Japan opposed this war. Besides, he assumed Germany also thought it could get by without Japan's help.[16]

Matsuoka's retirement naturally created a need in Moscow to establish how Soviet–Japanese relations might be affected. Therefore on 25 July Smetanin addressed the same question, whether the Neutrality Pact remained operative, to the new Foreign Minister, Toyoda. Toyoda promised to provide a detailed answer after careful study of the pact. He kept his word, and put the question to the 44th Coordinating Conference on 4 August. The Conference resoundingly demanded that Moscow be coerced to deny its territory (meaning Kamchatka and the Maritime Province) to any third country.

On the following day Toyoda told Smetanin that, although there were differing opinions about the war, the Neutrality Pact and the Tripartite Pact, he personally considered that Japan would conscientiously fulfil all Articles of the Neutrality Pact, provided that the Soviet Union adhered to the letter and spirit of Japanese–Soviet agreements. He demanded the Soviet government promise to cease direct or indirect assistance to Chiang Kai-Shek. He would also like to resolve as quickly as possible the most urgent problem facing the two countries, such as an end to pressure on the Japanese concessionaires in Northern Sakhalin, and the question of Soviet-proclaimed maritime security zones, which restricted Japanese shipping.

Smetanin expressed his satisfaction that Toyoda, unlike Matsuoka, had made a clear statement of Japan's firm intent to observe the Neutrality Pact. He repeated that his government viewed the pact as fully in force, and agreed that solution of bilateral problems was desirable. As for Soviet relations with Chiang Kai-Shek, he frankly admitted that he was uninformed, but promised to seek a reply to this and other questions from his Foreign Ministry.

At the 45th Coordinating Conference, on 6 August, Toyoda reported on his conversation with Smetanin. He said he had the impression that Smetanin was somewhat relieved. The Conference decreed that while Japan was continuing to improve its defences, it should avoid war with the Soviet Union, refrain from provocative acts, and resolve old questions of Japanese–Soviet relations as far as possible. Only in the event of 'direct attack' would the Japanese army respond with an offensive.

On 13 August Smetanin handed over Moscow's reply. It said that the Soviet government greeted with satisfaction Toyoda's statement that Japan

would observe the Neutrality Pact, confirmed its own decision to do likewise, and expressed a desire to resolve the problem of the Northern Sakhalin concessions in accordance with Matsuoka's letter of 13 April 1941, which spoke of liquidating them 'within a few months', and his personal message of 31 May, which affirmed that this meant 'not later than six months from the date of his promise'.

The Soviet government rejected the question about Soviet aid to China, on the grounds that the Neutrality Pact did not regulate the signatories' relations with third countries. Japan was not to have more rights than the USSR in their bilateral relations with China, Germany or Italy. However, to placate Japanese anxiety, the Soviet government confirmed Molotov's assurance, given on 2 July 1940 to the then ambassador, Togo. Molotov had said then that the problem of aid to Chiang Kai-Shek was unimportant, as the Soviet Union was preoccupied with its own national security. At present, since Germany had attacked, this position was even more valid.

As for Toyoda's statement about alliance with third countries, the Soviet government reminded him that on 15 July Molotov had clearly told Tatekawa that the Soviet agreement with Great Britain related only to Germany, not Japan. It assured Toyoda that it had not provided, and had no intention of providing, military bases or territorial concessions in the Soviet Far East. At the same time, it would like an explanation of the large-scale redeployments of Japanese troops in Manchuria, which were incompatible with Japanese statements about observing the Neutrality Pact.

Toyoda said that the world situation had changed greatly since Matsuoka wrote his letter, and this necessitated re-examining the essence of the problem. Nevertheless, he asserted, it was entirely understandable that Japan demanded the Soviet Union ensure unimpeded working at the concessions. When Smetanin asked whether Toyoda considered Japan's obligations based on Matsuoka's letter annulled, Toyoda repeated that the problem of the Northern Sakhalin concessions needed further study.

Toyoda justified Japan's military structure in Manchuria by concern over the problem of defending itself at a time when a neighbouring country was in a state of war. He assured Smetanin that the military preparations were not directed against the Soviet Union, with which Japan wanted to maintain good-neighbourly relations, and confirmed that Japan would observe the Neutrality Pact. But he stated that the Tripartite Pact remained the foundation of Japanese foreign policy, and that the increase in numbers of American military aid cargoes passing through Vladivostok put Japan in an extremely delicate position.

Soviet–Japanese relations were now becoming heated. On 20 August Vice-Foreign Minister Amau protested about the expected arrival of an American tanker in Vladivostok, asserting that its cargo of petroleum

products was destined for Chiang Kai-Shek's regime, with which Japan was at war. Five days later Toyoda repeated that continuation of deliveries to the Soviet Union via Vladivostok was annoying Japanese public opinion, and could prompt a negative reaction from Germany and Italy, which might create difficulties for Japan in maintaining amicable relations with the Soviet Union. He did not want to conduct general theoretical discussions with the USSR, but demanded Moscow examined this problem from a broad viewpoint.

On 26 August Smetanin handed Amau the Soviet reply. It said that goods bought in the USA were for Soviet consumption, and very necessary for the daily life of inhabitants of the European USSR and the south of the Soviet Far East, since the German invasion had disrupted the country's economy. The Soviet government saw no reason for Japan to be concerned about Soviet purchases of American goods and their transportation to Soviet Far East ports via long-established commercial routes. It wished Japan to understand clearly that the Soviet Union would view attempts to stop normal Soviet-American trade through Soviet Far East ports as an unfriendly act.

Amau strongly contested this. He said that although trade must in principle be regarded as free enterprise, the type of goods and time of their transportation must be taken into account. The concentration of large numbers of Soviet troops in the Far East created a threat to Japan, and therefore Japanese public opinion saw delivery of military equipment to Soviet Far East ports as dangerous. Moreover, it was going on in full view of Japan's coasts. He thought it wrong for the Soviet government to view Japan's demands in regard to Soviet-American trade as 'unfriendly', as this was not normal trade, but delivery of fuel for military use, that is for actions which struck Japan as unfriendly.

Smetanin tried to refute Amau's assertion that the Soviet Far East threatened Japan, by arguing that both sides intended to fulfil the Neutrality Pact. Amau then warned him that if the Soviet Union intended to use the pact to import military materials in defiance of Japanese public opinion, Japan would become more doubtful about maintaining it.

The tension in Soviet–Japanese relations, and the Soviet government's assumption that by virtue of its alliance obligations to Germany, Japan might attack the Soviet Far East, impelled the Soviet Union to take defensive measures. As the historical overview *The Red Banner Pacific Fleet*[17] puts it:

> Because of the growing threat of Japanese attack on the Soviet Union, in the first days of the Great Fatherland War the Pacific Fleet laid defensive minefields in the approaches to Vladivostok, Sovetskaya Gavan' and Petropavlovsk. These minefields, along with coastal artillery and warships' guns, were the basis of defence against landings on the Soviet coast.

> After the autumn storms of 1941 navigation of Soviet naval and merchant shipping was impeded by the appearance in the mined areas of floating mines torn from their anchors by the waves. To combat them, aircraft were mobilised to scan the coastal waters systematically, and warships to destroy the floating mines.

Two weeks after the German invasion, the Soviet government on 7 July 1941 notified the Japanese of the establishment of special zones dangerous to navigation. On 18 July Japan protested strongly by a note-verbale. It described the Soviet measures as a threat to Japan's national interests, affecting Japanese shipping en route to Vladivostok and back, impeding Japanese fishing in Korean waters, and creating a danger to Japanese shipping in general, because of the likelihood that some mines would break loose and drift. The note did not demand that the USSR cancel its declaration; but it warned that Japan reserved the right to take any action to establish safety in Far Eastern waters.

The Soviet Union defended the measures by claiming [falsely - G.J.] that German warships had reappeared in Far Eastern waters since the outbreak of war, promising not to impede access of Japanese shipping to Vladivostok, and denying that fishing could be inconvenienced by danger zones only in coastal waters. But Japan did not agree. Amau handed Smetanin a note that asserted there was no danger of attack by German warships on the Soviet Pacific coast. It repeated that the security zones created a threat to Japanese navigation and fishing, demanded the declaration be revoked, warned that Japan would demand compensation for any losses caused by Soviet actions, and reiterated that it reserved the right to take appropriate action.

Two weeks later, on 5 September, Amau protested to Consul Zhukov that a Japanese fishing boat had hit a floating mine and sunk. He demanded compensation, and again insisted on cancellation of the restricted zones. Since no Soviet reply followed, he summoned Smetanin on 18 September, demanded an immediate answer, asserted that more and more Soviet mines were floating in the open sea, creating a threat to lives, and again repeated the demand for abolition of the restricted zones.

Only on 22 September did Smetanin present his government's reply. It rejected the protest and demand for compensation, insisted that German warships threatened the Soviet Pacific coastline, claimed that, as a country at war, laying mines in its territorial waters was in conformity with international law and was entirely justified, and that there were no grounds for claiming a Soviet mine had caused the incident.[18]

On the evening of 5 November another, more serious, incident occurred. The Japanese steamship 'Kehi Maru', en route from Chongchin to Tsuruga, hit a floating mine, and 156 people died. Vice-Foreign Minister Nishi summoned Smetanin, to demand compensation and abolition of the restricted zones.

Smetanin rejected the accusation that a Soviet mine was responsible. He

asserted, as he had earlier to Amau, that Soviet mines were designed to disarm if parted from their anchors, insisted the ship must have suffered a boiler explosion or hit a contact mine, and even suggested a third power had sunk it in order to harm Soviet–Japanese relations. Nevertheless, the Japanese considered the accident had undoubtedly been caused by a Soviet mine, and expected a reply that took them seriously.[19]

Additional information was given to Fedor Khalin, Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, by Naritayu, a section head in the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Five days later, on 12 November, Sakamoto summoned Zhukov and demanded a precise answer to the demand for compensation. He handed Zhukov several documents, a map with the locations of floating Soviet mines marked, a list of incidents caused by them, and detailed demands for compensation for the 'Kehi Maru' incident. Zhukov repeated that Soviet mines disarmed automatically if they broke loose, claimed the ship had clearly been sunk by a German warship, but promised to present his government's reply as soon as it arrived.

On 13 November Smetanin presented the Soviet reply to Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo.[20] It denied responsibility for the 'Kehi Maru' sinking. That had occurred 125 nautical miles from the security zone, Soviet mines could not have got there, and even if any had, they would be harmless, because of their built-in safety devices. The note yet again repeated that the 'Kehi Maru' had suffered a boiler explosion or political provocation by a third country. The Soviet government refused to abolish the restricted zones, insisting that the threat of attack by German and Italian warships still existed.

Togo replied that the Soviet government must re-examine the matter, accused it of insincerity, and attempting to shift the blame onto others, but at the same time called on it to display compassion, recalling that many people had died. On 19 November Smetanin stated that his government maintained the position of its note of 13 November, but offered a joint Soviet–Japanese investigation, to prove that Soviet mines became harmless if they floated loose. Togo agreed, provided the Soviet Union accepted responsibility for the 'Kehi Maru' incident if the investigation confirmed Japan's contention. Smetanin could not take responsibility for doing this, so he referred it to Moscow.

No reply came, so on 28 November Togo again summoned Smetanin and handed him a lengthy memorandum, reconstructing the events of 5 November from interrogation of the Captain and other survivors.[21] The memorandum said that exhaustive investigation had proved beyond doubt that a mine had sunk the 'Kehi Maru'. It also rejected the Soviet claim that mines could not travel so far from a restricted zone, as Soviet mines had been found in the same area on 6, 8 and 12 November, and one was recovered in Korean waters, 200 or more nautical miles from the nearest zone. Two attachments listed the number and locations of Soviet mines found. In conclusion the memorandum said that 'in view of the above, the Empire must demand abolition of the restricted zones'.

On 1 December Smetanin reiterated Soviet willingness to participate in an investigation, and to compensate for material damage in the loss of the 'Kehi Maru' if the investigation was conducted in Vladivostok, established that Soviet mines are dangerous when floating, and showed that one of them had sunk the ship.[22] Togo replied that the investigation must take place in Chongchin, and there must be compensation for loss of life as well as for material damage.

Questions of floating mines and the wreck of the 'Kehi Maru' continued to be discussed throughout December 1941, and were raised again later. However, as the two sides could not agree what kind of investigation was needed, nor on the extent of compensation to be paid, decisions about the 'Kehi Maru' and the maritime security zones were postponed for further consideration.[23]

So the situation in the Far East remained quite tense. By decision of the Imperial Conference of 2 July 1941, the Japanese General Staff and War Ministry drafted a plan for active offensive operations against the USSR, codenamed 'Kantokuen' ('Special manoeuvres of the Kwantung Army'). It was somewhat similar to the German 'Barbarossa' plan, but unlike 'Barbarossa', it remained only a plan.

During July–August 1941 Japan undertook a covert mobilisation, as a result of which the Kwantung Army was doubled in size. By order of 5 July the 5th Fleet was formed, for operations against the USSR. The number of provocative acts by Japanese troops on the Soviet borders increased. These were not chance occurrences, but planned fights, carried out under a GHQ Directive 'to pursue an active defence policy, increase preparation for combat, but without taking the matter to an outbreak of war with major forces'. Simultaneously, diplomatic pressure on Moscow increased. On 4 August the Coordinating Committee approved the 'Basic principles of diplomatic negotiations with the Soviet Union'. These proposed 'to achieve cessation of Soviet aid to China, transfer of Northern Sakhalin, Kamchatka and Soviet territory East of the Amur to Japan, and withdrawal of Soviet forces from all territories of the Soviet Far East'.

Nevertheless, by the end of September 1941 Japan's highest military-political leadership was tending towards the conclusion that a swift and effective war against the USSR in 1941 was impossible. By then it had become clear that Hitler's 'blitzkrieg' plan had failed. Moreover, in succeeding months the German offensive slowed down, and in December the Soviet counteroffensive began in front of Moscow. Because of this and later Soviet victories, implementation of Japan's plan for war against the USSR was postponed, initially to the spring of 1942, then to 1943, and subsequently simply taken off the agenda. Japan waited in vain for the 'moment favourable to itself'.

5 Japan's Pearl Harbor attack and the Neutrality Pact

We have already said that Soviet–US relations were rather strained at the beginning of 1941. Washington was displeased that the Soviet Union had concluded a Neutrality Pact with Japan, thereby opening the way for Japan's expansion towards the south, where important American political and economic interests lay. Besides, there were still strong anti-Communist convictions in the USA, and they affected Soviet–American relations.

However, Germany's attack on the USSR radically altered the entire nature of global relations. First to come out in support of the USSR was Winston Churchill, who said that Great Britain would give it 'any economic and technical aid which is within our powers and which may be of use to it'.[1] This in no way meant that Europe's most ardent anti-Communist had changed his opinions. Not at all. He believed 'His (Hitler's) invasion of Russia is only the prelude to an attempt to invade the British Isles. He no doubt hopes that all this can be effected before the onset of winter, and that he will be able to crush England before the US Navy and Air Force can intervene.... Therefore the danger threatening Russia is a danger threatening us and the United States.'[2]

But too many in Washington hated the USSR to recognise at once the danger threatening the USA. Future President Truman's speech is widely known. 'If we see', he said 'that Germany is winning, then we should help Russia, and if Russia is winning we should help Germany, and that way let them kill as many of each other as possible.'[3] [He did, however, go on to say that he did not want to see Germany win - G.J.]. On 23 June 1941 Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles made a speech in which he called for the unity of all forces opposed to Hitlerism, but he too had serious reservations. Thus, via British Ambassador Lord Halifax, he tried to dissuade Britain from declaring itself a Soviet ally, because 'sooner or later Japan will probably join the assault on Soviet Russia, and therefore if England and Russia are allies, England will be dragged into military operations in the Far East.'[4]

Nevertheless, in its own security interests, the US administration could not but support the Soviet Union, which had begun to play a decisive role in the general struggle against Germany. Also taken into account was that

the threat to the USA emanated not only from the Fascist states in Europe, but potentially lurked in the Far East as well. The defeats of France and the Netherlands, and Great Britain's precarious situation, meant that they could not help the USA in the Far East. Therefore Washington had an interest in alliance with Moscow, not only for war against Germany, but in case of a clash of arms with Japan. The situation both in Europe and in the Far East therefore compelled the USA to declare its support for the Soviet Union.

As for Moscow, from the start of the German invasion it had an enormous interest in US entry into the war, as the only event that could fully subordinate the US economy to military needs, and give its allies the maximum military aid. The Kremlin was well aware of the isolationist attitudes of most Americans, who needed 'their own Dunkirk' before they would resolve to go to war.

In the first weeks of war, the USA's position was one of 'wait-and-see'. Molotov and the Soviet Ambassador in Washington asked Roosevelt to warn Japan publicly that America would not remain uncommitted if Japan attacked the Soviet Far East, but the USA always refused to do so. A Japanese advance to the south was also unacceptable to the Americans, because there too lay important American economic and political interests. As a result, on 17 August 1941 Roosevelt summoned Japanese ambassador Nomura, and warned the Japanese against any aggressive steps in the Pacific; but this was a toothless demarche, and taken as such by Tokyo, which did not even reply to it.

Nevertheless Roosevelt displayed an interest in possible cooperation with the USSR against Japan, even before the USA went to war with Japan. V.M. Berezhkov, then serving under Molotov, and having access to especially secret information, testifies[5] that a message from Roosevelt arrived in autumn 1941. It said the US government had reliable information that Japan intended to invade the Soviet Maritime Province very soon. In view of this, Roosevelt invited Stalin to consider the establishment of American air bases in the Soviet Far East. He inquired how the Soviet leaders would feel about the dispatch to Moscow of a special American military mission in order to exchange views about this, and simultaneously offered to deliver American aircraft to the Red Army via Alaska and Chukotka.

The USA may indeed have had such information. This problem was also worrying Stalin. But Roosevelt's approach aroused his suspicions. The information the Soviet government was receiving through its own channels, including from Richard Sorge, a Soviet agent in Tokyo who had succeeded in establishing close relations with German ambassador Ott, treated the situation rather differently. It spoke of serious disagreements among Japan's leaders over whether to attack the Soviet Far East, or to strike the US Pacific bases and advance towards South-East Asia. In his most recent reports Sorge had said that the balance was swinging towards

the south, strikes at the USA could be expected very soon, and therefore Moscow need not fear a Japanese attack, at least not in the near future. This enabled Stalin to redeploy part of his Far Eastern forces to Moscow, where in December 1941 they helped inflict Germany's first serious land defeat.

In one of his messages Sorge provided more precise data about Japanese plans, indicating that most likely there would be a strike at the US naval bases in the Hawaiian Islands. This information reached Stalin at the very time when Roosevelt was particularly insistently warning about a Japanese attack on the Soviet Maritime Province. Stalin did not pass Sorge's message on to Roosevelt. Why not? Berezkhov believes Stalin assumed Roosevelt would take it as an attempt to provoke Washington into entering the war, just as Stalin took Roosevelt's warning as an attempt to drag the Kremlin into the war against Japan. Maybe Stalin also thought that the more unexpected the Japanese attack, the more fiercely the American people would fight the Fascist 'Axis'.

Stalin's decision to redeploy troops from the Far East to the Soviet–German front meant taking a serious risk. In that situation Roosevelt's warning and his proposal for joint actions against Japan demanded great caution. Was it sincere? Or did he think that Roosevelt, after learning that Tokyo had decided to strike at American soil, wanted to exploit an agreement on joint Soviet–American military action in the Far East to make the Japanese revise their plans in favour of the northern variant? Stalin's suspicious nature led him to conclude that Roosevelt hoped to divert the Japanese blow away from himself, and direct it against the Soviet Union. He rejected Roosevelt's request for bases, and agreed to the American special mission's coming to Moscow, but confined the agenda to the problem of delivering US-made fighter aircraft to the Soviet–German front.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Stalin decided that he had correctly divined what lay behind the President's message. Oddly, however, Roosevelt subsequently warned Stalin several times about alleged Japanese preparations to attack the Soviet Union. For example, on 17 June 1942 the new US ambassador, Admiral Standley, handed Stalin a message from Roosevelt which said that the situation taking shape in the North Pacific and Alaska area did not preclude the possibility of Japanese operations against the Soviet Maritime Province.

> If such an attack occurs, the United States is ready to give American air force help to the Soviet Union, on condition the Soviet Union provides these forces with suitable landing grounds on Siberian territory. Of course, to implement this operation, the efforts of the Soviet Union and United States must be carefully coordinated. . . . I consider this question so urgent that there is every reason to give representatives of the USSR and USA full powers to go to work and compile specific plans.

This message also put Stalin on his guard. In rejecting Roosevelt's offer, he explained to Standley that with very fierce fighting on the Soviet–German front, and German divisions advancing to the Volga and the Caucasus foothills, the Soviet government could do nothing that might increase the risk of war with Japan.

It seems that when Roosevelt was informed of this exchange of views, he realised that he could not push the USSR into taking any steps that might complicate the situation in the Soviet Far East. However that may be, as early as 5 August another Presidential message came from Washington, saying 'Information, which I consider quite trustworthy, has reached me, that the Japanese government has decided not to undertake any operations against the Soviet Union at present. This, as I understand it, means postponing any attack on Siberia until spring of next year.' Nevertheless, over later months, there were numerous American inquiries about when the Soviets would be ready to join the war the USA was waging against Japan, and in general when would Moscow decide, even in principle, about taking part in that war?

However, let us go back to the eve of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Stalin knew that Japan was examining the possibility of attacking the United States, not only from Sorge's reports, but also directly from diplomatic contacts with the Japanese. In the preceding chapter we discussed in detail Foreign Minister Toyoda's conversations with Smetanin on problems of compliance with the Neutrality Pact, which was of vital importance to the Soviet Union. At that level the purely theoretical problem raised by the Japanese, of possible Soviet leasing of Far Eastern territory to a third country, perhaps seemed unimportant.

On 25 July 1941 Smetanin asked Toyoda, then newly appointed, whether the Neutrality Pact remained in force. Toyoda warned that Soviet provision of military bases in the Far East to a third country could significantly worsen the situation. Smetanin riposted that Japan need not worry about that, as the USSR intended to observe all Articles of the Neutrality Pact.

On Toyoda's initiative the question of Japan's attitude towards the Soviet Union was considered on 4 August at the 44th Coordination Conference, at which there were vociferous demands to compel Moscow to deny territory to a third country. By 'territory' were meant the Maritime Province and Kamchatka, and the 'third country' was the USA; rumours that Kamchatka would be sold to it were being widely discussed in the Japanese press even before the Pacific war began.

On the following day Toyoda told Smetanin that, although there were diverse viewpoints, he personally reckoned that Japan would fulfil all the articles of the Neutrality Pact conscientiously, provided that the Soviet Union adhered to the letter and spirit of Japanese–Soviet agreements. He warned that the sale or lease of Russian territory to a third country for military bases, expansion of military cooperation with other countries in

the region, or conclusion of any military treaties directed against Japan, would undoubtedly smash the Neutrality Pact, and insisted on guarantees on these counts. On 13 August Smetanin handed him the Soviet reply, which greeted his statement that Japan would observe the Neutrality Pact with satisfaction, and confirmed that it would do the same.

Regarding Toyoda's warning against alliances with third countries, the Soviet government reminded him that Molotov had clearly told Tatekawa on 15 July that the Anglo-Soviet agreement applied only to Germany, and assured Toyoda that it neither provided, nor was intended to provide, military bases or territorial concessions in the Soviet Far East.

At this time Japanese–American relations were deteriorating very rapidly. The bilateral negotiations had practically stalled, and the Japanese military, observing the failure of diplomacy, was becoming ever more inclined towards military action against the USA. At its initiative the 'Principles for implementing Imperial State policy' were confirmed at the Emperor's Conference on 6 September. They amounted to:

1 Aiming to complete measures to ensure its existence and self-defence, the Empire resolves not to stop short of war with America (England, Holland) and will complete all military preparations by about the end of October.
2 Simultaneously with implementing the measures envisaged by Point 1, the Empire will attempt to attain its demands by using all diplomatic means in relation to America and England.
3 If in the course of the above-mentioned negotiations no prospects of satisfying our demands have appeared by the end of October, the Empire must take a decisive course for war against America (England, Holland).

The 'Principles' especially noted: 'The Empire must make particular efforts to prevent formation of a united front between America and the Soviet Union.'[6]

The resignation of the Konoe cabinet, which declined to take responsibility for war with America, opened the way for the most aggressive of the Japanese military to seize power. On 18 October 1941 Tojo's cabinet was formed, and Togo became Foreign Minister.

There was another Emperor's Conference on 5 November. It decided to begin the war against the USA at the beginning of December, if the negotiations failed. The Army and Navy were to complete all preparations by then. As the authors of *The History of Diplomacy* aver,[7] the decision to start the war was in fact taken at the 5 November meeting.

On 22 November, a fortnight before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Togo summoned Smetanin and demanded confirmation of the Soviet position, already explained to his predecessor on 5 and 13 August, that the USSR remained true to the Neutrality Pact, and would enter no anti-Japanese agreement with a third country. Togo particularly sought to know whether

the USSR would provide bases for another state. Smetanin replied that both sides had already confirmed their obligation to observe the Neutrality Pact, and the USSR unswervingly fulfilled its obligations.

But Togo kept on asking whether there had been any changes in the USSR's position since the 13 August statement. Smetanin replied: 'I have already said several times that relations between our two countries are based on the Neutrality Pact ... and as far as I know there have been no changes since it was concluded on 13 April.' Togo's persistence underlines the importance the Japanese attached to guarantees that Soviet territory would not be made available for American use.

On 26 November the USA handed Japan the aide-memoire known to history as the 'Hull Memorandum'. The Japanese government assessed it as equivalent to an ultimatum, meaning that the USA was moving towards war.[8] At 6 a.m. Tokyo time that day, the Japanese task force to attack Pearl Harbor had left its Kurile Islands assembly point for Hawaii. The Combined Fleet Commander-in-Chief's order said 'the moment war is declared, attack the main forces of the American fleet in Hawaii, thereby dealing it a mortal blow.'[9]

When the Japanese squadron was already into the third day of its clandestine voyage, Togo applied diplomatic efforts to ensure favourable conditions for Japan's war with America. On 28 November he again summoned Smetanin, who yet again confirmed that the Soviet position was unchanged, and that it would continue to observe the Neutrality Pact. But in view of Togo's insistence, Smetanin undertook to ask the Soviet Foreign Ministry whether or not there had been any change in the Soviet position since 13 August.

From the nature of the conversations in Tokyo, the Soviet Foreign Ministry clearly felt that an attack on the USA was in preparation. So only 3 days later, on 1 December, Smetanin on his own initiative requested an audience with Togo, to let him know the Soviet government's official reply.

SMETANIN: 'The Soviet government has instructed me to state that the USSR is not thinking of violating the Neutrality Pact, and that my statement of 13 August to former Minister Toyoda remains in force, provided, of course, that Japan also observes the obligations of the Neutrality Pact.'

TOGO: *'Can it be arranged for the Soviet government to confirm this statement in writing?'* [my emphasis – B.S.].

Smetanin replied testily that everything was already in writing in the Japanese Foreign Ministry, and he did not think it need be written yet again.

Togo, in a conciliatory tone, agreed that the question 'can be left as it is'.[10]

By now events had already taken on an unstoppable momentum. In the early morning of 7 December, US date, 8 December in Japan, the Japanese squadron attacked Pearl Harbor. On the next day Togo summoned Smetanin, and informed him that from 8 December 1941 Japan was at war with the United States and Great Britain. He accused America of refusal to negotiate with Japan about the substance of existing international problems and of 'even making preparations for the eventuality of a breakdown in these negotiations'. He said that on the afternoon of 7 December, or early on the morning of 8 December Japan time, the Japanese government had given the Americans a comprehensive reply. He gave Smetanin the English text of it, a brief history of the negotiations, the Imperial rescript and the Japanese government statement, for transmittal to the Soviet government.

TOGO: 'The most important point in today's conversation is that there is a state of war between Japan on the one hand and America and England on the other. . . . But this in no way influences nor changes the mutual relations between the USSR and Japan. I want to state this specially. Apropos of this, the Soviet side has also stated that it will observe the Neutrality Pact between the two countries, and besides that, the Soviet side has recently confirmed the statement made by the Ambassador on 13 August. . . . The Japanese side, in its turn, will observe the Neutrality Pact.'

The concluding phrases of this conversation are of interest.

SMETANIN: 'I note the Minister's statement that the war between Japan on the one hand, and America and England on the other, will have no influence on relations between Japan and the USSR, and that Japan will continue as before to observe the Neutrality Pact.'

TOGO: 'I have therefore stated that the Soviet side will observe the Neutrality Pact, and that the Soviet government has confirmed the statement made on 13 August by Mr Ambassador, in the Soviet government's name. With precisely that part my statement will be complete, and I wish Mr Ambassador to transmit my statement in full, not a part of it.'[11]

Japan preferred to attack the USA rather than the USSR because it was acutely in need of the southern seas' raw materials, and the USA was blocking or at least appearing to block its southward advance. The American attempts to deprive Japan of motor fuel and ferrous metal scrap had had the reverse effect to that intended. Since Japan could not buy the materials it needed, it decided simply to seize them. Besides, to Japan the USA at that time seemed a less formidable adversary than the USSR, which had already shown its strength at Lake Hasan and Khalkhin Gol.

The idea of attacking the Soviet Union was not abandoned, but postponed to a more favourable moment, or to be implemented if the United States were given military bases on Kamchatka or in the Maritime Province. The Japanese also assumed that the USA, for which Japan had itself made the USSR a comrade-in-arms by attacking Pearl Harbor, would seek Soviet participation in the Pacific war.

Before attacking the USA, the Japanese government had confined itself to discussions with the Soviet ambassador in Tokyo, but after the attack it felt a need to broaden its contacts, both in Moscow and in Kuybyshev (now Samara, a city on the Volga to which the foreign missions in Moscow were evacuated in October 1941). Tatekawa met Deputy Foreign Minister Vyshinskiy in Kuybyshev, and after informing him of Japan's declaration of war on the USA and Great Britain, demanded the Soviet government confirm whether it would observe the Neutrality Pact. The Japanese had put this question so often that Vyshinskiy blew up. He said angrily that the Neutrality Pact had been concluded in order to be observed, so naturally the Soviet government would observe it as long as Japan did.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor coincided with the arrival in Washington of a new Soviet ambassador, former Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov. In his very first conversation, with Secretary of State Hull and then Roosevelt, the Americans raised the question of Soviet participation in the war against Japan.

On 11 December 1941 Litvinov received from Molotov a governmental position statement on the Japanese–American war. It said that the USSR did not consider it possible to declare war on Japan at this time, and was obliged

> to maintain neutrality so long as Japan observes the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact. Reasons:
>
> First. The Soviet–Japanese pact binds us to neutrality, and so far we have no grounds not to fulfil our obligations under this pact. We do not consider it possible to take the initiative in violating the pact, since we ourselves have always condemned governments that breach treaties.
>
> Second. At the present moment, when we are waging a difficult war with Germany, and almost all our forces are concentrated against Germany, including half our troops from the Far East, we consider it unwise and hazardous for the USSR now to declare war on Japan and wage a war on two fronts. The Soviet people and Soviet public opinion would neither understand nor approve a policy of declaring war on Japan at the present time, when the enemy has still not been expelled from the territory of the USSR, and the USSR's economy is under maximum pressure, bearing also in mind that Japan is maintaining neutrality, and so far provides no grounds for declaring war on it.

> Our public opinion fully realises that declaration of war on Japan by the USSR would weaken the force of the USSR's resistance to the Hitlerite troops, and redound to the benefit of Hitler's Germany. We think Hitler's Germany is our main common enemy, and because of that, weakening of the USSR's resistance to Hitlerite aggression would lead to strengthening the Axis powers, to the detriment of the USSR and all our allies.[12]

Today, of course, we know just how theatrical and hypocritical were Molotov's references to public opinion. Public opinion meant Stalin's opinion, and he thought it was not possible at that stage of the war to involve himself in war with Japan as well.

This position statement sounds clear enough, and has special significance for our investigation. It was precisely this viewpoint that the Soviet government stuck to throughout 1941–4, and abandoned only in the last year of the war.

On the same day, 11 December, Litvinov informed Roosevelt, who said ruefully that in our place he would have done exactly the same. However, he twice asked that we not publicise our decision to observe the Neutrality Pact, but consider the question unresolved, so as to keep on our front as many as possible of the Japanese forces that would otherwise be freed for action against England and America. Furthermore, Roosevelt even proposed publishing a joint communique to the effect that the USSR might take any decision in relation to Japan at any time. But Litvinov firmly rejected this proposal, remarking that it could only prompt Japan to attack us first.[13]

In concluding this chapter, I would like to touch on a theme that cannot be called scholarly, but exists and must be thought about.

We have already said that difficulties in Soviet–German relations in early 1941, the concentration of German and Soviet troops on the frontiers with Germany and Romania, and the transfer of Far Eastern divisions to Europe, compelled the Kremlin to look to the security of its Far Eastern frontiers. This could be achieved by distracting Japan's attention and interest from the northern to the southerly direction, where America's interests lay. From the Kremlin's angle, a war between Japan and the USA would be ideal. But it was well known that the USA was unwilling to become involved in either a European or a Far Eastern war. It would abandon that view only if it had 'its own Dunkirk', a shock to the nation, stimulated by a Japanese attack on US territory.

So an operation codenamed 'Snow' was devised in the Lubyanka, in Beria's notorious department. Its function was to provoke the Japanese into a decisive act against the USA, which would force Washington to declare war on Japan. Such a step was the well-known 'Hull Memorandum' of 26 November 1941, which was taken in Tokyo as amounting to an American declaration of war. How did the USA come to do this? Who

initiated the 'Hull Memorandum', which shattered the whole system of international relations in the Pacific?

Here is what retired Lieutenant-General Vitaliy Grigoryevich Pavlov, a major Soviet intelligence officer of the former KGB, has to say.

> The 'Hull Memorandum', which started the war between Japan and the USA, was devised, written and 'pushed through' by a man named Harry Dexter White. He was the son of refugees from Latvia, a close colleague of US Treasury Minister Morgenthau, and was answerable at that time for financing the US Navy and ground forces, the godfather of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for Reconstruction and Development. And – a Soviet Intelligence agent.

The idea itself, the draft outlines of a sharp statement addressed to Japan, were devised in the NKVD. Pavlov was sent specially to Washington to hand them to White. When the American read the 'crib', he exclaimed that it was time the Japanese were pulled into line, and that he had long been thinking about it. White was grateful for the idea, and promised to make the necessary efforts to implement it, for which, it seems, he had several possibilities. It is known for certain that White began to push the idea of an ultimatum to the Japanese from May 1941. But only on 26 November did 'everything work out'.[14]

The Lyubanka codenamed the operation 'Snow', because snow is white.

[The 'Hull Memorandum' did not play quite the decisive role suggested here. As noted above, Japan's decision to attack the United States had been taken 3 weeks before it was presented, and the task force designated to disable the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor had sailed on the morning of 26 November, i.e. before the Memorandum was issued. Nor did Harry Dexter White write it. He wrote a plan which Morgenthau submitted to the State Department, and which went through several redrafts (described in detail in Chapter 27 of Langer and Gleason (1953) *The Undeclared War 1940–41*). By the time it was handed to the Japanese envoys, in the late afternoon of 26 November, Roosevelt and his War Council had already decided that a Japanese attack was inevitable.

The circumstances were as follows. By 22 November US cryptanalysts had deciphered and translated a message from Tokyo to ambassador Nomura in Washington that stated 'things are automatically going to happen' after 29 November (Langer and Gleason (1953) p. 884). Secretary of War Stimson's diary notes of Roosevelt's War Council meeting on 25 November (a Tuesday) have Roosevelt saying the USA was likely to be attacked 'as soon as next Monday' (1 December). That suggests he (rightly) took the decrypted message to mean war with Japan soon after 29 November was inevitable (Wohlstetter (1962) *Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision,* pp. 239–41 of 1992 paperback reprint). The British and Chinese opposed the 3-month *modus vivendi* proposed in the

draft Memorandum. On the morning of 26 November Roosevelt was informed that Japanese troopships had been sighted heading towards French Indo-China (they were carrying the force that invaded Malaya less than 2 weeks later). This information, and the British and Chinese pressure, prompted Roosevelt to replace the *modus vivendi* proposal with a Ten-Point Proposal of maximum US demands, and these formed the 'Hull Memorandum' presented to the Japanese envoys that afternoon (Wohlstetter, (1962) pp. 243–5).

The stiffening of the Memorandum's terms reflected Roosevelt's definitive acceptance that the Japanese negotiations were designed only to mask preparations for war. It had no effect on the Japanese decisions, and was not the work of Harry Dexter White. Pavlov's claims for Soviet influence on US–Japanese relations in this period are therefore exaggerated.

White was summoned to appear before the Un-American Activities Committee of Congress in 1949, but died before appearing. G.J.]

6 The Neutrality Pact when Japan seemed to be winning the East Asian War, 1941–2

Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor seriously damaged the US Pacific Fleet. But it was not intended to decide the war in a battle with the US Navy. It was one of several tactical assignments aimed at weakening the US Pacific Fleet in order to make it easier to accomplish the main strategic task, the seizure of areas in the southern seas. Alongside it, on 8 December Japanese Army and Navy air units suppressed the US air forces in the Philippines, enabling Japan to launch simultaneous offensives to seize Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Wake Island and other territories.

It should be noted that there were figures in the Japanese leadership who foresaw the dangers that lay in wait for Japan in the near future. Thus at an army and government Coordinating Conference that took place in February–March 1942, Foreign Minister Togo, Minister and Custodian of the Imperial Seal Kido and some others among the most senior politicians expressed certain apprehensions about further prospects in the war. They pointed to Japan's insufficiency in raw material resources, especially oil, its over-extended communications and the difficulties of replacing lost ships and aircraft. They proposed that Japan limit itself to what it had already seized, and start looking for a profitable peace. However, the Japanese military, intoxicated by its early successes, insisted on a prolonged war.

The Coordinating Conference decided 'not to participate in the war against the USSR' for the time being. However, Japanese diplomacy was ordered 'to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union on one side and England and the USA on the other'.

In that context a speech by the War Minister, Major-General Sato, is worthy of attention. It was delivered on 10 March 1942, the 37th anniversary of the Japanese capture of Mukden during the Russo–Japanese War.[1] The 'Japan Times and Advertiser' published it under the flamboyant headline 'Stalin Also Cunning' on 12 March 1942.

The Anglo-American countries might try to draw the Soviet Union into the war with Japan. Sato asserted:

However, nobody believes Joseph Stalin is the sort of man who would agree to 'pull chestnuts out of the fire' for America and England, however strongly they insist he should. If the Soviet Union, in cooperation with the USA, attacks Japan and East Asia, the fate of Soviet territories in the Far East is also very obvious.

When former Foreign Minister Matsuoka, during his stay in the Red capital, touched on problems connected with the Maritime Province, they say Stalin put his arm around his shoulder, and gave him to understand that, for the USSR, to lose the Maritime Province would be tantamount to suicide by hanging. Nevertheless Japan must be in constant readiness, since attracting the Soviet Union to their side to wage war against Japan would be extremely advantageous for England and America.

In relation to the China incident, the European war and the war in Greater East Asia, the USA has constantly and openly stated that its aim must be defence of democracy against Japan's expansionism, Hitlerism and Fascism. America has in fact allied itself with Soviet Russia.

For America, with its so keen desire to defend democracy, it is in the highest degree inappropriate to have anything at all to do with Communism, which presents itself as democracy's most formidable foe. Nevertheless, America has stubbornly stuck to a policy of giving help to England, Chungking and Soviet Russia, seeing London, Chungking and Moscow as the front line of its own defence.

Confirmation that Japan had decided to maintain normal relations with the Soviet Union for the time being were the steps taken by the Foreign Ministry to mark the first anniversary of signature of the Neutrality Pact. As Malik, then Chargé d'Affaires, noted in his diary, a lunch was held at the Foreign Minister's official residence, at which the Turkish and (Vichy) French ambassadors, the heads of the Swedish, Afghan, Iranian, Portuguese and Chilean Legations, and the Argentine Chargé d'Affaires were present. That is, the lunch was arranged for the representatives of precisely those neutral countries that the Japanese considered were not pro-Axis.

Here is part of the conversation between Togo and Malik.

TOGO: Today is the anniversary of the signing of the Neutrality Pact. . . . This good treaty is the cornerstone of Japanese–Soviet relations. I am glad that it fell to me, together with Mr. Molotov, to conduct the initial negotiations. . . . This pact is very useful for good and friendly relations between our countries. I am pleased to observe that both the Soviet government and Ambassador Smetanin in its name have more than once stated their intention to fulfil the obligations assumed under this pact. And I think these promises hold also for the future.[2]

MALIK: I assume that any agreement between two countries, and the obligations arising from it, are always bilateral. So a pact can be good,

solid, and achieve its objectives only if both sides observe their obligations well and equally.

TOGO: Mutuality is the basis of any agreement. And I can assure you that the Japanese . . . will fulfil this pact.[3]

Malik noted his conversation with Sakamoto, head of the Foreign Ministry's European Department, about the fate of Matsuoka's confidential letter and of Matsuoka himself. Sakamoto answered in the general sense that this 'presumed direction of the pact' was only Matsuoka's view. To Malik's remark that Matsuoka was not alone, many shared his views, maybe even today, Sakamoto replied 'For Matsuoka the political climate has changed sharply. Now is not his time. Matsuoka is now ill, including a political illness. I think his political illness will last at least 3 years.'[4]

Malik also wrote down his conversation with the Turkish ambassador, who had a different opinion about a possible Japanese attack on the USSR each time he met the Soviet envoy. At their last meeting, in March 1942, the Turk had said that from precise information, based on a conversation with an important military man, he was firm in asserting that Japan would attack the USSR at the beginning of April. But now he said: 'I am certain Japan is not about to attack you. Of that I am firmly convinced. She is not up to it. Before her are India, Australia and other difficulties. She can come out against you only in the event things go too badly for you or too badly for Hitler.'[5]

Malik drew the following conclusions in his report to Moscow:

1 The lunch was arranged as an indirect and camouflaged way to mark the anniversary of the neutrality pact.
2 Inviting specially selected neutrals was designed to emphasise Japan's 'neutralness' vis-a-vis the USSR.
3 The second Japanese aim pursued by this choice of neutrals was to give us the impression of a subterfuge being used to show us their ostensible desire to cover themselves against German suspicion, needed and used solely 'to deceive the Germans'.

However, the participation of Togo's German wife, his daughter, and the wives of the envoys invited to this charade, showed that the Japanese were not much concerned to keep this lunch 'secret' from the Germans. From that, and the unusual nature of the lunch, the thought suggests itself that it was arranged in accordance with a previously conceived and devised German–Japanese plan 'of tripartite deception'.

In conclusion Malik wrote:

> The arranging of this unusual lunch, Togo's utterances, and Tatekawa's 'unusual' interview about the USSR,[6] give some ground to admit the possibility that the Japanese, with still unresolved tasks in

> the south, and faced with the unclear prospects on the Soviet–German front, have decided for the time being not to rush to display open hostility, to continue the old tactic of 'playing at friendship' with the USSR, and even try covertly to give us the impression that for the sake of retaining its booty in the south Japan would not be averse to maintaining its current relations with the USSR, and maybe even reaching some form of agreement with the Soviet Union, to the annoyance of the Anglo-Americans, and behind Hitler's back, but without undertaking any guarantees, and carefully masking their preparations against the USSR. In any event one thing is clear, that in the German view this Japanese tactic in relation to the USSR will do them no harm, however events turn out.[7]

We have cited Malik's diary notes, including his biting remarks about Japan, to give the reader a correct idea of what the Soviet Foreign Ministry expected from its Chargé d'Affaires and his 'moral-political image'. The fact that as early as June 1942 Malik was appointed Ambassador to Japan shows that he met its requirements.

An important event was Togo's speech of 22 April 1942 to a session of the Japanese Economic Federation. He said:

> The Soviet Union's position still attracts our attention. Japanese–Soviet relations produce the impression of a focus, on which the whole world's attention has recently been concentrated. Hostile countries are conducting overt propaganda about the current phase of this situation. From time to time the Soviet government clearly states its policy of observing the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact. It is clear that the Soviet Union is too clever to play into the hands of Anglo-American interests and pull chestnuts out of the fire to its own detriment.[8]

On the next day the Japanese press reacted to Togo's speech with headlines such as 'Unwavering Japanese–Soviet neutrality; America and England in state of growing difficulties' (*Asahi*); 'Soviet Union will not pull chestnuts from the fire for America and England' (*Tsyuhai* and *Kokumin*).

In his report to Moscow Malik drew attention to the fact that the problem of Soviet–Japanese relations was given first place in the entire press. He also noted that Togo was again silent about how the Japanese government itself intended to observe the Neutrality Pact, and on whether Japan was sensible enough not to fall into Hitler's intriguing hands, just as he had been silent about this in all his preceding statements, including at the 79th session of the Japanese parliament.[9]

On 24 April the important newspapers *Asahi* and *Nichi-Nichi* devoted leading articles to Soviet–Japanese relations in the light of Togo's speech. The *Asahi* stressed

1 'Soviet–Japanese relations are a focus of world attention not because they are currently fraught with problems in themselves, but simply because hostile states – the USA, England and Chungking – have not yet abandoned their attempts to goad and provoke the Soviet Union and Japan, by spreading rumours of a crisis in their relations and using other means to worsen Soviet feelings about Japan and vice versa.'
2 'Despite this, amid the present world chaos, relations between the Soviet Union and Japan are regulated in accordance with the Neutrality Pact between them, and are in a state of calm.'
3 The *Asahi* took it that Togo 'underlined the Japanese government's policy of regulating Soviet–Japanese relations in strict conformity with the Neutrality Pact'. Then, noting the fragility of Japanese–Soviet relations in the uneasy international situation, since the USSR is an ally of America and England, and Japan a close ally of Germany, the paper wrote that 'The environment of Soviet–Japanese relations is perhaps delicate. However, there is no reason whatsoever for the Soviet Union and Japan to cross swords. It is natural that the alliance between Japan and European countries is of the strongest and firmest. But at the same time it should not be forgotten that this alliance is founded on the principle of respecting the independent views of each participant.... From this point of view there is nothing odd in Soviet–Japanese relations' remaining calm amid the tempest of war. There is really no place for war propaganda in this region.'
4 'The main point is, of course, the Soviet Union's attitude towards Japan and vice versa. If the Soviet Union undertakes any act contrary to the spirit or letter of the Neutrality Pact, then the present amicable relations will be destroyed. Happily, we see that up to now the Soviet Union is indubitably attempting to observe the conditions of the Neutrality Pact in the best possible way, despite inducements and threats by the USA and England.'

The *Asahi* concluded 'that Japan's northern defence stands firm and in proper condition in no way implies a crisis between the Soviets and Japan. But this must be taken as an important factor for averting the possibility of such a crisis arising, and for normalising relations between the two countries.'[10]

The *Nichi-Nichi* spoke in similar tone of a 'conspiracy of the USA and England aimed at putting the Soviet Union and Japan at odds', of the failure of that conspiracy, as 'the dense mists which hung over Japanese–Soviet relations have recently been dispersing one after another', of the wisdom of the leaders' words in not playing into Anglo-American hands, of the objective evaluation given in 'Red Star' to development of the war in the Pacific and to the Japanese forces, etc. Then it wrote: 'It is absolutely clear that the Soviet Union takes full account of the senselessness of

becoming a "running dog" of the USA and England against such a strong Japan'. It expressed the hope that the Soviet Union would either return its ambassador to Tokyo or appoint a new one 'in response to the sincerity of Japan, which has not permitted the post of ambassador in Moscow to be vacant even for an instant.'

Malik drew the following conclusions:

1 Both articles were an officially inspired response to a 'Pravda' leading article, and if Togo or vice-minister Nishi had not written them, they had undoubtedly carefully vetted them.
2 The thought that the USA and England are making every effort to put the USSR and Japan at odds with each other is systematically emphasised by the press. Its appearance here is neither novel nor original, but merely shows yet again that this is one of the important principles of Japanese diplomacy.
3 This is the first time the Japanese press has put so comparatively the question of interrelations between Soviet–Japanese neutrality and Japan's alliance with the European Axis, and has said that 'the Tripartite Pact is based on principles of respect for the independent views of each participant'. This is an indirect response to Soviet utterances.
4 The emphasis on the lack of reasons for the Soviet Union and Japan to 'cross swords' is noteworthy.
5 There are unambiguous hints at the strengthening of Japanese military power and the Soviet Union's need to take account of that in its relations with Japan.
6 There is an evident wish to annoy the USA and England by emphasising that all their hopes of turning the USSR against Japan are vain.
7 A desire is expressed in extremely veiled form for strengthening and improving relations between the USSR and Japan, even to the extent of ignoring the current international environment, the existence of the Tripartite Pact, and the USSR's special relationship with the Anglo-Americans.
8 There is open expression of a Japanese desire for the USSR to either return its previous ambassador to Japan, or appoint a new one.

The only aspect left unclear is to what extent these inspired articles express the Japanese government's sincere desires, or whether this is just the usual cunning hypocrisy so often used by Japanese diplomacy to mislead the other side.[11]

The Japanese press and official statements widely popularise the idea that the war is only now beginning, and that the real war yet stands in the future. This nuance must draw our attention, because it was not impossible that the military included in the idea a covert concept of preparation for war against the USSR.[12]

Malik's diary notes of 21 April 1942 included such observations as that the Japanese press had stopped clamouring about the need to seize Australia and India as quickly as possible. A suspicious calm had fallen on the southern front, even though frenzied preparations for war were going on within Japan. He had the impression that the Japanese had decided to limit their activities in the south and prepare to attack the USSR, especially since Hitler felt unwell, and was not ready for a spring offensive.[13]

Malik studied carefully from various sources the question most important for Moscow; when could Japan be expected to attack the USSR? He raised this in almost every conversation with other countries' diplomats in Tokyo. On 30 September 1942 he wrote:

> the Swede (ambassador Bagge) said he was an old pessimist, and still assumed that Japan would attack the USSR. He pointed to rumours of transfer of forces to Manchuria from the south, especially from the Philippines, and spoke at length about Japanese hatred of the USSR. True, . . . the tone of all his remarks was less decisive than his previous assertions . . . in late February and late July of this year, when he stated categorically that a Japanese attack on the USSR must be expected from day to day.

To give an idea of the attitudes prevalent in diplomatic circles in Tokyo, let us cite another conversation with Bagge, of 11 November 1942. He again said Japan had no choice but to move against the USSR. In reporting this conversation to Moscow Malik observed:

> Rumours have recently reached us that the problem of Japanese–Soviet relations was discussed at a Privy Council session. It is said that it was decided to maintain former relations with the Soviet Union, basing them on the Neutrality Pact, in no circumstances to aggravate them, but on the contrary, to take all possible steps not to annoy the Soviet Union, and, if possible, to improve relations with it.[14]

Now let us see how the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo evaluated Japan's domestic political situation. In spring of 1942 parliamentary elections were held, under a new system whereby candidates were 'recommended', i.e. in reality appointed, by the government. Thus in the Lower House 381 of the 466 seats, or over 80 per cent, went to 'recommended' persons. The Tojo government's task was complete concentration of internal political forces on a national scale, which Tojo felt was essential for further waging of the Greater East Asia war.

The 80th (extraordinary) session of the Japanese Parliament took place on 27–28 May 1942. Its basic task was to 'pass extraordinary measures' to strengthen the so-called national unity, so as to subordinate all forces of the country totally to state control, to mobilise and use them for waging

Japan's difficult war. Prime Minister Tojo and Foreign Minister Togo especially emphasised the strategic importance of Japan's relations with the Axis countries. Both stressed especially forcibly the unity of aims and actions of Japan, Germany and Italy, especially in the strategic field.

Malik wrote that rumours were circulating in Tokyo that the Germans were not too happy with Japan. It was using a 'golden opportunity' to expand its aggressive conquests and as yet displaying no great enthusiasm for real cooperation with its partners in aggression, fobbing them off with resounding phrases about 'friendship', 'community of aims' and 'sincerity of relations'. Obviously this did not suit the Germans, 'therefore Tojo and Togo had to assure Hitler and Mussolini yet again from the parliamentary platform of their most benevolent intentions towards the Axis'.

On Soviet–Japanese relations Tojo confined himself to his usual phrases, to the effect that 'in the north the security of our defence is as strong as a rock'. Togo said:

> Relations between Japan and the Soviet Union have undergone no changes even after the start of the war in Greater East Asia. It has been confirmed very recently that the Soviet Union intends to regulate its relations with Japan by the Neutrality Pact and that accordingly it has no intention of offering its territory for military bases at the disposal of countries hostile to us. I assume that as the war develops these hostile countries will intensify their treacherous manoeuvres to put Japan and the Soviet Union at odds. However, there is no chance that these intrigues will produce any result while the Soviet Union adheres firmly to the position stated above. At the same time, we for our part shall continue to watch this situation calmly, from the viewpoint of preserving the security of the North.[15]

Malik concluded:

> Thus Japan's government continues to sing one-sided songs. Everything will be as before, provided the Soviet Union does not do this or that. Again, as at all three preceding sessions of parliament, it is emphasised that the USSR adheres to a neutral position, and 'again confirmed this very recently'. On Japan's intentions, whether it will observe neutrality or intends to submit itself to hostile intrigues by Hitler's Germany, the minister, as before, was silent.[16]

Let us look in more detail at the problem of Soviet–Japanese relations.

Lately, Malik wrote, rumours had become more frequent that Germans living in Japan were angry at the Japanese for being 'unforthcoming' over attacking the USSR. Publication of materials about the 'Anticomintern trial' (the case of Richard Sorge, a Soviet agent arrested by the Japanese military police in autumn 1941 – B.S.) had made a bad impression on the

Germans. It had led to persistent rumours in Japan that the accused German journalists were agents not so much of the Comintern as of the Gestapo. It had also been precisely established that Germans in Japan were subjected to the same police surveillance as all other whites.[17]

On 9 June 1942 the Emperor decorated 13,310 members of the Manchuria Army 'for participation in the battles at Nomonhan (Khalkhin Gol) and Chankufyn (Lake Hasan) and for fighting the Communist 8th Army in China throughout the China incident'. Tojo published a special statement congratulating those decorated.

Manchukuo's ambassador, Li Shaokeng, stated:

> I think it is still fresh in your minds how the armed forces of Manchukuo, jointly with the Japanese Imperial Army, ejected the Soviet armed forces back to Soviet territory, from where they had illegally and unjustifiably entered Manchukuo. It also dealt a crushing blow at the Communist 8th Field Army. After these incidents the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact was concluded. Thereafter the situation between Japan, Manchukuo and the Soviet Union changed for the better. This makes us extremely happy.[18]

In the Soviet Embassy's opinion, Japanese press description of the Soviet–German war still maintained a tendentiously anti-Soviet and pro-German tone. A series of articles from Berlin, by Japanese correspondents whom the Germans had taken to Kerch and Kharkov, appeared in the *Asahi* and other newspapers. These 'eyewitness' reports oozed anti-Soviet propaganda. The *Asahi* correspondent, for example, described the 'Soviet troops' poor uniforms', and said 'captured soldiers can be distinguished from the civilian population only by their aluminium water-bottles'. However, Malik noted, even this singer of the German tune had to acknowledge the Soviet troops' steadfastness, though he tried to explain it away by the presence of Commissars, and by Russians being not purely Slav, but having an admixture of Asian blood. 'Only ethnic Russians are distinguished for steadfastness. Therefore tank and air force units are formed only from Russians, other nationalities are sent to the infantry. The cavalry is formed from Cossacks, but has already been destroyed', this 'eyewitness' concluded.

During his discussion with Togo on 14 August 1942, Malik drew his attention to the Japanese press' tendentious and unobjective descriptions of the Soviet–German war, pointing out that in October 1941 the Foreign Ministry had assured the Soviets that it would maintain a neutral position. Togo's response was interesting: *'In my statements I always emphasise that Germany is our ally, and with the Soviet Union we have neutral relations.'*[19]

However, Malik's report continued, the Japanese press was now displaying quite unusual restraint and caution. Newspapers as a rule were

ending their commentaries and 'prognoses' by saying how hard it was to forecast the outcome of the Soviet–German war. These differed radically from the previous year's incantations, when the Japanese, following Goebbels and Dietrich, were wiping out the Red Army and Soviet Union at a stroke of the pen.[20] Alongside the anti-Soviet tone of description of the war, individual anti-Soviet acts (such as the Chankufyn and Nomonhan awards), and statements of fidelity to the Axis alliance, the press' relative restraint over open attacks on the USSR had to be noted. Calls for 'attention to the North' or on 'the need for movement to the North', etc, so common in the first 2 or 3 months of 1942, had ceased almost completely. The Japanese press had not commented on the 'anti-Comintern trial', even though the charges against the principal accused, Sorge, and his two co-accused, Klaussen and Vukelich, several times mentioned the words 'Comintern' and 'Moscow'.

In an interview about the planned 'anti-espionage campaign' on 2 June 1942 the Head of the Japanese Military Gendarmerie, Lieutenant-General Nakamura, hinted that the British and Americans had been behind Sorge, and said not a word about the Comintern or Moscow. Malik concluded that the Japanese had obviously decided to soft-pedal Soviet–Japanese relations.[21]

In this period Japan and the Soviet Union changed their ambassadors. It was said unofficially that General Tatekawa had been removed for failing to predict the Red Army's ability to put up such stubborn resistance. His successor was N. Sato, a career diplomat. In notifying Malik of this on 12 February 1942, Vice-Minister Nishi stated:

> Sato has worked in the Soviet Union for a long time in the past. After resumption of normal relations with the USSR he was the first Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, in 1925. For many years he worked in Europe in various diplomatic capacities. He has held the post of Foreign Minister. Currently he is an adviser to the Foreign Ministry.[22]

The appointment of a new Soviet ambassador took some time. Smetanin, a biologist by training, was recalled to Moscow in February. It is hard to say why, but my impression from reading his reports is that they were not notable for profundity, and contained few generalisations or recommendations. What Counsellor Malik wrote looked better based. Nor did he abstain from the biting derogations of Japanese imperialism so favoured in the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Malik was also much younger than Smetanin.

On 16 June 1942 Malik informed Foreign Minister Togo that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet had appointed him ambassador, and that the letters accrediting him and recalling his predecessor were on their way.[23] He was accredited on 8 July. Vice-Minister Nishi, congratulating him on 14 July, said 'Among your predecessors there were some outstanding persons such as Mr Troyanovsky and others, but as you are a friend of

Foreign Minister Togo, I hope you will have more success than your predecessor'.[24]

In late 1941 and early 1942 many acute problems arose between the USSR and Japan, and seriously exacerbated their relations. First, the outbreak of the Soviet–German war resulted in effective relegation to the 'pending' file of Matsuoka's promise to abolish the Japanese concessions in Northern Sakhalin. Moscow protested, but fearing a Japanese attack on the USSR, did so rather timidly. The Japanese, by contrast, displayed an inflexibility the Soviets could but envy, and were often unrestrained in their language during discussions with Soviet representatives. Instead of abolishing the concessions, Japan on 4 December 1941 demanded extension of the oil exploration rights, due to expire on 14 December. Vice-Minister Nishi reminded Smetanin that these had been established by the Peking Convention, which gave Japan the right to explore for oil over 1000 square versts for 10 years, until 14 December 1936. This was later extended by 5 years, but the concessionaires, through no fault of their own, had been unable even to start work in that time. So, Nishi said, the Japanese government would like Soviet agreement to another 5-year extension of prospecting.[25]

On 12 December 1941 Smetanin informed Nishi that Moscow refused an extension, and asked whether the agreement to abolish the concessions in Northern Sakhalin, reached between Molotov and Matsuoka in April 1941, remained in force.

Nishi pointed out that Matsuoka's confidential letter to Molotov had clearly made signing of a trade agreement and fisheries convention preconditions for resolving the concessions issue. Matsuoka had made the same point personally to Molotov and Stalin, as making it easier for him to create in Japan an atmosphere congenial to securing agreement to relinquish the concessions. Neither Stalin nor Molotov had raised any objections. But after the Soviet–German war broke out on 22 June, the trade agreement, then about to be signed, was not concluded, because transit of goods from Germany to Japan via Soviet territory, included in the agreement, and of great importance to Japan, became impossible. The long-term fisheries convention had not been concluded, because the Soviet government had not made the required concessions. Such concessions would have helped create an atmosphere in Japan favourable for liquidating the oil concessions.[26]

Although the Soviet Union's international position in both Europe and the Far East was still difficult, nevertheless abolition of the Japanese concessions remained a strategic task for Soviet diplomacy. So the Soviet Union continued to obstruct the Japanese concessionaires' work, particularly by delaying the issue of visas to Japanese subjects heading for the concessions. In discussion with Malik on 25 June 1942 Nishi complained that visas had been issued for only thirty of the 584 Japanese workers needed for the oil concessions, and for only forty-five out of 600 destined

for the coal concessions. He said the Soviet side seemed to be creating obstacles to the working of the concessions.[27]

The Japanese also put all kinds of difficulties in the way of Japanese–Soviet relations. In a conversation with Nishi on 26 May 1942, Malik raised the question of exit from Shanghai to the USSR of 123 Soviet citizens previously on Soviet ships in Hong Kong. The Japanese had not issued transit visas, linking their action to the Soviet refusal to allow Japanese diplomatic couriers and others to travel along the Amur railway, and the closure of the route between Tsuruga and Vladivostok to Japanese shipping.

On 13 December 1941 the Soviet ship 'Kuznetskstroy' was intercepted by Japanese warships while transiting Onekotan Strait in the Kuriles, inspected and told to continue its journey via the Tsushima Strait between Japan and Korea. Smetanin protested sharply on 23 December. Nishi retorted 'Japan is now at war', and at that time 'there were many of our warships in the La Perouse Strait' (between Honshu and Hokkaido), but added that 'Japan is not closing the Kuriles straits'.

Events then took a more ominous turn. On 14 December 1941 the Soviet ship 'Krechet' was sunk by Japanese artillery fire in Hong Kong harbour, and on 17 December the steamer 'Perekop' was sunk off Borneo by Japanese aircraft, with the loss of eight lives. On 21 December the tanker 'Maykop' was bombed by Japanese aircraft off Mindanao, and sank soon afterwards in Sarangan Bay. The Japanese action seemed deliberate, as the weather was clear, and the Soviet flag clearly visible. In this case too, the Soviet Union delivered a sharp protest.

Three Soviet ships were still in Hong Kong. At a meeting with Foreign Minister Togo on 14 August 1942 Malik pointed out that before the Pacific war began, Soviet ships docked regularly in Hong Kong for repair, and three of them, 'Sergey Lazo', 'Simferopol' and 'Svirskiy', were still there when Japan invaded. The Soviet Union had twice previously, in December 1941 and January 1942, raised the matter with Japan, but had been told that 'since the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong was so recent, entry was still forbidden to all foreigners'. A Soviet request to tow the 'Svirskiy' to Vladivostok, and have the repairs to the other ships completed by Japanese firms in Hong Kong, had been refused. Malik now proposed the Japanese tow all three ships to Shanghai, to which Togo replied 'A mass of questions has arisen because of the outbreak of the Greater East Asia war. But *I have a special interest in resolving this question, because it concerns the Soviet Union*'[28] (my emphasis – B.S.). Togo recalled that there were still unresolved Japanese demands for compensation for the sinking of the 'Kehi Maru', and besides, he said, the USSR was continuing to lay floating mines.

On 12 October 1942 Malik presented Vice-Minister Yamamoto with a note-verbale, protesting that by then the Soviet ships still in Hong Kong had been almost totally looted, and citing cases of ill treatment of members of their crews.[29]

Since Japanese–Soviet relations were accumulating too many negative layers, with potential consequences desired by neither, Tokyo sent a well-known public figure, Count Ichijo Goto, to meet Malik. He was a member of the Upper House of Parliament, a director of a major electrical company connected with Mitsui, and a son of the late Viscount Shimpei Goto, who had been considered a friend of Russia. They met on 15 August 1942.

In his report to Moscow, Malik concluded that Goto's visit and the nature of the conversation gave him the impression that Goto had been sent specially, as the son of a late 'friend' of Russia, entrusted with the same role played by Japanese so-called 'friends' of America. Right up to the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor, these had systematically assured the Americans that Japan cherished most 'fond' feelings and 'peaceful' intentions towards America. This was how the Japanese usually assured and blunted the vigilance of their opponents, with tales about Japan's 'love of peace'.

The rumours about General Yamashita's transfer to Manchuria, recently circulated very widely, and Count Goto's bringing those rumours specially to the Soviet Embassy clearly pursued the objective of pressuring and blackmailing the Soviet Union. It could be said with confidence that the Kwantung Army was ready enough for starting an adventure against the USSR; Yamashita's presence was superfluous, as the Kwantung Army could quite likely get by even without him.

If they had really redeployed Yamashita to Manchuria in order to expedite an attack on the USSR, they would hardly spread rumours about it, much less bring them specially to the Soviet Embassy's notice. While making assiduous military preparations in Manchuria and the north, so as to be ready to attack at any minute, Japan nevertheless took the delicacy of its position into account.

Here Malik noted on the one hand a strange desire to profit at the USSR's expense, and on the other a fear of a joint Soviet–American strike, especially from the air. Besides, Japan at the same time had no great burning desire to help Hitler to become too strong in the Old World, and disrupt a European balance of power from which Japan itself had profited. Moreover, Japan had not given up hope and expectation of future contradictions arising in Europe between the USSR and the Anglo-Americans. Because of its fragile position, Japan evidently preferred to try first to deal 'peacefully' with the USSR, while preparing and waiting as before, and resorting as usual to military blackmail.

Malik concluded that 'It is my impression that the Japanese would not be averse to seizing a convenient pretext to begin an "exchange of views" with the USSR.'[30]

On 2 September 1942 it was announced that Togo had retired and Tojo, already Prime Minister, had been appointed Foreign Minister as well. The opinion spread among diplomats in Tokyo that this was Japan's

response to Hitler's speech of 31 August, in which he was said to have pleaded unambiguously to Japan for help. These neutrals felt Togo might have made some specific promise to the Germans. The government, not bound by any such promise, and at present unwilling to attack the USSR, had decided to sacrifice Togo under the guise of retirement.

But Malik drew different conclusions. He saw Togo's retirement as prompted chiefly by disagreement with Tojo over the functions of the new Ministry for East Asian Affairs, and the Foreign Ministry's relegation to a second-class role.

Here Malik drew another, extremely important, conclusion. With wars in the Pacific and in China, and the 'southern problem' (the difficulties of creating and building up the 'Co-Prosperity Sphere') on its hands, Japan did not want to take on a fourth problem, a risky and dangerous war with the USSR.[31]

Malik's first visit to Tojo was on 11 September 1942. Tojo emphasised to him that the change of Minister did not mean a change of government, much less of its policy, especially towards the USSR. He wanted to preserve and cooperate in further developing good relations between the two countries, and resolve all questions in a friendly spirit.

Malik complained that Tojo's words were contradicted by the hostile utterances of a number of influential Japanese newspapers and public figures. Tojo replied that only official statements by the government or its spokesmen should be believed.

In his report to Moscow Malik observed that Tojo did not conduct himself as refined Japanese diplomats normally did, but simply like a military man. He roared with laughter at his own jokes (especially at one that the press also wrote badly about him), waved his arms, gesticulated and talked animatedly.[32]

Malik's discussion with S. Tanakamaru, president of the 'Society of Japanese companies fishing in Soviet waters' on 5 October 1942 testifies to the favourable development of Soviet–Japanese relations in those years. Malik's guest spoke of the happy ending to the fishing season in Soviet waters, and tendered his thanks for the Soviet authorities' benign attitude towards the fishing companies during the season.[33]

On 7 November 1942 the Soviet Embassy held an official reception to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the October Revolution. Two hundred and forty political and public figures were invited. They included Cabinet members, representatives of the Court Ministry, Privy Council, Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament, Foreign Ministry employees, soldiers, sailors, representatives of companies having business contacts with the Trade Mission, concessionaires, fishers, representatives of science and art, the press, the theatre and others. About 150 came. Of Cabinet members only Foreign Minister Tani; of nineteen invited from the Court Ministry, only 3 Masters of Ceremonies; none of the Presidents or Vice-Presidents of the Privy Council were there. But for the first time in the three years the

Embassy had held these receptions, they sent letters and visiting cards apologising for their inability to attend, i.e. as if asking for this not to be taken as wilful refusal. Tatekawa and Ota, former ambassadors to the Soviet Union, were present. The Japanese behaved with 'marked politeness and goodwill'. In his report on the reception Malik singled out the following incidents. Tatekawa told him:

> There is much I would like to say, but you yourself understand the delicacy of my position since Japan is an ally of Germany, and I cannot say everything. I can say only the following: Stalin is a strong man, he has succeeded in creating and organising a strong state and inculcating a steadfast spirit in the Soviet people. The only thing I want still to say is that *not only Germany but also Japan miscalculated the Soviet Union's strength and toughness, and the Soviet people's steadfastness of spirit. The Soviet Union has not collapsed as expected* [my emphasis – B.S.].

Matsumoto, chief editor of the 'Domei' news agency, proposed a toast to 'the youngest ambassador in Japan and the world'. Eguchi, editor of the magazine 'Russia' said 'Frankly speaking, we don't believe Hitler will win. Stalingrad will not fall. Many Japanese think that.' Tanaka, Commercial Secretary of the Foreign Ministry's Trade Department, said in conversation with Trade Mission Head Lvov that he felt 'the time is approaching when it will be possible to start trading'. He himself was ready to begin trading with the USSR, but the government had not yet decided to initiate trade.

Malik concluded that major political figures and cabinet ministers did not come to the reception. Ex officio was only Foreign Minister Tani, who was obliged by protocol to attend, but he stayed only 12–15 minutes. But the presence of the Vice-War Minister, Vice-Navy Minister and the Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Army and Navy should be noted. From the list of those attending Malik reached the conclusion that Japanese policy towards the USSR was ambiguous.[34]

At that time the Second World War's most important and bloodiest battles were being fought on the Soviet–German front. The great Stalingrad battle began in the autumn of 1942, and the Red Army dealt Hitler's armies a blow from which Germany could not recover. From then on the Japanese High Command could no longer pin its hopes on 'decisive successes of German arms' in the war against Russia, and on the situation on the Soviet–German front favouring a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union.

By the end of 1942 Japan was already facing serious difficulties in the East Asian war. Its extended lines of communication were becoming harder and harder to control. The shortage of merchant ships was beginning to tell. In the Battle of the Coral Sea in May, Allied naval forces had compelled a Japanese invasion force heading for Port Moresby on the south coast of New Guinea to turn back. In the Battle of Midway in June,

the US Navy inflicted a major defeat on the Japanese Navy, which lost four aircraft carriers, with all their aircraft and aircrew.[35]

[In August Australian forces defeated a Japanese attempt to land at Milne Bay in New Guinea, and the first US land offensive began, when Marines landed on Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. Fighting continued there for several months, during which the Japanese Navy's efforts to support its ground troops cost it far more warships than it could hope to replace. In September a major Australian counteroffensive began in New Guinea, ultimately driving the Japanese back to the north coast and destruction there by joint operations with US forces. Japan still held the military initiative in China and Burma, but in the South Pacific the military balance was already turning decisively against it. – G.J.].

7 Implementing the Neutrality Pact, 1943–mid-1944

Problems and achievements

Soviet–Japanese relations and the Neutrality Pact

As the Soviet Embassy's political overviews[1] indicated, Japan's interest in preserving neutral relations with the Soviet Union was increasing inexorably. This followed entirely naturally from Japan's own interests. Its European allies' defeats, and Japan's own failures in the Pacific war, insistently dictated a need not only to maintain neutral relations with the USSR, but also to try to improve them. This above all explained Japan's constant and unambiguous hints and suggestions that the Neutrality Pact should be converted into a non-aggression pact.

The Soviet Embassy learned from several sources that as early as the beginning of 1943 a special state conference on Soviet–Japanese relations, held in Tokyo, decided to maintain the neutral relationship with the Soviet Union as long as possible. Incidentally, it should be noted that the Governor-General of Korea, Kuniyaki Koiso, well known for his hostility to the USSR, attended this conference, and he too was said to have favoured neutrality, though he insisted that major armed forces should be retained in Korea and Manchuria.

Ando, Head of the Foreign Ministry's Legal Department, said, during one of his frequent discussions with Soviet Embassy staff, 'I drink to the victory of the Soviet and Japanese armies, because only those two armies are worthy of victory, and will be victorious. This is the result of the strength of the USSR and Japan, and chiefly the result of the neutrality between them. This isn't just my opinion'.[2]

One of the 'Domei' news agency's senior staff, a certain Hasegawa, said in conversation with TASS correspondent Samoylov, 'It would be good to convert the Neutrality Pact into a non-aggression pact or, perhaps better still, a military alliance, even one directed against Germany.' War and Navy Ministry representatives also expressed a desire to improve relations with the Soviet Union. At a lunch given by Lieutenant-General Arisue, Head of the War Ministry's Intelligence Directorate, a certain Major Nahara told our temporary military attache Sergeyechev that the government wanted to establish friendlier relations with the Soviet Union than

the Neutrality Pact. Field-Marshal Sugiyama expressed himself in the same spirit, but even more specifically.

According to rumours, a group influential in court circles, including Court Minister Matsudaira, also actively supported preserving and strengthening relations with the USSR. So did a significant proportion of Japanese naval officers, who felt that Japan's fate was currently being decided on the Pacific Ocean, not the Asian mainland. The two biggest firms in Japan, Mitsubishi and Mitsui, also supported the idea of neutral relations with the Soviet Union. Moreover, there were rumours that Prime Minister Tojo had somewhat strengthened his political position throughout 1943 by rejecting the idea of action against the Soviet Union. In the early part of the Soviet–German war he believed firmly that a rapid Soviet defeat was inevitable, and cherished the idea of profiting by it. But, Malik wrote, during 1943 he finally became convinced that this idea was perverse, rejected it, and by so doing won prestige for himself and his Cabinet in the eyes of the more cautious and very influential 'moderate' political camp.[3]

The Japanese press invariably emphasised that relations with the Soviet Union were firmly based on the Neutrality Pact. They usually stressed this particularly when castigating the so-called 'intrigues and efforts by the USA and England to disrupt neutral Soviet–Japanese relations, make the USSR denounce its neutrality treaty with Japan, and act jointly with them against Japan'. In doing so, the press took obvious satisfaction in claiming hopefully that 'their efforts have failed, because Prime Minister Stalin analyses the situation in the Pacific penetratingly, and sets a high value on his present relationship with Japan'.[4]

Official treatment of Japanese–Soviet relations also changed qualitatively. Throughout the 2 preceding years the basic theme of official statements at Japanese parliamentary sessions had been the one-sided formula that neutral relations would be maintained as long as the Soviet Union observed the Neutrality Pact. As late as the 81st session in early 1943, the then Foreign Minister Tani said the relations would not change, since the Soviet Union would adhere to the Neutrality Pact, and continued 'I assume that the Soviet Union will remain faithful to the Neutrality Pact for its duration.'

All these statements created a superficial impression that the Japanese thought the Soviet Union had more interest in maintaining the Neutrality Pact than Japan, which adhered to it only as long as the Soviet Union did so. However, this swashbuckling tone changed substantially at the beginning of 1944, and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu's statement at the 84th session of Parliament, in January 1944, already sounded rather different. He said:

> We are applying our efforts to further extension of friendship and goodwill with all neutral countries, both far and near. Thus even with

> Soviet Russia we also firmly adhere to neutral relations, which have not been affected to the slightest degree, neither by the outbreak of the Great Oriental War, nor by any development of the war in Europe.[5]

Attacks on the USSR, common in press and propaganda in the past, ceased almost completely. The Cabinet Information Bureau often specifically warned all the press not to publish material that might annoy the Soviet Union. Japan's attention was concentrated on its titanic struggle against the USA, Britain and China for domination in the Pacific Ocean and East Asia. This totally absorbed it, and Japan's state interests were in no way served by aggravating relations with the Soviet Union at that stage. On the contrary, the Japanese now made every effort to underline their 'friendly intentions', reinforce neutral relations and ensure quiet on their northern frontiers, and even dropped unofficial hints about their wish to convert the Neutrality Pact into a non-aggression treaty. Twice officially and twice semi-officially, they offered to send a special high-level mission to Moscow, and in the latter instances both Field-Marshal Sugiyama and former Prime Minister Hirota declared their willingness to head it personally. The 'Northern Problem', i.e. the question of seizing the Soviet Far Eastern possessions and incorporating them into the Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere, disappeared from press and propaganda. The Japanese also showed unusual tact in explaining Communism in the light of their relations with the USSR. It was officially proclaimed in Parliament that Communism and the fight against it were one thing, but Japanese–Soviet relations quite another.

General Yamashita, the Hero of Singapore, arrived in Manchuria from the south in July 1942. Some sources suggest that he was sent to prepare the Kwantung Army for action against the USSR, and that the fall of Stalingrad was to be the signal for attack. [An alternative interpretation is that Tojo, widely known to be jealous of the reputation Yamashita had gained for his victories in Malaya and Singapore, sent him to Manchuria, where he would be out of the limelight precisely because no attack on the USSR was contemplated. Given the other evidence that Japan did not intend to attack in Manchuria, and that Yamashita received command not of the entire Kwantung Army, but only of its subordinate 1st Area Army, this interpretation seems more credible. It is further supported by the fact that in July 1944, almost immediately after Tojo's fall from power, Yamashita was transferred to the Philippines, where American invasion was imminent. – G.J.].

The Red Army's victories in the west undoubtedly strengthened the USSR's position on its eastern frontiers too, and buried Japanese plans for attack. The Japanese military became more restrained, and a sobering-up process was visible. For Japan the Soviet Union now became a 'diplomatic ventilator' that it sought to extend, improve, and, if possible, utilise to reinforce its domestic political and international position. Japan's military

situation was becoming ever more difficult, as Allied blows increased. That Germany was doomed was becoming obvious. Japan could now count only on its own forces for its war against the USA and Britain. To make war on the USSR not only would not help Japan one iota, but quite the opposite, would make its position more difficult than ever, and undoubtedly accelerate the approach of the fatal denouement. Malik concluded that for Japan to add to its enemies and, moreover, to throw down the gauntlet to the Soviet Union, was not only senseless but extremely dangerous;[6] hence its intensified desire 'to be friends' with the Soviet Union.

From new developments in that respect the following may be noted.

The Japanese finally decided to fulfil their promise to abolish the Northern Sakhalin concessions and also that, in terms of what Shigemitsu called the 'great line' (i.e. winning the Pacific war), it made sense to extend the fisheries convention on terms not entirely profitable to themselves. The press emphasised that the spirit of these agreements, signed on 30 March 1944, must be supported and extended. The Japanese very much wanted the Soviet Union to forget all, or at least much, of what they had said, written or stated officially in 1941 and 1942. Miyakawa, Japanese Counsellor in Moscow, said in a conversation with Malik, 'like it or not, we Japanese always feel closer to you than to any other Western people'.

Vice-Minister Matsumoto made a no less friendly gesture. On 27 March 1944, while Malik was breakfasting with him, he answered Malik's comment on the current spring weather with 'that is the result of rapprochement and closer relations with the North'. A certain Dr Fujisawa, who described himself as a 'friend of the USSR', argued at length in a recent conversation with Embassy staff that there was 'commonality of religion' and even 'commonality of race' between the Russians and the Japanese. They must therefore, he concluded, live forever in peace and friendship.

The idea was put forward that both countries should remember how Russo-Japanese relations had developed after the Russo-Japanese war, from the Portsmouth peace of 1905 to the treaty of alliance of 1916. The question was directly put whether the Soviet Union's advance in Europe should not only go unimpeded, but so quiet a situation should be created in the Far East that it would not need to look over its shoulder while it was advancing westwards. In January 1944 one newspaper wrote 'Japan has no grounds to object to the Soviet Union's interest in European politics. So that Soviet intentions are aimed exclusively at Europe, an atmosphere must be created in the Far East that would not distract Soviet attention.'[7]

A desire was expressed to regularise Soviet–Japanese relations for 10–20 years. This, the Japanese felt, was needed not only to secure the Soviet Union's position, but to enable Japan to accomplish its 'sacred task' of victory over America and Britain and 'liberation' of East Asia. Japan and the USSR, the Japanese said, must mutually secure the safety of their

rears. Hints were dropped about the desirability of establishing diplomatic relations between the USSR's Russian Republic and Manchukuo. Changes in the Soviet Constitution, broadening the rights of constituent Republics, were very favourably received in Japan, as somehow intensifying the USSR's differences with the Anglo-Americans.

In a conversation with Malik, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu more than once emphasised his intention to develop and strengthen good-neighbourly and friendly relations with the Soviet Union, in accordance with the bases of Japanese foreign policy which he outlined at the 84th session of Parliament on 21 January 1944. Shigemitsu also pointed out that development of friendly relations with Japan's two great neighbours, the Soviet Union and China, was the foundation of foundations of Japan's policy. He gave assurances that Japan's relations with Germany never to any degree affected or influenced Japanese–Soviet relations, and constantly argued at length the need for mutual understanding and mutual trust between the USSR and Japan. He did so again in conversation with Malik on 15 June 1944, just before Malik left for the Soviet Union. 'It is my profound conviction', he said, 'that neighbouring countries must always have good-neighbourly and friendly relations. This is not only natural, it is the main thing. . . . My sincere desire and aspiration is simply to apply all my efforts to develop and strengthen the good-neighbourly relations of the two neighbouring countries, Japan and the Soviet Union.'

He went on to dilate at length and in detail about his work on Japanese–Soviet relations as part of the 'great line', and expressed satisfaction that the concessions and fisheries questions had been resolved. He again stressed Japan's desire to negotiate on all other questions that had arisen since conclusion of the Neutrality Pact (e.g. a trade treaty, and redemarcation of the Soviet–Manchukuo frontier). He assured Malik that no external influences, including those of Japanese extremists, were having any effect on Japan's foreign policy, and that its policy towards the Soviet Union was firmly decided and established. Then he spoke of the desirability of preventing any, even tiny, complications in bilateral relations (he had in mind here Soviet measures taken in May–June 1944 affecting Japan's Consulate in Vladivostok). And he gave assurance that he would now treat all Soviet officials in Japan or territories under its control as subjects of a friendly country, and in an appropriately friendly way. Shigemitsu also asserted that since becoming Foreign Minister he had not encountered great resistance to his policy. In the past there had been great differences between government policy and the view of various political circles, especially the military, but now there was none of this.[8]

In internal politics also there was a noticeable increase in efforts to maintain normal diplomatic relations. The extremists, particularly Seigo Nakano, who supported unconditional alliance with Germany and joint military operations against the USSR, became politically insignificant. The political role of the 'moderates' – supporters of a cautious, restrained,

policy, and of careful weighing of all the pros and cons before resolving a problem as important as Soviet–Japanese relations – was increasing. Malik concluded that, as Allied strikes against Japan increased, so would the Japanese undoubtedly be forced to become ever more 'gentlemanly and polite' towards the USSR.

This, however, did not mean that Japan was at present prepared to take any steps that would downgrade its prestige. While Japan still did not consider itself beaten, while it still possessed real forces, it tried and would try to speak to the Soviet Union in the language of an equal, preserving its interests to the maximum, and refraining from making any political concessions.

Japan understood and took into account, Malik continued, that currently the Soviet Union had no interest in aggravating relations with Japan, much less opening a Far Eastern front. This enabled Japan to sustain an independent policy and a certain degree of firmness, and make no unduly large political concessions.

Japan also assumed that the Soviet Union was the only great power that could go to peace negotiations as soon as the war ended, not as Japan's proclaimed enemy, but as its neutral neighbour. Japan also understood the extreme importance to itself of preserving this Soviet status. Moreover, as already noted, the Japanese government had frequently emphasised indirectly that only the Soviet Union could emerge in future as a weighty mediator between Japan and its Anglo-American antagonists. All this *compels* (Malik's emphasis – B.S.) Japan to maintain normal neighbourly relations with the USSR, to try, at least on the surface, to strengthen those relations, and even to make some concessions.[9]

In this period, Malik noted, the following statements had become more widespread in the press: The Soviet Union should be seen not as a Communist state but as a great Slav state. A one-sided approach to it as only a Communist state hindered understanding of it, its role, place and significance in international relations. It must be seen as a great Slav state fighting for its age-old hopes and ideals, for its sphere of influence in Europe, as a decisive force opposing US and British aspirations to world domination. Japan, too, was fighting Anglo-American world hegemony, and this gave Japanese–Soviet relations special significance.

The *Kokusai Gurafu* newspaper put the question of Soviet–Japanese relations prominently and precisely.

> When we view the Soviet Union's real strength as displayed during the present war, without linkage to Communist principles, but from a specific viewpoint, namely that of the USSR's struggle for the existence of a Slavic state, it is easy to see that the USSR has enormous specific weight in the system of resistance to Anglo-American hegemony.
>
> It would be wrong to assume from the fact that the Soviet Union

> receives arms from Britain and America to fight the Germans, that the USSR's foreign policy follows Britain and America.... Such a view makes for totally incorrect understanding of the Soviet Union's real strength. It is also wrong to view the Soviet Union exclusively from the viewpoint of Communist principles, as this provides no possibility for explaining the real essence of the present-day Soviet Union. In this war the Soviet Union has clearly realised its state's real strength. In no way can it be thought that the USSR is cooperating with America and Britain to establish their world hegemony.
>
> Among the countries in neutral relations with Japan, the Soviet Union is the only country with real strength. Consequently, Japanese–Soviet relations must emerge as an important factor in our foreign policy for the present and future.[10]

Malik continued that undoubtedly this article, like every other such article on political themes in Japan, had undergone very strict military censorship, and been sanctioned by the appropriate government organs. Consequently, *attempts are being made through the press to provide 'theoretical' underpinning for the policy of playing along with the USSR* (Malik's emphasis – B.S.). The leitmotif of these 'theories' was the old postulate about irreconcilable differences between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-American bloc. The Japanese relied greatly on these differences.[11]

The Soviet Embassy felt that the Japanese government nevertheless preferred to abstain from widespread comment on Japanese–Soviet relations. Articles such as that cited above, like the utterances of governmental figures, appeared only in serious limited-circulation journals, not popular periodicals. For example, an interview by Foreign Minister Shigemitsu on 31 May 1944, in which he commented on (US Vice-President) Wallace's visit to Chungking, including in the light of Japanese–Soviet relations, was broadcast widely to abroad, but not published at all in the press. Shigemitsu emphasised

> Wallace may perhaps try to implement plans to detach the USSR from Japan. However, Japan, a neighbour of the Soviet Union, is strengthening its relations with the USSR, in opposition to the existing relations between the USSR and the Anglo-American countries.... It does not matter what Wallace does to try to smash Japanese–Soviet economic relations, as none of it will achieve its objective.[12]

The reason for abstention from widespread comment on Japanese–Soviet relations was apparently the Japanese government's uncertainty about the USSR's position, especially in the light of its mutual relations with the USA and Britain, and consequent fear of attracting particular public interest to this question.

The Allies' landing in Northern France in June 1944 did not necessitate

any substantial changes in Japan's policy towards the Soviet Union for the time being. There was some evidence that the Germanophiles, i.e. extremists, tried to raise their voices about the need to give Germany active help by pressuring the Soviet Union. However, during the past year the extremist group had lost both its authority and its leader and ideologue, Seigo Nakano, and had no weight. Moreover, the government took steps to shut excessively Germanophile mouths.

On 7 June 1944, the day the communiques on the Allied landings in France were published, the Cabinet Information Bureau issued a strictly secret order to the press to publish no material linking the Second Front issue to any extent to Soviet–Japanese relations. It was also significant that on 10 June the Domei agency considered it expedient and timely to broadcast for abroad a commentary by its diplomatic commentator, Kojo Murayama, on the theme that 'Japanese–Soviet relations must be re-examined on the basis of Japan's position in world politics'. Murayama argued that

> the fundamentals of the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact must also be understood in connection with Japan's position in world politics. . . . The Greater East Asia War pursues the aim of creating a new world order in opposition to the old world order of Anglo-Saxon world hegemony . . . the Soviet Union has long been opposed to the old world order. . . . The conflict between the Anglo-Americans and Soviet Union on questions of world politics was the world's chief problem in the period after the First World War. . . . According to Stalin's statements, from the French Revolution to the last Chinese national revolution, the British bourgeoisie constantly played the leader's role among the world's oppressors of the movement to liberate mankind. According to Stalin, the British bourgeoisie still holds that position.
>
> Anglo-American–Soviet cooperation is based on mutual benefit. The Soviet Union is absolutely hostile to the world order supported by Britain and America. . . . The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact is based not only on mutual benefit, but also on common positions opposed to the existing world order of Anglo-American hegemony. . . . The fundamental ideological contradictions between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Americans will never be weakened by Anglo-American diplomatic chatter.
>
> As yet Soviet diplomacy's fundamental direction has not been disclosed in substance. . . . This lack of substance in Moscow's diplomacy is a temporary phenomenon. . . . Defining precisely the essential character of the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact in accordance with both countries' positions on world policy questions will contribute greatly to forming both countries' policy in the face of future international events.[13]

To conclude this part of our research, we should note that Japanese naval circles, growing in role and influence in those years, firmly supported 'a courteous attitude by Japan towards the Soviet Union and China'. Also standing for strengthening normal and neutral relations with the Soviet Union was an influential group at Court, headed by 'pro-British' Court Minister Matsudaira. This group also stood for seeking ways to take Japan out of the war, conceding that it might lose the war, but must try for an honourable peace.

Several sources indicate that the overwhelming majority of junior Foreign Ministry officials also thought Japan's relations with the Soviet Union must be strengthened, and even expressed dissatisfaction with Shigemitsu as insufficiently active in that direction. They approved the conclusion of the 30 March 1944 agreements, and inclined to believe *that Japan can and must always live in amity with Russia* (Malik's emphasis – B.S.). The people also welcomed the agreements. In a recent discussion with Soviet Trade Mission staff in Tokyo a representative of the 'Okura' firm had said: 'We very much feared that the Soviet Union would go to war with us. In that event Japan's position would be simply awful. We are most happy at conclusion of the 30 March agreements.'[14]

The Japanese well, quite benignly and, most important, openly observed 13 April 1944 as the third anniversary of signing of the Neutrality Pact, which they had not done in previous years. On that day Shigemitsu hosted a breakfast for the Soviet Ambassador and Embassy staff. The press emphasised the immutability of neutrality, the Neutrality Pact's special meaning for Japan at that stage of the war, indicated that the pact could be the future basis of Japanese–Soviet relations, playing a world-wide role, and declaimed for improving good-neighbourly relations, establishing peace throughout the world, mutual trust and a spirit of respect towards the Neutrality Pact.

The Japanese press also often noted that, for better or worse, the USSR was the only country with which Japan could conduct diplomatic negotiations. In a conversation with Malik, Tatekawa said 'I stand firmly for Japanese–Soviet neutrality, for the strength of the Neutrality Pact, and want only that the Soviet Union does not threaten Japan and thrust eastward. . . . We are for the Soviet Union not to be too strong, and therefore dangerous to Japan, but not for it to lose the war.'[15]

At the same time, Japan was uneasy at its deteriorating military position and Germany's increasing defeats, and also anxious and uncertain about the USSR's position, especially in its relations with the USA and Britain. So not only did it not reduce, but, on the contrary, it took steps to reinforce the Kwantung Army in Manchuria and train Manchu, Chinese and Mongol military reservists. The Kwantung Army was maintained as before at 1–1.2 million, and trained local reserves were estimated at around 800,000. Thus Japan disposed of impressive forces of up to 2 million in Manchuria. Recently the Japanese had several times redeployed major

elements of the Kwantung Army, of the order of 60,000–100,000 men, to North and Central China, and to Burma. However, this deduction was rapidly made up by new contingents of reservists.

Malik conceded the possibility that, in a hopeless situation, seeing defeat by the Anglo-Americans as inevitable, fearing military and international isolation, and trying to prolong the agony of its German ally, Japan might decide upon a desperate attack on the USSR. But it was clear to any right-thinking person that this not only would not improve Japan's military situation, but on the contrary, would immediately and acutely worsen it. Such adventurism would perhaps be possible only as a consequence of some unexpected military-fascist coup, for which the extremist and fascist-inclined circles in the military currently lacked both strength and abilities. The so-called 'moderate camp' was firmly playing the decisive role in politics, and was more inclined to seek a compromise way out than to initiate new and hazardous adventures.

Opinions were being expressed that cooperation with the USSR was possible on the following basis:

1 Cooperation against the USA and Britain, relying on the Japanese Navy.
2 If the USSR were to clash in Europe with the USA and Britain (which Japan was almost convinced would happen), it would need calm in the Far East and stability in its relations with Japan.
3 In Europe the USSR was waging a political and organisational offensive against the USA and England. This should not be obstructed.
4 Russia and Japan had a mutual interest in not allowing a third partner, the USA, into the Far East.
5 The Japanese also advanced the idea of an alliance of the three great powers that are masters of the Far East, Russia, Japan and China, to ensure peace and territorial inviolability in the Pacific Ocean basin.
6 The Japanese advance the idea of the 'status quo' in the Pacific, i.e. Japan's retention of all it managed to seize in the first stage of the war.

Summing up, Malik reached the following conclusions:

1 Japan understood precisely that preserving normal relations with the USSR, even improving them with a few concessions, was necessary for somewhat strengthening its Pacific position in its fight against the USA and Britain. The Japanese also assumed that this could be useful in enabling Japan to 'sneak out' of the war. It had become absolutely clear that the Soviet Union was a mighty force. All plans for defeating it had failed, so Japan's interests currently required normal relations with it to be maintained.
2 The Japanese government was trying to stabilise its relations with the USSR not by serious political or substantial economic concessions, but

by concluding an 'ideological' bloc, under the slogan of fighting the threat of Anglo-American world hegemony. This devious formula also untied Japan's hands vis-a-vis its Nazi ally. Judging the differences between the USSR and the Anglo-American camp as irreconcilable, and Soviet collaboration with them as temporary, relative, and determined by the previous joint struggle against Germany, the Japanese government undoubtedly dreamt of exploiting these differences in its own interests. It could, however, not be excluded that as Japan's military and international situation deteriorated, it would seek to improve relations with the Soviet Union by making more substantial concessions.

3 Japan was constructing its relations with the Soviet Union on the basis that it was not defeated, and not compelled to seek help. Japan's possession of major, unexpended military forces gave its government grounds to consider itself equal and adequately strong in relations with the USSR. It would therefore not be entirely correct to assume that Japan was already prepared to cajole, concede or surrender prestige, though it would have to do so in future. Japanese diplomats and others often currently indulged in flattery of the USSR bordering on sycophancy. This, however, in no way vouchsafed any desire as yet for Japan to embark on concessions unprofitable to itself, or to cajole; it rather expressed the methods of cunning oriental, especially Japanese, diplomacy, built on insincerity, flattery, deceit and treachery (Malik's personal opinion – B.S.).

4 The threat of Japanese military action against the USSR had been removed for the present. The further prospects of the international and military situations in Europe and the Pacific provided no grounds for assuming that Japan would do anything so desperate as attack the USSR. The present Japanese government would not do so. It seemed to him that at present Soviet relations with Japan should continue to be based on restraint, caution and firmness, preventing any aggravation of relations on major or minor matters without special need, attentively watching development of the Pacific war, and Japan's war policy.

It would perhaps even be expedient to give the Japanese the impression that their offer to negotiate on frontier and trade questions, especially the latter, was being carefully studied. In diplomatic exchanges, the Soviets should maintain the outward respectfulness and politeness that impress them, sustain their hope and desire for future reinforcement of relations, and not reject this idea in conversations. The Embassy could and should somewhat broaden its contacts with official and unofficial circles. The USSR should confine its main negotiations with the USA and Britain to European questions, separate from negotiations with them and China on matters affecting Japan, as this had a very soothing effect on Japan.[16]

The Soviet–German war and Japan

Japan adhered as before to non-intervention in the Soviet–German war, and limited itself to ideological-propagandistic help to Germany. The worsening of Japan's war situation in the year just ended diminished indirect military assistance to Berlin. Japan was on the defensive, had lost the initiative, and could influence the war in Europe even less than in previous years, although it continued to divert powerful American and British military forces onto itself.

There were also changes in Japan's position, and in its assessment of Germany's military situation. The hopes of a German 'summer revenge', expressed by Japanese press, propaganda and even official representatives at the beginning of 1943, had not been fulfilled. They were replaced, especially towards the end of the year, by disillusionment with Germany, open acknowledgment of the unparalleled difficulties it was experiencing, and private but ever franker admissions that Germany was doomed.

As already mentioned, the Japanese press continued to publish news of the Soviet–German war from German sources only. However, in 1943–4 the Japanese, reluctantly, but more specifically and openly, acknowledged the Soviet state's strength and its people's high martial spirit. As early as March 1943 Lieutenant-General Kenriko Sato, Head of the Military Affairs Department, acknowledged the Soviet soldier's strength, endurance and patriotism with the words 'People with such zeal to defend their country are strong, whoever they are.'

Then the press wrote that even Goebbels admitted that 'Germany rather underestimated all the Soviet Union's armed forces' (*Nippon Sangyo Keizai*, 16 March 1943). Colonel Sasaki, a former Assistant Military Attache to the USSR, observed that the Soviet people were strongly indoctrinated in the spirit of defence, devoted to their government, and the Soviet order was strong.

The Japanese attributed Germany's defeat at Stalingrad to the proximity of the industrial Urals, converted into an armaments base, and the historical exalted spirit of the Russian people, which rose to defend its fatherland during every enemy invasion. The press attempted to explain the German retreat after Stalingrad by 'the cold of winter' and 'insecure communications', in chorus with the Germans' oft-repeated 'strategic withdrawal', 'elastic defence', 'shortening the front line', etc. It many times invoked insuperable difficulties for the Soviet Union, which, it alleged, had thrown its last reserves into Stalingrad and the winter offensive. Alongside these, hope was expressed that after the thaw and mud of spring, the German Army would again launch tank battles with air support unprecedented in history. In the spring of 1943 Germany was mobilising the total might of itself and all Europe, and would launch an offensive of unprecedented scale to decide the European war. As early as 15 February 1943 Major Hiraishi, representing Imperial GHQ, stated

> we are somewhat apprehensive about Russia's winter offensive. However, by virtue of the Axis' brilliant fighting and effective defence, Russia has exhausted its fighting power, and possesses almost no more reserves. In the words of Lieutenant-General Banzai (recently returned from Berlin, where he was Military Attache) Germany and Italy are fighting with overwhelming confidence. We have no cause for anxiety about the future of the European war. Although the Germans have abandoned southern Russia, they are firmly holding its northern and central parts, including Kharkov. Our firm belief in final Axis victory remains unshaken.

The 'serious' Japanese press displayed a certain restraint and caution over the second German recapture of Kharkov, but the pro-Nazi Teichi Muto in the *Yomiuri Hochi* of 3 March 1943 gleefully wrote 'for the Soviet Union the future reconquest of Ukraine now remains only a dream'. Incidentally, at the start of 1943 the Japanese press often emphasised that Germany simply could not abandon Ukraine, because of its wheat, other foods and manganese that Germany badly needed.

The Japanese press marked the second anniversary of the outbreak of the Soviet–German war with restraint, without the previous anti-Soviet noises, and, most unusually, by abstaining from prediction or prognosis. However, the press had to admit that all Hitler's plans had failed, and Germany had miscalculated; and on 30 June the *Asahi* noted for the first time that a special feature of 1943 was a Soviet summer offensive.

The German defeats at Kursk and Orel were described in pro-German tones, and it was contended that 'the Germans are withdrawing to fulfil strategic operations, in complete order, and even without any anxiety about the Soviet forces on their flanks.'

Although the Japanese had predicted that the German summer offensive's fundamental task would be to destroy the Soviet armed forces on a narrow front, they were later forced into frequent admissions that if events unfolded equally unfavourably for Germany in the winter of 1943–4, then 'Germany's situation will become uncontrollable'. Alongside this, the press consoled the Germans by asserting, though with no particularly hostile digs at the USSR, that the Soviet Union was incurring great losses in attacking, throwing its last reserves into battle, experiencing great difficulties, especially in food production, its military-industrial base was now far from the front line, lines of communication were stretched, etc. However, all these 'weak sides' of the USSR were adduced in calmer tones, without the former attacks and sneering; and it was especially noteworthy that even the 'possibility', let alone the 'inevitability' of Soviet defeat was never once mentioned.

After this, for almost the entire duration of the Red Army's offensive, the Japanese press confined itself to brief communiques about German abandonment of major points, and expressions of confidence in German

ability to hold the 'Dnieper Line'. However, occasional press commentaries acknowledged the Red Army's enormous attacking strength, expressed apprehensions about Germany's situation, and described the Wehrmacht's position as difficult, though still expressing confidence in Germany's strength, the stability of its rear and the invulnerability of 'Fortress Europe'.

Toyoichi Nakamura, Head of the Japanese Legation in Finland, gave this assessment of the war situation on the Eastern Front in the journal *Keikoku* (State Administration) for February 1944: 'The Soviet Union's military forces, which seemed to have been totally destroyed, repaired themselves after a temporary blow, and launched a decisive offensive against Germany. The assumption that the Soviet Union would collapse in the very first days of the war proved a total miscalculation.'

Thus, Malik wrote, had Japanese views changed during 1943.[17]

The most characteristic feature, the 'novelty of 1943', in Japan's attitude towards the Soviet–German war was its growing aspiration (including actual efforts) to 'mediate peace' between the USSR and Germany. There were rumours that in summer 1943 Lieutenant-General Banzai was summoned from Berlin, and Counsellor Morishima from Moscow, to report on the course and prospects of the Soviet–German war, and that both declared it absolutely inadvisable for Japan to get involved.

Unambiguous hints of willingness to mediate were dropped by a number of prominent Japanese in private conversations with Soviet Embassy staff in Tokyo. Later this took the shape of proposals and persistent efforts to send a 'high-level' mission to Moscow. Rumours of Soviet–German 'peace negotiations' were frequently played up in the press. Shigemitsu himself facilitated the appearance three times in the press of items, immediately broadcast to abroad, to the effect that Malik had visited him immediately after he, Shigemitsu, had spoken with German Ambassador Stahmer. Among the diplomatic corps in Tokyo this gave rise to rumours of Japanese 'peace mediation' between the USSR and Germany.

Adyrkhayev, then a translator at the Soviet Embassy, told this author that in 1943 the Japanese showed unusually increased interest in our film 'Stalingrad', which the Embassy screened over ten times to large Japanese audiences. On 27 September 1943 it was seen by over 200 Foreign Ministry staff, immediately after an official banquet with the Germans celebrating the third anniversary of signing of the Tripartite Pact. The Red Army's major successes of 1943 and January–June 1944 forced the Japanese to evaluate facts more soberly, and cease building castles in the air.

The 'problem of the North', role of Manchukuo, the Kwantung Army

As mentioned above, the notorious 'problem of the North', raised by the Japanese in 1941–2, had almost completely disappeared from Japanese

publications by the end of 1943. But through inertia two events connected with it were commemorated at the beginning of that year. The first was a meeting called by the Naval Youth League, with Tanakamaru and Sintaro Shindo representing the 'Nichiro' company, in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese Gunji's expedition to Kamchatka, the newspapers emphasising the historical link between the expedition and the 'Greater East Asia War'.

At the end of March 1943 Tokyo Prefecture Administration and the 'Association for Aid to the Throne' jointly arranged a meeting in memory of Rinzo Mamiya, explorer of Sakhalin, by whose name the Japanese still today call the Tartary Strait. Its purpose was 'to elevate Japan's fighting spirit for advancing to the north in war conditions'. Among those present were prominent figures most hostile to the USSR, such as the 'Anti-Comintern' Viscount Ogasawara (President of the Japanese–German Friendship Society), Count Hayashi, and another well-known enemy of the USSR, General Araki, President of the 'All-Japan Society for Conquering the North'.

However, these events were merely echoes of past Japanese right-wing propaganda, rather than a beginning or serious continuation of it. Afterwards the 'problem of the North' ceased to be raised in the periodical press. Only the idea that Manchukuo had assumed and was fulfilling the duty of protecting the north, thereby enabling Japan to concentrate all its spiritual and material forces on the war in the Pacific, was unremittingly emphasised. Nevertheless, an anthology of lectures by the late General Hayashi (former President of the 'East Asia Development League'), entitled 'On the Structure of the South Seas Region', should be noted. He expressed the intention to include Manchuria in the Japanese sphere of influence, seize the Soviet Maritime Province, Northern Sakhalin and Kamchatka, and spread Japanese influence from Inner Mongolia to Tibet and India. The book, published in October 1943, included Hayashi's writings and lectures from previous years.

The press periodically devoted attention to the Kwantung Army, which it called 'the Guardian of the North', though without the hostile digs at the USSR usual in the past. It had been converted into the main depot for Japan to train and retrain military reserves. Several times during 1943 the Japanese redeployed combat units from it to the South. A Kwantung Army spokesman stated 'The Kwantung Army now occupies the same position as the German Army occupied in East Prussia during the First World War. The utility of that Army was manifested by subsequent events.'

Now, because of the changed military and international situations, the Kwantung Army was pinned to the Soviet–Manchurian border by the strong Soviet army in the Far East. However, in private conversations, Japanese said 'We know that in the Soviet Far East there were also moments when a significant part of the forces was redeployed to the Soviet–German front. But Japan immutably and steadfastly observed neutrality.'

Judging from the Japanese press, a certain restraint was also observable in White Russian-emigre anti-Soviet propaganda. As for the fight against Communism, the Japanese Fascists had bitterly but openly to admit that there was no 'anti-Communist campaign' in Europe. There was just a war of the USSR against Germany, and of Germany and Italy against the USA and Britain, and 'ungrateful England is reluctant to admit that Germany is saving it from Communism'. However unpalatable it might be for Hitler to hear, it was officially proclaimed in Parliament that Communism was no danger to Japan, and that Communism and Japanese–Soviet relations were different questions. Aoki, Minister for East Asian Affairs, spoke of Japan's immutable aspiration to eradicate Communist activity in the Co-Prosperity Sphere, by the joint efforts of all its countries. The Japanese did not comment on the dissolution of the Comintern. They were clearly perplexed by it. An important trump card for anti-Soviet activity had been knocked from their hands. Contrary to custom, the anniversary of the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact was not celebrated in 1943. In North China the 'anti-Comintern committee' was replaced by the 'North China Commission for Fighting Communism'. In Malik's words, the notorious trial of the German spy, Richard Sorge, (who we now know was a Soviet agent – B.S.), instead of the expected bombastic 'trial of Comintern agents' was modestly renamed 'the Sorge trial', conducted behind closed doors and with no clamour in the press.[18]

Even in speeches by Wang Ching-Wei, Japan's puppet in Nanking, officially described at the 81st session of Parliament as entrusted with the task of fighting Communism in China, the 'fight with Communism' was now rarely mentioned. In commentaries on the November 1943 Treaty of alliance between Japan and Nanking, not a word was said about Communism. There was only an oblique mention of the 'three principles of Konoe' in Japan's policy towards China.

Further intensification of Japanese activity was noticeable in use of resources and in industrial development of Korea and Manchukuo, as components of 'the nucleus of the Co-Prosperity Sphere' and as Japan's safest areas for waging war in the Pacific. Statements by General Koiso indicated that Japan intended to turn Korea into its 'Quartermaster Base', and General Minami, a former Governor-General of Korea, named it the 'arsenal and storehouse for the East Asia War'. In 1943 the Japanese devised a wide-ranging plan for self-sufficiency in food, based on close collaboration with Manchukuo. In 1944, when part of Tokyo's population was being evacuated, Japanese were recommended to resettle in Manchukuo, safe from threat of air raids.

At the 84th Parliamentary session (December 1943) Tojo, speaking as War Minister, for the first time divided his customary single 'defence of the North' formula into two concepts, 'the situation on the Soviet–Manchurian frontier (calm, and defence stable)' and 'the situation in the Northern part of the Pacific (tense, the enemy preparing an attack on Japan)'.

Thus, Malik concluded, the main levers and resources on the continent for preparation and propaganda against the USSR – the Kwantung Army, the idea of seizing the 'north', activity of the White emigres, the struggle against Communism, etc – were at least superficially less targeted on the USSR in this period. And the rapid development of industry and agriculture in Korea and Manchuria testified that the Japanese apparently did not anticipate any great military threat to them from the USSR, but considered them safe deep-rear areas.[19]

Soviet–Japanese relations and the USA

Japan continued to follow development of Anglo-Soviet–American relations with unflagging attention. The mere thought of a mighty Anglo-Soviet–American bloc directed against Japan was nightmarish. Hence Japan's desire to prevent its creation.

Both officially and unofficially Japan attentively, tensely and unwaveringly followed every event in the development of Anglo-Soviet–American relations. In so doing it pursued an idea no less important to itself, of exploiting differences between the USSR and the Anglo-Americans to stabilise its own international position. Japan reckoned, and hoped, that as Germany weakened, and especially after its defeat, an ever-increasing number of problems would mature in Europe, inevitably increasing differences between the USSR and the Anglo-Saxons. This would help stabilise Japanese–Soviet relations in the Far East, and at the same time prevent the USA and Britain from concentrating all their forces and attention on the war against Japan. This simple assessment was logical in its way. Japan considered that Britain was in the twilight of its existence, and that the principal inter-Allied differences would be between the USSR and the USA. The future course of the world war depended on those countries' relations with the Axis countries. Japan's cherished dream was to bring the Soviet Union into collision with the USA and Britain in Europe and South Asia ('let the USSR advance to the Persian Gulf'), and prevent Anglo-Soviet–American collaboration in the Far East.

During this period, Japanese press and propaganda discussed particularly broadly and systematically the problem of relations between the USSR and the Anglo-Americans, naturally in a way that suited Japan. The lion's share of press items about the Soviet Union over the 2 years dealt with its relations with the USA and Britain. The leitmotif of all press and propaganda pieces was emphasis that the USSR's relations with them were temporary and unstable. There were insurmountable political, ideological and other irreconcilable contradictions, and no unity of aims or community of interests apart from the joint struggle against Nazi Germany. Hence it was certain that the coalition would disintegrate after Germany was defeated.

The Japanese constantly picked on and broadly exaggerated any fact or

event in Anglo-Soviet–American relations that they could treat as indicating a 'crack', 'differences', 'disagreements' or 'a gulf' between the USSR and USA–Britain. What worried the Japanese most was the 'Far East bases problem', i.e. the possibility that the USSR would provide its Anglo-American allies with air and naval bases in Siberia and the Far East. This was literally a Japanese idée-fixe; the thought never left them that the USA and Britain might succeed in drawing the USSR into the war against Japan. However, the Japanese unceasingly emphasised the independence of the USSR's foreign policy, and its meticulous observance of the Neutrality Pact. Thus, for example, the Foreign Ministry's mouthpiece, the *Nippon Times*, wrote on 14 July 1943:

> For the purposes of opposing Japan and weakening its thrust, the USA, from the very beginning of the war in the Pacific, has tried to drag the Soviets into it, to that end using threats, pleas, conspiracies and intrigues, and even trying to lease Soviet bases in East Asia. However, the Soviet Union shows no sign of acquiescing, despite all the USA's crafty intrigues and promises. The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact will be strictly observed.

The *Tokyo Shimbun*, an organ of the Japanese Information Bureau, wrote on 20 March 1943 that 'we do not think the realist Stalin has succumbed to such intrigues. . . . The USA's hopes of using the Soviet Union on the East Asian front have no chance of success.'

Nakamura, the Japanese envoy in Finland, wrote in the February 1944 issue of *Keikoku*:

> England and the USA are trying in every way to get the Soviet Union to provide them with bases for air raids on Japan. However, peaceful relations continue between the Soviet Union and Japan, based on the neutrality treaty. Up to now we have not one instance of Soviet violation of this treaty. The Soviet Union did not take part in the Quebec and Cairo conferences, and at Teheran discussed mainly European questions with the USA and England. They cannot persuade the Soviet Union to agree to their demands for bases for air raids on Japan. . . . Despite provocative Anglo-American actions, there are to this day no changes in Japan's neutral relations with the Soviet Union.

The next especially important question for the Japanese in Anglo-Soviet–American relations was the problem of the Second Front in Europe. It is reasonable to say that Japan had a very great interest in seeing this front established, counting on it to divert American and British forces and attention from the Pacific. The Japanese press literally scourged the USA and Britain for delaying the Second Front, accusing them of dastardly betrayal of their promises to the Soviet Union. In doing this, the press usually

emphasised that the Anglo-Americans' main aim was mutual exhaustion and collapse of the USSR and Germany, because they hated and feared Bolshevism no less than Nazism, and the strengthening of Soviet military and political influence in Europe frightened them no less than German domination.

The Japanese watched attentively the meetings of top Soviet representatives with those of the USA and Britain, noted British and American journeys to Moscow, and the change of Soviet ambassadors in the two countries. They gave great publicity to a tendentious speech by William Standley, US Ambassador in Moscow, and to statements by Vice-President Wallace, and articles in the American press about the USA's need to have armed forces equal in numbers and strength to the Soviet Union's, etc, etc.

They watched especially attentively and cautiously the course of the October 1943 Moscow conference of Foreign Ministers of the USSR, USA and Great Britain, initially expecting it to fail, then awaiting its outcomes with trepidation. Only after Ambassador Sato reported that the USSR would not change its policy towards Japan, did the Japanese government and ruling circles heave a sigh of relief and relax.

Judgments such as this were expressed about the Moscow conference: 'We should, of course, not underestimate the Moscow conference decisions, but also not lose sight of the existence of fundamental contradictions in the Anglo-Soviet–American camp. Germany is still strong ... And while it remains strong, the contradictions between the USSR and USA/England will not be aggravated.'[20]

The Teheran conference, an almost complete surprise to the Japanese, was received with satisfaction, because Chiang Kai-Shek did not take part, but conferred beforehand with Roosevelt and Churchill in Cairo. They were particularly relieved that Stalin did not take part in the Cairo conference.

Among other questions widely discussed by the Japanese press, in order to propagandise disagreements between the USSR and the Anglo-Saxons, were the following: the USSR has revived Panslavism, intending to extend its influence into the Balkans. It is ignoring the Atlantic Charter, and intends to hold on to the Baltic States and Poland. In no circumstances will Britain agree to recognise a policy uniting Central and Eastern European Slavdom. The USSR is dissatisfied with Mihailovich. The USA and Britain sympathise with Poland. Britain is negotiating with Turkey, with the aims of using it against the USSR and stopping Bolshevism's invasion of Europe. The USA and Britain do not want a powerful USSR. They are using the Soviets' strength against Germany, since they cannot fight Germany themselves, but at the same time they fear that a victorious USSR will become a danger to themselves. Roosevelt and the USA rejoiced at the Red Army's spring offensive, but are uneasy at its autumn-winter offensive. The USA and Britain are striving to dominate in North Africa, and that displeases the USSR. The wars of the USSR against Germany and of the USA and

Britain against Germany are two independent wars. Within the Anglo-Soviet–American bloc there are two irreconcilable ideologies. Permanent political unity is unthinkable. The USA is establishing a powerful defence against the USSR in Alaska, and squeezing the Soviets out of Sinkiang (Western China). Soviet–American relations are not eternal. Soviet and Anglo-American interests clash in West Asia, Iran, Turkey and the Balkans, and over the question of the Straits. The ideology of Bolshevism is irreconcilable with the 'principle of Service of Mammon' professed by the Anglo-Saxons. The USA and Britain want the USSR and Germany to overthrow each other; they do not want to let the Soviet Union into the Balkans, Poland or Central Europe.

The Japanese particularly relished and exaggerated the Polish problem, on the surface addressing all their hatred and hostility towards the USA and Britain, but indirectly touching the Soviet Union as well. The struggle for hegemony in Europe, the Soviet–Czechoslovak Treaty, the USSR's alleged intention to create a 'Central European Union', comprising Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and Poland, to counteract the Anglo-American plan to create a 'cordon sanitaire' hostile to the USSR, all were objects and themes of Japanese propaganda. However, during all this, Anglo-American interest in keeping the Soviet Union in the allied camp to continue the fight against Germany was particularly emphasised. So was what the Japanese called their 'flirting, flattering and courting' of the Soviet Union, such as granting the USSR membership of the Mediterranean Committee, recognition of Marshal Tito, agreement to establish the Polish–Soviet frontier along the 'Curzon Line', etc.

The press' tone in all these effusions was, as a rule, fairly restrained in regard to the Soviet Union, even stressing that it possessed enormous productive capacity, and did not particularly need American help. However, hostility towards the USSR sometimes broke through. For example, the assertion that politically Germany was fighting for the Anglo-American cause, namely the 'eradication of Bolshevism', that the USA and Britain had turned the Atlantic Charter into a mere piece of paper, and were completely ignoring small countries' interests in their desire for Soviet favour, etc. Even Shigemitsu stated, at the 82nd session of Parliament (June 1943), that for the alleged defence of three great countries, America, Britain and the Soviet Union, the Anglo-Saxons had thrown the smaller countries' interests into the dustbin.

However, such digs were the exception, not the rule. The fire was directed mainly against the USA and Britain, in full accord with Japan's desires and its foreign policy aim – a longing for the Soviet Union to be engulfed as much as possible in European problems, and to devote less attention to the Far East. In the light of this, it was notable that the notorious Kurusu, in a speech at Nagoya in October 1943, 'sympathised' with the USSR. Long-standing British tradition was to keep it bottled up in the Black Sea, and deny it access to the Mediterranean. The USA and Britain

were not establishing a Second Front because they wanted the Soviet Union and Germany to collapse simultaneously, after which they could take the most profitable positions in the post-war world.[21]

In a wide-ranging conversation with Malik on 15 June 1944, just before Malik's departure to the USSR (which attracted much attention), Shigemitsu for no apparent reason began with the theme that Britain and the USA were mortal enemies of Japan, which would never enter into any negotiations with them. However, given the Soviet government's declared willingness to mediate about dispatch to Japan of parcels for American and British prisoners of war, Japan had agreed to examine this question 'precisely because it was raised by the Soviet government and through its mediation'. This phraseology can perhaps be understood in the sense that *Japan would not be averse to examining other questions of its relations with the USA and Britain if they were put by the USSR, acting as an intermediary. In other words, Japan at present would react favourably to peace mediation by the USSR between Japan and the USA* (Malik's emphasis – B.S.). In conversations with Malik, Tatekawa and Miyakawa several times complained that in the whole world there was now no major neutral power that could mediate between the two warring camps. 'Only the Pope could mediate', Miyakawa said, 'but he's not popular now.'[22]

Sino-Soviet relations and Japan

Although Japan continued closely monitoring developments in relations between the USSR and the Nationalist government of China in Chungking, on the surface it described them less warily and uneasily than before in press and propaganda, because the Japanese assumed that Chiang Kai-Shek was becoming less dependent on the Soviet Union. After the Soviet–German war began, the Soviet Union's centre of attention shifted temporarily to Europe. Chungking took advantage of that and, relying on the USA and Britain, intensified its activity in Sinkiang, which the Japanese now viewed as an object of struggle between the USA and Chungking on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other.

The second apparent reason for Japanese restraint over Sino-Soviet relations was Japan's change of policy towards Chiang Kai-Shek. Throughout 1943–4 Japan constantly and perseveringly tried to 'win Chungking's heart', start peace negotiations with it, and attract it into so-called 'building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'; in short, to paralyse Chungking's resistance, and resolve the Chinese problem, of which even Japan had had enough. In consequence of this, Malik considered, Japan thought it sensible not to annoy either Chungking or the Soviet Union without good reason.

Among questions dealt with in the Japanese press, the following may be noted. The new Chinese Ambassador in Moscow was trying to improve Sino-Soviet relations, and to set the Soviet Union at odds with Japan. He

should not be underestimated, but it should also be remembered that Chungking was more entangled in Anglo-American nets, and rumours of its rapprochement with the Soviet Union were exaggerated. The Japanese asserted that investigation showed that there were no Soviet troops in North-West China, and that rumours to that effect were exaggerated, calculated to make the USA pay more attention to Chungking and render it more effective assistance.

The Japanese press expended much ink on a so-called 'high road' from the USA to Chungking via the USA–Canada–Alaska highway, then via Kamchatka–Siberia and Ulan Bator (first variant) or via the Persian Gulf–Iran–USSR–Sinkiang (second variant). It was also announced that an economic agreement had been signed between the USSR and China, with US participation, involving transfer to China of one-quarter of all armaments and military supplies made by the USA to the USSR. This, of course, was an obvious provocation, and the press did not comment on it.

A story was observed to the effect that the Pacific war was strengthening the spiritual links between Chiang Kai-Shek and the USSR, but that in practice both were in the same position with regard to the USA and Britain, which had invited neither of them to the Casablanca or Quebec conferences. It was even announced that the Soviet Union was supplying Chungking with oil products. Nevertheless, most attention was given to North-West China and routes connecting Sinkiang to the outside world. On 30 August 1943, the *Asahi* wrote:

> The problem of North-West China (Sinkiang) must be watched attentively. Initially this was the 'Red route' for supplying Chungking. Now Chungking is paying more attention to this route, has sent an economic mission to Sinkiang, and intends to develop it. What interests us most is not the question of North-West China's development as a base for fighting Japan, but above all the possibility that this route will be developed as a transport artery connecting Chungking to the outside world.

The Soviet Embassy had heard unofficially that Japanese political circles, especially those close to the Ministry for Armaments, believed the route was being developed, and American influence there (construction of airfields) increasing with Soviet knowledge and consent, a manifestation of the Soviet Union's covert enmity towards Japan. However, the press constantly emphasised only one theme, and that with satisfaction, that in Sinkiang the USA was squeezing the Soviets out, and even opening a Consulate, which aggravated their relations. The press once even alleged that the Soviet government had agreed to enhance development of the northwest route, and to an air route, and agreed to transport of military shipments for China across Siberia, but had categorically rejected Anglo-American capital investment in Sinkiang's mining industry. It

claimed that the Soviet government had agreed to invest capital itself, and to send experts to develop the industry.

As already noted above, Stalin's absence from the Cairo conference and Chiang Kai-Shek's absence from Teheran had a particularly soothing effect on the Japanese. In essence they did not at that stage see the problem of the USSR's relations with Chungking as touching excessively on, or capable of reflecting negatively upon, Soviet–Japanese relations. They attached more importance to Chungking's relations with the USA, and American military airfields on the Chungking government's territory.[23]

In conclusion Malik drew attention to the following hint/judgment made by Shigemitsu on 15 June 1944, just before Malik left for Moscow: Shigemitsu twice emphasised the complexity of the Chinese problem, and Japan's desire to resolve it. In so doing, he indicated that *Japan was prepared to mark and resolve the future lines for regularising the China problem jointly with the Soviet Union, taking account of the mutual interests of both countries* (Malik's emphasis – B.S.) 'and, of course, of the Chinese people's interests', Shigemitsu added.

Malik detected here a Japanese intention to try to use the China problem as one on which it could negotiate with the Soviet Union, not stopping short of even substantial concessions, of course at China's expense. Apparently Japan wanted to repeat its past experience, when China was used as small change to improve Japan's relations with Russia, and the negotiations were crowned by conclusion of a Russo-Japanese agreement at China's expense. 'For Japan at present', Malik wrote, 'it would be very profitable to annoy the USA, England and Chiang Kai-Shek by using the China problem for rapprochement with the Soviet Union, to strengthen its position, aggravate the USSR's relations with the USA, England and China, and weaken those countries' position in the Far East.'[24]

The concessions question

We recall that Matsuoka's confidential letter, in which he said Japan bound itself to resolve the question of relinquishing its concessions in Northern Sakhalin within a few months, was inseparable from the Soviet–Japanese agreements signed in April 1941. He confirmed that obligation on 31 May 1941, in another letter handed to the Soviet government by Tatekawa, specifying a deadline of not later than 6 months from the date of signing of the Neutrality Pact. However, the outbreak of the Soviet–German war took this issue off the agenda.

In June 1943 the Soviet Union confronted Japan with the need to fulfil the obligation it had undertaken by signing the Neutrality Pact. The Japanese government considered the matter for almost a month, and at the beginning of July ambassador Sato notified Molotov of agreement to begin negotiations.

The main explanation for the Japanese government's decision was the changed international situation. The Red Army's major victories had radically altered the course of the entire war, and this had a substantial effect on the military-political situation in the Far East and in the Pacific, where the US-led alliance had already forced Japan onto the defensive. The Japanese government was very apprehensive that in retaliation for its ignoring of Matsuoka's promise to relinquish the concessions, a serious violation of the Neutrality Pact, the Soviet Union might provide assistance to the USA and Britain in their war against Japan.

The concessions issue remained a very delicate one. At the sitting of Parliament at the beginning of 1944 Foreign Minister Tani declined to answer questions about it, on the grounds that negotiations with the USSR were still in progress. However, despite his vague reply, the parliament confirmed state budget allocations of 8.99 million yen in subsidies to the oil concession.

At the start of that year the Japanese Foreign Ministry handed the Soviet Embassy a long memorandum about the obstacles created by the Soviet authorities to working of the coal and oil concessions. In the negotiating process the concessionaires' application for labour was only partially satisfied. Araki complained in writing to the Embassy about the Soviet Oil Ministry's delays in examining the concessionaires' projects and plans. Maruyama, director of the coal concession, applied for a visa for himself and Matsui to visit Northern Sakhalin to inspect the concessions. Visas were refused. The concessionaires tried to deal directly with Embassy staff by inviting them to lunch, but without result. Malik observed that our relations with the concessionaires were markedly cool (compared to those with the fishermen, that were normal).

The Japanese press maintained total silence about the course of the negotiations. That Japan could be forced into relinquishing the concessions, at a time when its need for oil was increasing, was very significant. 'Circumstances now compel Japan to settle its accounts at the old exchange rates', Malik remarked in his report to Moscow.[25] However, Uori, an Information Bureau spokesman, had stated on 23 September 1943 that 'there is enough oil in East Asia to supply Japan's air force and automobile transport.' Despite that, without special need and force of circumstance, Japan would never have easily agreed to part with Sakhalin's oil.

The protocol liquidating the oil and coal concessions was signed in Moscow on 30 March 1944 by Deputy Foreign Minister Lozovskiy and Ambassador Sato. Their abolition removed one of the main elements complicating the usually practical resolution of many questions in the system of Japanese–Soviet relations.

The fisheries question

While agreeing to open negotiations on abolishing the concessions, Japan insisted on simultaneously starting negotiations for a new fisheries convention, as the existing convention was due to expire in December 1943. In official statements and in the press the Japanese took a very restrained and even, it may be said, conciliatory, position. Although the fisheries negotiations dragged on, at the beginning of 1943 the press, unlike on many previous occasions, expressed not a word of dissatisfaction. The Japanese did not particularly insist on the Soviets' recognising the reorganisation of the 'Nichiro' company carried out in March 1943, hiving off a separate 'Nisso' company with a capital of 10 million yen to fish in Soviet territorial waters. Because the Soviet side did not recognise this, it was not implemented, even though the new company had been officially established and its senior personnel appointed.

The fishers' relations with the Embassy staff were correct. They persistently sought to send a 'special fisheries mission' to Moscow, to help ambassador Sato, but the negotiations concluded without any such mission. The course of these negotiations was also not reported in the press.

Because of the deteriorating war situation in the North Pacific, the Japanese did not fish off the East coast of Kamchatka during the 1943 fishing season. In discussion with Malik S. Tanakamaru, representing the fishermen, officially thanked the Soviet local authorities for their 'benign attitude' towards Japanese fishermen in the 1943 season. At a meeting of 'Nichiro's' shareholders in February 1944 the dividend was confirmed as 6 per cent instead of the usual 8 per cent; director Hiratsuka complained that it was time to end the war, which had seriously affected business activity. The negotiations ended with signature on 30 March 1944 of a protocol extending the convention for another 5 years. This helped stabilise normal business relations.

Trade relations

These were confined to soundings and responses on the possibility of commercial exchanges of some types of raw and other materials, but had no real consequences. The only trading operation during 1943 was that through the Trade Delegation in Tokyo Soviet trading organisations bought cargo totalling 150,000 yen from the Japanese steamship 'Izan Maru', which had sunk off Northern Sakhalin.

The coal concessionaire asked the Soviet Trade Delegation to sell coal in Sakhalin in exchange for Japanese goods. The Delegation counterproposed selling coal in exchange for rubber delivered at a Japanese port or at the Manchuria border railway station. The concessionaire replied that if the Soviets wanted to buy rubber in exchange for coal they should

send Soviet ships to Singapore to collect it, and at that point his representative ceased negotiating.

A certain Yoshida, representing the Okura firm, visited the Trade Delegation several times. He explained his visits by his firm's wish to maintain contact, so that it would be among the first to begin trading with the USSR as soon as it became possible to do so. He also expressed his firm's desire to purchase platinum, asbestos, manganese ore, cotton and some other commodities. The firm was most interested in platinum and asbestos, which were almost unobtainable. Yoshida complained that at the start of 1943 Tanaka, a member of the Foreign Ministry's Commercial Department, had told the firm 'It is premature to raise the question of trade with the Soviet Union for the time being. A big offensive has begun there. It is possible that the war will end in 1943, and then it will be possible to trade normally.'[26]

Ueda, of the 'Toa Tsushinsha' information and publishing agency said in conversation with Embassy Secretary Dolbin that it would be good if the Neutrality Pact were reinforced by something more substantial, such as a trade agreement.

So in this period trade relations did not progress beyond optimistic words.

The main events in Japanese–Soviet relations

On the surface there were relatively few significant events in Japanese–Soviet relations in this period. Only the following can be noted. At the beginning of the year a provisional agreement was signed, extending the fisheries convention into 1943. In February 1943 the Soviet steamships 'Kola' and 'Ilmen' were sunk off the east coast of Honshu – the Japanese tried in every possible way to attribute the sinking to the Americans. [They were right. It was eventually established that both ships had been sunk by the US submarine 'Sawfish' on 17 February, in the erroneous belief that they were Japanese masquerading as Soviet. – G.J.]. There were forced landings by American aircraft on Kamchatka, one in August and several in December 1943.

Among international events which greatly influenced Soviet–Japanese relations, above all should be noted Germany's defeat at Stalingrad, the successful Soviet winter offensive that followed, the Italian Fascist regime's collapse and Italy's capitulation following the Anglo-American invasion, the Moscow, Cairo and Teheran conferences, and the dissolution of the Comintern.

Japanese press and propaganda on the USSR and on Japanese–Soviet relations

Throughout the year the Japanese press described Soviet military and economic power, and Red Army soldiers' courage and military ability incom-

parably more objectively than in previous years. It also carried comparatively fewer overtly hostile remarks about the USSR, except that throughout the year and up to the time of Malik's report (early 1944) it continued to publish, though in rather more restrained terms, only German propaganda about the situation on the Soviet–German front.

The press noted that the Soviet Union had created a mighty industrial base in its eastern regions and cynically, but with evident satisfaction, emphasised that 'the Soviet Union is not advancing on the Far East, to avoid hitting its head on a stone'. (In the sense of not wishing to aggravate relations and clash with Japan – Malik.) The Japanese saw the industrialisation of Soviet Central Asia as creating a 'Great Central Asian Empire' with its natural exit to the Persian Gulf, allegedly because the road west was closed by Germany, which was creating a 'new order' in Europe, and wanted the Soviet Union to advance only eastward.

Also noted was the USSR's confidence in its productive power, that the winter offensive was mainly supplied by armaments from the Urals; the Urals and Kuzbass, plus enterprises transferred from the European USSR, ensured Soviet wartime economic independence from America. The Japanese press also wrote of the outstanding progress of Soviet science and technology, especially in tank construction. At the beginning of 1943 it was said that it was difficult for the Soviet Union to get back Ukraine, and that it was therefore directing all its attention south, towards the Persian Gulf, and on developing the Urals.

A political overview prepared by the Soviet Embassy for the Foreign Ministry presented Japan's position and approaches to its relations with the USSR in the following terms.

The Soviet Union was fully occupied with the war in Europe, and could not take on Japan as well. Unity of aims in fighting Nazi Germany was strengthening alliance relations with the USA and Britain, but as Germany's defeats increased, and the need to resolve fundamental European problems matured, contradictions in the allied camp would intensify. This might to some extent ease Japan's international-political and military situation. Hitler's Germany was doomed to defeat and collapse. Relations with it must be chiefly ideological. The Moscow and Teheran conferences had not changed Soviet attitudes towards Japan, which was satisfied and reassured by this. In trying to secure itself more solidly from the North, and to make its external political situation sounder, Japan considered it desirable and advantageous to reinforce its relations with the Soviet Union, not stopping short even of making some concessions. For Japan what was now basic and decisive was directing all its forces and attention to the war in the Pacific, and reinforcing its positions in the areas of East Asia which it occupied.[27]

8 The last year of the USSR's war with Germany

By the end of 1944 all the belligerents knew that the world conflagration would end soon. Above all, Germany's defeat was obviously only a matter of months. On 17 January 1945 Soviet forces liberated Warsaw, and on 3 February seized a bridgehead on the west bank of the Oder, only 37 miles from Berlin. On the Western front Anglo-American forces were also pushing the Germans back, and were close to Germany's western borders.

In the Pacific the initiative had passed permanently to the Anglo-Americans. The US Navy and Marines had seized strategically important islands, from which super-heavy B-29 bombers were already hitting Japanese cities from November 1944. US forces had also seized the islands of Morotai and Leyte, and set up bases there for a further offensive in the Philippines. In Northern and Eastern Burma British, American and Chinese forces had advanced deep into the country, and were about to unblock the Burma Road supply route from India to China, while Australian and American forces had eliminated the Japanese in New Guinea and nearby islands.

The Allies had concentrated major forces against Japan. Moreover, given favourable developments in Europe, Britain and particularly the USA expected to increase them substantially. Their large, well-trained, well-equipped and well-supplied forces gave the highest allied political and military leaders confidence that the war would soon be won.

For Japan the war's third year had ended badly. Despite fanatical resistance, the Japanese forces had lost many Pacific islands, and their position in South-East Asia had deteriorated, culminating in decisive defeats in naval and air battles off the Philippines. Only in China had they had some success. The 1944 campaign there had succeeded in linking the occupied territories in North and Central China with Indo-China and, via Malaya, with Singapore, and eliminating airfields from which US aircraft could bomb Japan. But this only partially compensated for Japan's loss of full control over the sea routes between Singapore and Japanese ports, along which flowed strategically important raw materials from the countries of the southern seas.

Nevertheless, at the end of 1944 Japan still controlled an enormous territory, from the Kurile Islands in the north to the Solomons in the south,

though the US Navy's domination of the seas meant that by no means all Japan's forces could be actively used. Force comparisons show that Japan had substantial numerical superiority on land, but the allies had it on sea and in the air, and Japan's armed forces were scattered over the entire theatre, whereas those of the allies were concentrated into powerful groups. The allies also now firmly held the strategic initiative. British, American and Australian troops were better armed than the Japanese, and had many times more resources for transport and communication. Their supply systems worked very effectively, whereas Japan could not replace losses in arms and equipment, and an ever-deepening fuel shortage deprived its remaining warships and aircraft of full effectiveness.

At the end of 1944 the Allies' main objectives in the war against Japan remained those stated in the Cairo Declaration of 1 December 1943. This proclaimed that the USA, Great Britain and China were fighting to restrain and punish Japan for its aggressive policy, to deprive it of all Pacific islands seized or occupied since 1914, and to restore Manchuria, Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands to China. Japan was also to be expelled from all the territories it had seized by 'violence and treachery'. The Korean people were promised freedom and independence 'in due course'. The Allies declared their resolve to continue doing whatever was needed to force Japan into unconditional surrender,[1] but still saw the defeat of Nazi Germany as their primary task. This directly affected the planning of operations in the Pacific and South-East Asia for the first half of 1945.

The Japanese plans demonstrate that Japan was seeking to achieve one objective only by fanatical resistance – to avoid unconditional surrender. Imperial ruling circles saw this as attainable by using active defence to prolong the war. Their principal attention was given to defending Japan itself, and its military-industrial foothold in North-East China and Korea, but Imperial GHQ ordered other areas also to be defended to the last man, assuming that by so doing they could force the USA and Great Britain to make concessions. But by the end of 1944 the Allies had scored important successes, and Japan now faced a real prospect of invasion. Moreover, the Red Army's great victories in Europe had brought Japan's chief ally, Nazi Germany, to the brink of collapse.

Let us now return to mid-1944 Tokyo, as seen from the Soviet Embassy. After 2 years 9 months in power and ten reshuffles, Tojo's Cabinet resigned on 18 July. The Cabinet Information Bureau's announcement gave the following reason:

> In the present period of decisive battles, the government, acutely aware of the urgent need to reanimate public opinion and prosecute the war with even greater forces, sought broad involvement by capable people and strengthening of the cabinet. However, despite all the government's efforts to implement its plans, it failed to achieve its objective, and has acknowledged wholesale resignation as more appropriate.

Press commentaries on the resignation emphasised that Japan's war situation was extremely serious, and criticised Tojo's cabinet for inadequacy, failure to increase arms production, especially of aircraft, and production of food and fuel, isolation from the people, and passing dictatorial measures. In the current situation Japan, as never before, needed a 'man of genius' as Prime Minister. But since no such genius had yet been found, the new Cabinet must be composed of 'the most talented and competent statesmen, irrespective of their past connections, and without regard to their previous interrelations'.

On 20 July 1944 formation of a new Cabinet was entrusted, contrary to custom, to two men, General Koiso, former Governor-General of Korea, and Admiral Yonai, a former Prime Minister. This was only the second time in Japan's history when an Emperor had commissioned two persons to form a Cabinet. The press noted that the Emperor's order was unusual, but did not speculate on the reason for it. It could be explained only by the fierce conflict between Army and Navy that preceded Tojo's resignation, and that not only failed to diminish, but flared up even more fiercely, the moment the Koiso-Yonai cabinet was formed. Yonai, as Navy Minister, confirmed this officially when he said 'The Emperor's order to General Koiso and me to form a new cabinet is an order for us to cooperate.' The new cabinet, headed by General Koiso, was formed on 22 July.

The Soviet Embassy assessed Koiso as

> one of the most experienced politician-generals in the Japanese Army. In 1935–6 he belonged to a group in the army which adhered to so-called 'moderate views on renewal'. He is an old Kwantung Army man and coloniser of Manchuria and Korea, who conducted Japanese militarism's aggressive policy on the mainland with fire and the sword. In 1938–9 he supported Konoe's policy of so-called 'resolution of the China question with Northern China as centre', the point of which was directed against the USSR, by creation of the notorious 'anti-Comintern' zones in Northern China and Inner Mongolia. Koiso was also a vigorous defender of the 'Anti-Comintern Pact' and Japanese aggression 'to south and north'. It is an irony of fate that now his designated role as Prime Minister is to take steps 'to develop and reinforce neutral relations with the USSR'.

The second important figure in the Cabinet was Admiral Yonai, considered a 'moderate'. He was among the Navy's most important political figures, and fully empowered to represent it in Cabinet. His appointment as Navy Minister returned him to active service, which the press considered unusual. Press commentary on his appointment emphasised that he represented 'the influence and prestige of the senior statesmen who stand close to the throne and behind the scenes of active leadership in affairs of state'. In 1938–9, as Navy Minister in the Hiranuma cabinet, Yonai had

stood for compromise with the Anglo-Americans to resolve the Japan-China conflict. As Prime Minister in January–July 1940 he had opposed concluding the Tripartite Pact, and that was one of the reasons why he and his Cabinet had resigned. It was rumoured that the Emperor's order to form the Koiso-Yonai cabinet had displeased the Germans in Tokyo.

The post of War Minister was given to the elderly Field-Marshal Sugiyama, who had retired as Chief of General Staff only a few months before. He was considered one of the army's most experienced generals, and was close to the Court. In the past he had actively supported the general policy of aggression on the mainland, which always had a clearly expressed anti-Soviet character. Only Japan's worsening military, foreign policy, and consequently domestic political situation had prompted his well-known statement that he would not countenance a war between Japan and the USSR. For all his aggressive views, Sugiyama nevertheless belonged among the more sober political figures.

The next major figure was undoubtedly Armaments Minister Fujiwara, whom the press described as 'the greatest of Japan's industrial magnates'. By the appointment of Fujiwara, who, as Minister without Portfolio in Tojo's Cabinet, had in effect taken control over arms production, the industrialists freed themselves from 'bureaucratic control' and took arms production and leadership of industry into their own hands.

Former Ministers retained in office were Foreign Minister Shigemitsu and Finance Minister Ishiwata. The press assessed their retention as signifying no change in foreign or financial policy. Shigemitsu also received the portfolio of Minister for Greater East Asian Affairs, which was assessed as underlining the unity of Japan's policy towards all countries of the world.

Lesser, though still important, figures were Interior Minister Odachi, a former Mayor of Tokyo, and Justice Minister Matsuzaka, a former General Procurator. Both had solid experience in the police, judiciary and suppression of dissenters, and were considered to exemplify a 'firm hand'. Other appointments of 'political party veterans' were seen as meant to ensure closer collaboration between the government and the political Association for Aid to the Throne.

Malik concluded that:

1 The main reason for the Tojo Cabinet's resignation was the worsening of Japan's situation through 2 years of serious defeats. The fall of Saipan and the naval defeat on 19 June had only accelerated its fall. Taken together, all this aggravated the political struggle, especially between the Army and Navy.
2 The fall was the first indication of the collapse of Japan's adventuristic policy of aggression in the Pacific war.
3 The inadequacy of all the Tojo Cabinet's 'extreme measures' to increase war production to the required level was openly admitted. So

was the error of making the War and Navy Ministers Chiefs of the Army and Navy General Staffs.

4 Also acknowledged were serious errors in food policy, as a result of which the country was going hungry.
5 Government propaganda was officially admitted to have failed. Throughout the war the people had been nourished with the 'invincibility' of Japanese arms, and the invulnerability of Japanese positions and 'spirit'. This had led to carelessness and complacency, and the reality had turned out entirely the opposite.
6 The Tojo Cabinet's fall meant the final collapse of the extremist camp's gamble on capturing the state apparatus and establishing a military-fascist dictatorship. In contrast the Koiso-Yonai Cabinet represented an effort to form a cabinet of 'national unity', and was supported by a bloc of high dignitaries.
7 The new Cabinet would undoubtedly do everything it could to correct Japan's serious situation and save the Empire from total defeat, but there were no good grounds for expecting success. It would probably not last as long as Tojo's.
8 It would continue the previous Cabinet's foreign policy.[2]

On 23 July Shigemitsu told reporters 'that the new cabinet will continue the previous cabinet's foreign policy is shown by the fact that I have been appointed Minister for Greater East Asian Affairs.' Shigemitsu went on to declare that Japanese foreign policy was very clear, and rested on three basic points:

1 By close collaboration with its allies and cooperating nations, Japan would wage the war to a successful conclusion.
2 It would implement the principles of the joint declaration of the Greater East Asian nations and of a new policy towards China, aimed at liberating and rebuilding Greater East Asia.
3 Japan would unwearyingly promote good-neighbourly and friendly relations with countries with which it had treaties, especially its neighbours.

The press carried a number of lengthy commentaries on the new cabinet. Of particular interest was a leading article in the *Yomiuri Hochi* of 23 July.

> The cornerstone of stability in East Asia is the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact. Soviet Russia, as a great power, borders on the Pacific Ocean and, moreover, is directly adjacent to mainland China, so it always has great interest in developing political relations in East Asia. The greatest danger to the policy of aggression against East Asia pursued by Anglo-American imperialism is the serious fact that Japan and the Soviet Union exist.

> Therefore the focal point of Anglo-American policy towards East Asia has always been to isolate Japan and the Soviet Union, and incite antagonism and hostility between them. It is open knowledge that America and Britain stuck unwaveringly to making Japan the custodian of their anti-Soviet policy in East Asia, and could not conceal their astonishment when the stability of Japanese–Soviet relations was guaranteed by conclusion of the Neutrality Pact. . . . Establishment of a defence system in East Asia, linking Japan, the Soviet Union and China, would have to be the greatest danger for America and Britain.

On 16 June all the newspapers reported that Malik was about to leave for Moscow on Soviet government orders. They noted that he had had no home leave in 5 years, that his absence would be temporary, and that his family would stay in Tokyo.[3] P.V. Anurov, Chargé d'Affaires in Malik's absence, wrote in his diary: 'The ambassador's departure for Moscow at the present moment was highly unwanted by the Japanese. Therefore the main question interesting all Japanese correspondents is – Why has Malik gone to Moscow?'[4]

Tokyo political circles feared that the Soviet Union might begin preparing to enter the war against Japan. Their only consolation was that since Malik's wife and son remained in Tokyo, there was hope that he would return.

Adyrkhayev told me he heard personally from Malik that while in Moscow he was received by Stalin. When he asked Stalin what to do in Tokyo during the last months of the war, Stalin is said to have replied 'You will watch Japan's every breath.'

Malik (Figure 6) was away for over 2 months during July–September 1944, and his first conversation with Shigemitsu after his return was on 8 September. Shigemitsu asked about Stalin's health; Malik replied that he was well, but had aged somewhat, and had more grey hairs than Molotov. He also emphasised '*It was a pleasure for me to observe the favourable atmosphere in Moscow in the field of Japanese–Soviet relations*'[5] (my emphasis – B.S.).

On 12 September Shigemitsu chaired a Top Secret conference in the Foreign Ministry, devoted to development of Japanese–Soviet relations. The conference minutes were given in evidence at the Tokyo War Crimes trials. Shigemitsu distributed to the officials the preliminary draft of his plan for 'Soviet–Japanese negotiations which, it is hoped, will begin soon in Moscow'. The following are some extracts.

> In view of the situation Japan must at once initiate an active demarche towards the Soviet Union, aimed at ensuring maintenance of neutrality and improvement of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Soviet Union bringing about peace between Germany and the Soviet Union and, finally, improving Japan's position with Soviet help if

Figure 6 V.M. Molotov, USSR People's Commissar (Minister) for Foreign Affairs, and Ya.A. Malik, Soviet Ambassador in Japan (Malik family album).

> Germany leaves the war.... A special representative must be sent to the Soviet Union to conduct the negotiations. But first the Foreign Ministry must find out Soviet intentions towards Japan, and pursue the following objectives as far as possible:
>
> 1 Prolongation of the Neutrality Pact, or conclusion of a new one. For that purpose the following agreements must be reached, independently of the Neutrality Pact or in parallel with it.
>
> a) confirmation of obligations envisaged by the Neutrality Pact, or an agreement to extend them.
> b) a non-aggression pact ...

Shigemitsu went on to try to foresee what payment the USSR might demand:

1 Permission for Soviet ships to transit the Tsugaru Strait.
2 A trade agreement with Japan and Manchukuo.
3 Extension of its influence in China and elsewhere in the 'Co-Prosperity Sphere'.

4 Demilitarisation of the Soviet-Manchurian border.
5 Soviet use of the North Manchurian Railway.
6 Recognition of a Soviet sphere of influence in Manchuria.
7 Abolition of the fisheries treaty.
8 Cession of Southern Sakhalin.
9 Cession of the Northern Kurile Islands.
10 Cancellation of the Tripartite Pact.
11 Cancellation of the Anti-Comintern Pact.[6]

Shigemitsu then examined five variants of the possible post-war diplomatic scene. Each included the price for expected Soviet services. For example, cession of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles was permissible only in the extreme case 'of acute worsening of Soviet–Japanese relations, and the danger arising that the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan'.[7] And 'if Germany suffers defeat or concludes a separate peace, and general peace is concluded by Soviet mediation, then we shall accept all the Soviet Union's demands'[8] (those listed in his draft and also apparently other, additional ones – B.S.). Incidentally, the conditions on which Shigemitsu and his government would have resolved Soviet–Japanese relations in September 1944 were considerably broader than those later expressed in the Yalta agreements. [Except that they did not envisage ceding the Southern Kuriles. – G.J.]

To prove that these documents were authentic, Vidar Bagge, Sweden's envoy in Japan, submitted written testimony to the Tribunal. Bagge, whom Shigemitsu had invited to participate in the discussions as a mediator, confirmed that the plan was inspired by Prime Minister Konoe, and only his Cabinet's resignation prevented its implementation.

When Malik met Vice-Minister Matsumoto on 19 September, Matsumoto said:

> In the current, very difficult international situation, *the fact that neutrality continues to be preserved between our countries is most pleasing* [emphasised by Malik – B.S.]. and the ambassador's return at this time is the best indication that these relations will also continue as before. We want the Neutrality Pact and the agreements indicated (on the concessions and fisheries, concluded on 30 March 1944) to continue to operate in the future' [emphasised by Matsumoto – B.S.].[9]

But Malik had already recorded his views on likely developments in Soviet–Japanese relations in a report 'On the Question of Japanese–Soviet Relations (at present and in the light of the prospects of the war in the Pacific between Japan, the USA and Britain)',[10] written in Moscow in July. He wrote that Japan's inevitable defeat would raise a whole series of territorial, strategic, economic and political questions, which he listed as follows:

1 The Status of Manchuria (as an independent state, or joined to China). Ways of ensuring Soviet interests and security guarantees for the 300–km border (USA unofficially reported as intending to hand Manchuria over to China and Russia).
2 The Chinese Eastern Railway; recompense for its value, seeing that it was ceded to Japan under pressure, and for only one-fifth of its true cost.
3 Restoration of Soviet rights to Russian state property in Manchuria.
4 Korean independence. Should a protectorate be established for a period by some allied organisation, limits of Soviet participation in such an arrangement, also the forms of Soviet political, military and economic influence; existence and development of Korea (bearing in mind Soviet security interests and steps to ensure aggression in this region is not repeated).
5 Question of the Japanese naval bases on Korea's East China and Japan Sea coasts, in light of Soviet security interests.
6 The South Manchuria Railway, taken from Russia by Japan as a result of the Russo-Japanese War.
7 Soviet property interests in Northern China.
8 The Liaotung Peninsula of China, with the former, actually Russian, town of Dairen, and the Russian naval fortress of Port Arthur.
9 Return of Southern Sakhalin, this main [Japanese] tap for closing off our communications with the Pacific.
10 Transfer to the Soviet Union of the entire Kurile Islands archipelago, which blocks Russia's exit route to the Pacific.
11 Neutralisation of the island of Tsushima, or its conversion into a Soviet naval base with aims of preserving security and non-repetition of aggression in the Far East. Importance of this island on the route of our communications with the South Pacific. We cannot permit interference by England in resolving this question, as happened in 1861.
12 Complete annulment of the Portsmouth Treaty and the linked Peking Convention, with all the obligations and restrictions on the USSR which flowed from it. Russia must wipe out this black spot. America helped this black spot appear and, like it or not, must help it disappear.
13 Compensation for losses and damage caused by Japan's ferocious 1918–22 intervention in Siberia and the Far East (perhaps we should review the issue of free Japanese fishing in Soviet Far East and Kamchatka territorial waters).
14 Our attitude to the US intention to destroy the entire Japanese merchant fleet, including all vessels of over 5000 tonnes, . . . in the light of our merchant shipping interests in the Pacific.
15 Our attitude to the problem of occupation of Japan's six major cities by allied forces. Possibility of participation to protect Soviet interests and to restore historical justice and Soviet prestige, bearing in mind

that the Japanese took the liberty of putting their forces into the Soviet Far East. On the other hand, it may be appropriate to leave this entirely to the Allies, provided, of course, this does no harm to our state interests, which is very doubtful. Final decisions on such matters can be taken in line with the situation, including Japan's domestic political situation at the time. In particular, how will the problem of the monarchy and democratisation of the Japanese social order be resolved, and the question of liberating 300,000 progressive elements (liberals, democrats, socialists and communists) currently imprisoned in Japan. Perhaps the experience of applying surrender conditions to Italy, and Soviet participation, will be taken into account in regard to Japan also.

16 The problem of China after it is purged of the Japanese and reunited into a single state organism. USSR's possible attitude to China's future development problems. . .

17 Our political attitude towards complete liquidation of Japanese naval power in the Pacific, including bases and shipyards. Question of destruction or appropriate utilisation of the Japanese fleet, or more correctly, that part of it not destroyed by the Japanese. Recalling in this context how the Japanese behaved or tried to behave towards Russian warships and merchant ships after the Russo-Japanese war. Perhaps take account of experience with the Italian fleet.

18 Compensation for harm done to Soviet state interests, institutions and individuals during the Pacific war (closure of straits, inspection of ships, torpedoing of ships, non-return of ships, money and property in Hong Kong, etc).

19 Abolition of the fisheries convention and return of absolutely all fishing areas to the Soviet state, with an obligatory statement that Japan's catching by treaty in Soviet territorial waters was only temporary. This last is necessary because for 40 years the Japanese have been blathering about their alleged 'eternal rights' to catch fish in Russian Far East waters, adding that these 'rights' were won by blood, and that the fisheries convention is 'special and perpetual'. As is well known, Japan is a country of myths and mystification. The Japanese imperialists must be deprived of any grounds to compose myths and fables about some 'special and perpetual' fisheries convention.

20 Payment to the Soviet state of the full value of the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian Railways, and of land, buildings and equipment in cities and ports formerly utilised by the Russian state in the Far East. Right to use these by treaties at special tariffs for transporting goods from one Soviet province to another, or to the world market.

21 Reparations.

22 Confiscation of Japanese heavy and military industrial equipment, as the bases for rebirth of its military-industrial potential. Account to be taken of the damage the Japanese did to Soviet capital industrial

equipment and railway transport in the years of intervention, when they had control of the Soviet Far East.

23 Japanese-mandated islands, Formosa and the Ryukyus. It is said that the USA intends to take the mandated islands for itself, and formally return Formosa and the Ryukyus to China.

24 Our attitude to the status quo in SE Asia and the South Seas – return of colonies to their pre-war owners, USA, Britain, Holland and France. (We must pay attention to Japan's 'Panasianist' demagogy during the years of occupation, and the possibility of strengthening the separatist and national liberation movement among the South-East Asian peoples.)

25 Establishment of the principle of free transit through straits between the Japanese islands. Proclamation of the Tsugaru, Shimonoseki and Bungo Straits and Inland Sea as international waters. Neutralisation of the straits.

26 Measures to preserve and protect shipping in the straits. Principle of free ports or bases in some Japanese ports.

27 Participation in Inter-Allied Commissions for liquidating Japan's weapons and ground, naval and air forces.

The Soviet government undoubtedly made considerable use of this report in preparing comprehensive documents on the Far East for the Yalta conference.

Questions of Soviet–Japanese relations were raised at the Japanese Parliament's 85th extraordinary session, 6–12 September 1944. Shigemitsu gave priority to explaining Japan's war aims. He said the war had been forced on Japan; for her it was a war for existence and self-defence, a life or death struggle. . . . Soviet–Japanese relations, he claimed, were based not only on the Neutrality Pact, but on the actual situation and real interests of both countries, and said that if there would be mutual trust between the two countries 'I am convinced, and have no doubt whatsoever, that the measures our government contemplates will develop successfully.'[11]

The press reported his speech under headlines such as 'Neighbourly and friendly relations with Soviet Union unchanged' . . .'Japan and Soviet Union trust each other' . . . 'Development of Japanese–Soviet friendship' . . . 'Shigemitsu spoke of interests linking Japan and Soviets.'

Malik wrote in his diary:

> According to rumours, the Japanese are firmly convinced that the USSR is the fundamental force in the international arena, and this must be taken into account. Besides, Japan borders on the USSR. Relations with it must be strengthened. The Supreme Council for Direction of the War is said to have decided to establish a special committee to study problems of Soviet–Japanese relations, so that urgent steps can be taken to develop and reinforce them. [So, Malik concluded],

> Japan's policy towards the USSR at this stage is characterised by a compulsion to improve and strengthen relations with the USSR, prevent its active cooperation with the USA and Britain in the Far East, draw the USSR's attention to the Far East on the basis of the Japanese idea of dividing China between Japan and the USSR, frighten the USSR with the growing danger of American imperialism in East Asia, and attempt to cause the USSR's relations with Britain to deteriorate, at the same time attempting to find ways to improve Japan's relations with those two countries separately. On this last question, Japan may try to some extent to repeat the policy it pursued in relation to Russia and Britain on the eve of conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance treaty of 1902.[12]

I would like to emphasise here that at this time the Soviet government saw the state of its relations with Japan as entirely satisfactory. Let us turn to a most important conversation between Molotov and Sato on 16 September 1944.[13]

Sato told Molotov that the Japanese government had decided to send an important special mission to Moscow.... Molotov replied that 'Normal relations between our countries have been established, *especially while you have held the post of ambassador in Moscow.... We examine and resolve current questions within the order of the existing normal relations. Our ambassador in Tokyo and ambassador Sato in Moscow work to this end* [my emphasis – B.S.].'

But as for the special mission, Molotov said he considered its arrival untimely, since its appearance would be taken in the USSR and abroad as raising the question of peace between the Soviet Union and Germany, a question Japan had already raised in 1943 and the Soviet government had rejected. Although Sato persevered in arguing that the mission's aim was to strengthen and further develop relations between the USSR and Japan, Molotov answered with a firm 'No'. He repeated: 'The Soviet government considers that *Soviet–Japanese relations are developing normally and in a good direction, and this was shown, for example, by the conclusion of the (concessions and fisheries) agreements in spring of this year.* [my emphasis – B.S.].

Despite this, throughout the entire second half of 1944 Washington exerted massive pressure on the Soviet Union to begin drafting plans for military operations against Japan jointly with US military experts. Roosevelt 'courted' Stalin especially actively, seeking his agreement to a 'Big Three' meeting, to formulate Soviet agreement to join the war against Japan in official terms. The Japanese press sensed this. Malik noted that Japanese propaganda was

> counting on the inevitability of acute and irreconcilable differences between the USSR, USA and England; attempting at whatever cost to

ensure Soviet neutrality; trying to strengthen and improve relations with the USSR at the price of dividing China.

New nuances:

1. Not to count on a split between the USSR, USA and England before the end of the war in Europe, although it is inevitable afterwards.
2. Increased uncertainty – maybe the USA and England will succeed in attracting the USSR to their side in the war against Japan? This uncertainty is now causing the Japanese not a little anxiety.[14]

Events connected with the October Revolution's 27th anniversary in 1944 merit special mention. First, Stalin's speech at the Kremlin Palace on 9 November was published in all the Japanese newspapers. During the war years not one of Stalin's speeches or orders had been so published, but this speech appeared verbatim, except for some abridging of its domestic politics section. Those parts of the speech which mentioned the Red Army's successes, the Second Front, the Teheran conference and strengthening of Soviet–US–British cooperation, the aggressor states (including word for word everything said about Japan), measures to prevent aggression, and organisation of the post-war security system, were cited in full. Contrary to usual practice, passages describing the Nazis and the inevitability of their defeat were not removed.

At the Embassy's 7 November reception Furuno, president of the 'Domei' news agency, had already told Malik that Stalin's speech would be published in full (i.e. a political decision to do so had already been taken). Malik considered this was done to begin preparing the Japanese psychologically for Nazi Germany's inevitable defeat and the unmasking of Hitler's racist ideology. Malik noted that the Japanese were now trying to correct, and escape the consequences of, their greatest and most fateful error, their overestimation of Germany's strength. He concluded there was reason to assume they were already realistically reckoning that in the circumstances they would have to repudiate their ally, Hitler's Germany, and were gradually getting ready to do so.[15]

Let us look more closely at that reception. There was a daylight air raid alarm, and two American reconnaissance aircraft appeared over Tokyo. It was feared the reception might have to be cancelled, but the 'all-clear' came about 2 hours before it was due to start, so it went ahead. There were more guests than in 1943, over 160, including Shigemitsu, Sawada and Matsumoto from the Foreign Ministry, ex-Ministers Arita and Toyoda, Court Minister Matsudaira, former Prime Minister Hirota, Minister and President of the Information Bureau Ogata, and representatives of Parliament and the press. In 1941, 1942 and 1943 persons of such high rank and responsibilities had not even replied to their invitations.

Prime Minister Koiso sent his personal secretary, who handed Koiso's visiting card to Malik, and conveyed his apology that pressure of work prevented his attendance.

Notable also was the unusually large number of cabinet ministers and, especially Court ministers, thirteen of whom attended, headed by the Minister, Vice-Minister and Chief Master of Ceremonies, the first time any of the three had attended a Soviet Embassy reception. The attendance of these high-ranking and influential courtiers was politically very important, and expressed the Court's inclination to try to improve relations with the Soviet Union.

Konoe, Togo, Tatekawa and Matsuoka did not attend, and the first two did not reply to their invitations. Konoe had not come in previous years either, but had always replied politely and precisely. Matsuoka probably felt uncomfortable about appearing at the Soviet Embassy, in view of his overtly pro-Hitler position in the first stage of the war. Both he and Tatekawa sent their regrets, pleading pressure of work.

Malik noted the following points from the reception.

Hirota reminded him of the proposal, already put several times by the Japanese, to send an emissary to Moscow. He said 'I myself am that emissary'. Malik replied 'the situation is extremely delicate at present, and it is not always possible to resolve questions both quickly and positively.'

Japanese statements at the reception reflected Japan's overall position – an acute desire to discuss improving relations with the Soviet Union, coupled with alarm and uncertainty about its future attitude towards Japan. Stalin's remark about Japan being an aggressor nation worried the Japanese even more. Malik noted in his diary that active efforts could be expected to define the USSR's position at the current stage, even if just for the immediate future.[16]

As demonstrated in detail in my previous book (*The Yalta Conference and the Northern Territories Problem*) Washington throughout 1944 persistently sought a meeting of the three Allied leaders, at which the question of Moscow's entry into the war against Japan would be an important part of the agenda. America's military leaders realised that to achieve victory the Kwantung Army must be beaten, and the Red Army was best placed to defeat it. To draw the USSR into the Pacific War the USA offered 'precious gifts' at China's and Korea's expense; this was arranged at Yalta, by the secret agreement of 11 February 1945. Secretary of State Stettinius later wrote 'military considerations of the very highest order dictated to the President the need to sign an agreement on Far East questions.' The most important discussion in this respect was a conversation between Stalin and Roosevelt on 8 February 1945 (Figure 7). The most significant parts of it are as follows

> Roosevelt says that the Americans intend to establish air bases on the Bonin Islands, south of Japan, and on islands close to Formosa. He

Figure 7 Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta Conference, February 1945.

thinks the time has come to conduct major bombardments of Japan. He, Roosevelt, does not want to land troops in Japan if he can get by without doing so. He will land troops in Japan only in case of extreme necessity. The Japanese have a 4-million strong army on the islands, and an invasion would incur great casualties. However, if Japan was subjected to a heavy bombardment, it could be hoped that everything would be destroyed, and thus many lives could be saved without landings on the islands.

Stalin replies that he has no objections to the Americans having bases at Komsomolsk ... bases could be provided there or at Nikolayevsk. As for Kamchatka, bases could be provided for the Americans only as a last resort. A Japanese consul now sits on Kamchatka. There had been hopes he would go away, but he had stayed. Besides, Komsomolsk and Novo-Nikolayevsk are closer to Japan. ...

Stalin says ... he would like to know how matters stand with the political conditions on which the Soviet Union will enter the war against Japan. This concerns the political questions about which he, Stalin, spoke to Harriman in Moscow.

Roosevelt replies that the southern part of Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands will be returned to the Soviet Union. As for a warm water port, he, Roosevelt, had proposed at Tehran that the Soviet Union receive the port of Dairen, the terminus of the South Manchurian

Railway. But he, Roosevelt, had not yet spoken to Chiang Kai-Shek about this question. He, Roosevelt, assumed there were two ways for the Soviet Union to utilise this port. The first way was to create a free port, subject to control by an international commission. The second way was for the Chinese to lease the port to the Soviet Union. However, the latter method was bound up with the question of Hong Kong. The reason why he, Roosevelt, wanted to avoid leases is that he hopes Britain will give Hong Kong back to China, and that later it can be turned into a free port for the whole world. Churchill very likely will object strongly to this, and it will be hard to persuade Churchill if the Soviet Union will be obtaining a lease on a port in the north. Therefore he, Roosevelt, thinks it more expedient to establish an open port.

Stalin asks what the President thinks about preserving the *status quo* in Outer Mongolia.

Roosevelt replies that he has not yet spoken to Chiang Kai-Shek about this, but he thinks the *status quo* in Outer Mongolia should be maintained.

Stalin asks what Roosevelt thinks of a lease on the Chinese Eastern Railway.

Roosevelt replies that he has not yet spoken with Chiang Kai-Shek about this, but he is sure agreement can be reached on this question. . . .

Stalin says that if the Soviet conditions are accepted, the Soviet people will understand why the USSR is entering the war against Japan. It is therefore important to have a document signed by the President, Churchill and him, Stalin, in which the aims of the Soviet Union's war against Japan are laid out. In that event it would be possible to put the question of the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan to the Supreme Soviet, where people know how to keep secrets.

Roosevelt replies that there can be no doubt about keeping secrets at Yalta. There can be doubts only about the Chinese.

Stalin responds that as soon as it is possible to free twenty–twenty-five divisions from the western front and redeploy them to the Far East, the Chinese can be informed. T.V. Soong (Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in the Kuomintang government) would arrive in Moscow at the end of April, and he, Stalin, would very much like to meet him.

Roosevelt says that he is very glad that Marshal Stalin will receive Soong.

Roosevelt says there is one more question he would like to discuss with Marshal Stalin, the question of Korea.

Stalin states that first he would like to answer the question of how the Soviet Union might utilise a warm water port in the Far East. He says that international control is acceptable to the Soviet Union.

Roosevelt thanks him, and going on to the question of Korea, says that at Tehran he had spoken of establishing a trusteeship over Korea. The question arises of who should be the trustees. He, Roosevelt, thought of inviting China, the Soviet Union and America in the capacity of trustees.

Stalin asks, would this not be a protectorate?

Roosevelt answers, by no means, and explains that the trustees would assist the Koreans to administer their own country over a period of perhaps 30–40 years, until the Koreans were prepared for self-rule. There is also one further question: should the British be invited as trustees of Korea?

Stalin says the time span of the trusteeship ought to be defined.

Roosevelt replies that the Americans had experience with the Philippines, where 50 years were needed to prepare the Filipinos for self-rule. Possibly a shorter period would be needed for Korea, perhaps 20–30 years.

Stalin asks would it not be necessary to put troops into Korea?

Roosevelt replies in the negative.

Stalin expresses approval, and says he has no objections to the President's proposal. The shorter the period of trusteeship, the better.

Roosevelt asks, what about the English?

Stalin replies that they will be offended if they aren't invited.

Roosevelt answers that nevertheless they have no grounds for laying a claim to take part in the trusteeship.

Molotov (present at this discussion) remarks that the English are a long way from Korea.

Stalin says that if Churchill finds out we don't intend to invite him, he'll kill us both. In his, Stalin's opinion, the English could be invited.

Roosevelt says that at first there would be three trustees, and the English could be invited later, if they raise a big outcry.

Stalin says he agrees.

Roosevelt says that in regard to China he will do everything possible to prevent its dying.

Stalin replies that China will not die, but needs new leaders. They should surround Chiang Kai-Shek. There are good people among the Kuomintang, but he, Stalin, cannot understand why they are not promoted.

Roosevelt states that he is in agreement with Stalin's remarks. Roosevelt says there is one more question that he would like to discuss with Marshal Stalin, that of Indo-China. That is a backward country. The people inhabiting Indo-China are like the residents of Java and Burma. Under French administration Indo-China has made no progress whatsoever. The Chinese do not want to take Indo-China. He, Roosevelt, wants a trusteeship established over Indo-China. But the English want to give Indo-China back to the French.

> Stalin replies that France had not ensured the defence of Indo-China. Because of that the English had lost Burma. Surely they didn't want to lose Burma a second time? He, Stalin, considers this question important, that it deserves study, and the President's thought is, perhaps, correct . . .
>
> Harriman (present at this discussion) asks whether it would not be expedient for Stettinius and Molotov to consider the question of China.
>
> Roosevelt says that the political situation in China is indeed complex. US ambassador Hurley and American General Wedemeyer are making every effort to unite the Communists in the north with the Kuomintang.
>
> Stalin replies that it would be good to unify these forces in the interests of a united front against Japan. . . .[17]

[The conversation shows Roosevelt's extreme anxiety to avoid the need to invade Japan, and that he drew no distinction between the Kurile Islands, ceded by treaty, and southern Sakhalin, taken by aggression. It also shows the two leaders as prepared to arrange the future disposal of colonial territories not only of the enemy, Japan, but of their allies, Britain and France, but with all the initiatives for these disposals coming from Roosevelt. – G.J.]

Moscow kept its undertaking to enter the war against Japan within 2 to 3 months of Germany's defeat strictly secret, because it feared that the Kwantung Army would start preventive attacks before the USSR was ready to launch its own assault. Therefore Soviet ambassadors abroad, Malik included, were not told about it. His diary entries for 1945 show this.

Naturally the Japanese were extremely interested in the outcome of the Yalta conference. They could not but be aware that Germany's defeat was only a few months off, and that the Allies must of course have reviewed Far Eastern matters at their meeting, including the prospects for ending the Far East war. Therefore the Japanese persevered in seeking clarifications, both in Tokyo and in Moscow.

On 15 February 1945 Miyakawa, Japanese Consul-General in Harbin (and formerly Counsellor at the Embassy in Moscow), visited Malik while in Tokyo on official business. It became clear that he was there to sound out Malik's opinions on the Yalta conference. Malik noted his main questions and points in his diary:

1 Until now the USSR had not participated in international conferences with Chungking. So when Miyakawa read in the Crimea communique that both would attend the forthcoming San Francisco conference, he was very surprised. Did this change in attitude towards China indicate a change in the Soviet attitude towards Japan?

2 . . . Throughout the war the Soviet Union had dealt and cooperated with Britain and the USA. Did this mean that the USSR would never part from these countries? Would it follow America and Britain in everything?
3 When Japan concluded a military alliance with Germany, it in no way had the Soviet Union in mind. This alliance was and is directed against the USA and Britain, our fiercest enemies. Long before the war we conceived and suggested a Tripartite Alliance between Japan, the USSR and Germany. Could this idea not be realised after the war?
4 Miyakawa spread himself on the theme of expanding, deepening and developing sincere friendly relations between the USSR and Japan. 'You understand', he said, 'that for us it is the fundamental, main question.' . . . On the basis of the Crimea communique and the development of the Soviet Union's relations with its allies, Miyakawa had the impression that it was being drawn more and more into alliance dealings and into the orbit of the USA and Britain

During the conversation Miyakawa twice returned to the point that a moment in the war had now arrived when an outstanding international figure, possessed of adequate prestige and authority, and disposing of enough force to carry conviction, should assume the role of peacemaker, and demand all countries stop the war. In Miyakawa's opinion only Stalin could be that authority figure. If he made such a proposal, Hitler would stop his war, and Roosevelt and Churchill would not dare object to Stalin's proposal.

Malik replied that more should not be read into the Crimea communique than was written there, that Miyakawa himself knew that the USSR always conducted its own policy, and had not been under anyone else's influence even in the most difficult times. Miyakawa agreed. Malik went on to argue that on his reading of the Crimean communique the USSR was becoming ever more deeply involved in European affairs, to which the conference had been devoted. To Miyakawa's question about joint Soviet–Chinese participation in the forthcoming San Francisco United Nations conference, Malik replied that Soviet policy of not participating in conferences with the Chungking government remained unaltered, as the absence of a Chinese representative at the Crimean conference testified. But dozens of other countries would be at San Francisco, so the presence of both Soviet and Chinese representatives would have no special political significance. It was natural and appropriate that the USSR had frequent dealings with the USA and Britain, since many common problems arose in the course of their struggle against their mutual enemy, Germany. Malik pointed out that in an earlier conversation Shigemitsu had admitted the need for frequent dealings between Japan and Germany, to discuss problems which arose in their common struggle against the USA and Britain. Such consultation between allies was neither unusual nor unnatural. On

the suggestion of a peacemaker, Malik asked: 'would it not be better if the proposal to end the war came from those who had started it?'[18]

Malik concluded that Miyakawa had been ordered to visit him to sound out his views on the matters arising from the Yalta conference that most troubled the Japanese.

A little over 2 weeks later, on 4 March 1945, Malik was visited by Tanakamaru, who represented the *Nichiro* shipping company, and cooperated closely with the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Tanakamaru raised the question of Hirota's proposed mission to Moscow.

> Hirota has close connections with the present government, knows Russia and the Russian language very well, and his journey would not have a bad influence. He is a very businesslike person. . . . Stalin is not only a Marshal, he is a world diplomat, and the only diplomat in the world capable of calling for an end to the war, for peace. If Stalin called the world's diplomats together, and put the question of ending the war and concluding peace, the Soviet Union would have the first place of honour in the diplomatic world. Only Stalin, only the Soviet Union can do this.

Malik concluded: 'Tanakamaru's utterances, like Miyakawa's opinions, are an almost overt semi-official request by Japan to the USSR for it to mediate peace between Japan and the USA.'[19] He did not know that at Yalta the Soviet Union had undertaken to enter the war against Japan. But it is also interesting to note a conversation Sato had had on 22 February with Molotov, who had only just returned from Yalta.

Sato said he had come specially to speak about the Crimean conference. The Japanese government was interested to know whether the Conference's decisions touched on the situation in the Far East. What had been published since suggested that they had not, but he felt that this conclusion was perhaps mistaken.

Molotov said that the ambassador was probably acquainted with the conference communique. The conference had considered a good many questions . . . and the communique also, of course, expressed the Soviet Union's point of view.

Sato thanked Molotov . . . but said that if he ventured to ask about the results of the Conference, this was because possibly . . . there was something else which had not found reflection in these published documents. . . . Perhaps during the conference, there had been conversations between the three heads of government or the three foreign ministers on questions of the war in the Far East. . . . Until now the Soviet Union's position had been very clear and definite, but after the Crimean conference the question arose whether there was anything, apart from what had been published, that might change the Soviet position. This issue was very important to the Japanese government.

Molotov stated that he would like to add to what he had said: Of course relations between the Soviet Union and Japan were different from those which Britain and America had with Japan. They were at war with Japan, whereas the Soviet Union had a Neutrality Pact with Japan. We consider that Soviet–Japanese relations are a matter for our two countries. . . . As for conversations . . . during the conference, conversations in such cases are of little import.

Sato said that in their last conversation Molotov had told him the Soviet government adhered to an independent line in foreign policy, even though it had allies. . . . The Japanese government esteemed this Soviet position highly. . . . *The question of the Neutrality Pact was very important for Japan. 25 April would be the day on which the Pact must be denounced or extended. Sato stated that he could say that his government was ready to extend the Pact* [my emphasis – B.S.], and it would be interesting and useful for him to know the Soviet government's intentions.

Molotov said that he heard with satisfaction the ambassador's statement of the Japanese government's intentions about the Neutrality Pact. He added that he intended to have a special discussion with the ambassador about this somewhat later. He could not do this earlier, as recently he, and not only he, had been distracted by other matters, in particular the Crimean conference. But he had in mind to send for the ambassador specially to discuss this question. And he would bring the ambassador's statement to the Soviet government's notice.

Sato said that the question of the pact was exceedingly important, and he understood that Molotov did not want to hasten over his reply. . . . Soon, on 25 April, an international conference would open in San Francisco . . . and it was very probable that Molotov himself would attend it. Therefore he . . . assumed that Molotov would go to America at the beginning of April. The discussion about the Neutrality Pact must take place before he left.

Molotov replied that he must, of course, see the ambassador before 25 April, the anniversary of the neutrality treaty, and he proposed to do so.[20]

So Molotov openly lied to Sato about the questions discussed at the Yalta Conference. But isn't lying diplomacy's constant bedfellow?

From the way events were unfolding at the time, the Japanese sensed the possibility of a change in Soviet policy. Japanese diplomats, trying to infuse some clarity into the future of Soviet–Japanese relations, demanded high-level meetings. But the Soviets used various pretexts to avoid contacts with them. Only on 24 March 1945 did Deputy Foreign Minister Lozovskiy receive Sato.

Sato said that at their recent meeting Molotov had promised to receive him to continue the conversation about the Neutrality Pact. He realised Molotov was busy with foreign visitors, but they would soon leave . . . Sato therefore hoped that Molotov would receive him in the coming week . . . and would be happy if Molotov could see him before leaving for San Francisco. Today he would like to ask for Molotov to be told of his wish.

Lozovskiy replied that Molotov had told him of the ambassador's wish, but because he was busy had asked him, Lozovskiy, to speak with him. He was ready to listen to him, and would tell Molotov about their conversation.

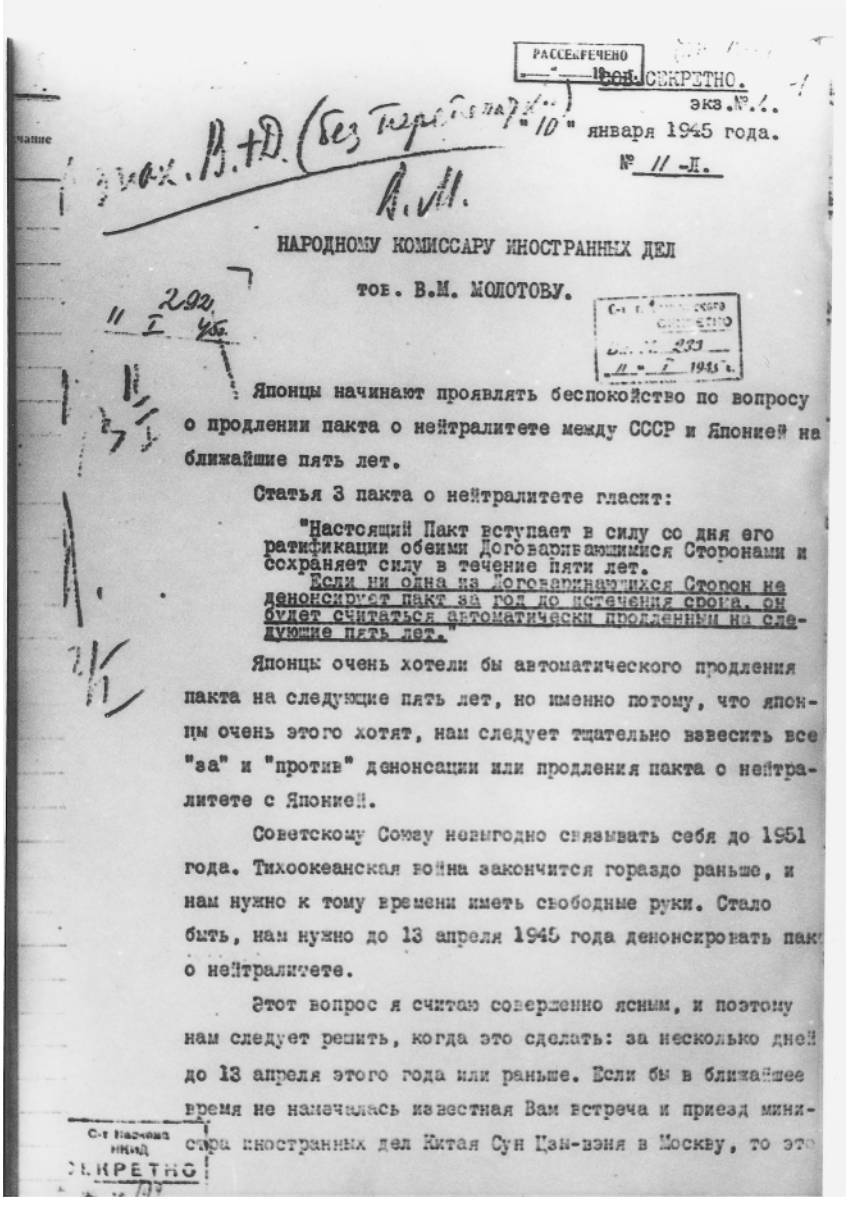
Sato said the Japanese government's position on the Neutrality Pact was clear. It wanted the pact to remain in force, and wished to know the Soviet government's decision. He would like to speak to Molotov about this. Lozovskiy promised to tell Molotov of Sato's statement.[21]

But that was just another Foreign Ministry trick. The Kremlin had already taken its decision to denounce the pact, and was waiting only for a suitable occasion to do so.

9 The denunciation of the Neutrality Pact

By early 1945 the heads of the Soviet Foreign Ministry were already inclined to think the Neutrality Pact would have to be denounced. Lozovskiy's note to Molotov on 10 January of that year (Figure 8) shows that:

> The Japanese are beginning to display anxiety over the question of extending the Neutrality Pact between the USSR and Japan for the next 5 years. Article 3 of the Pact states: 'This Pact comes into effect on the day of its ratification by both High Contracting Parties, and remains in force for a period of five years. If neither of the High Contracting Parties denounces it a year before its expiration, it will be considered automatically renewed for the next five years [underlined by Lozovskiy – B.S.]
>
> The Japanese would very much like automatic extension of the Pact for the next five years, but precisely because the Japanese very much want it, we should weigh very carefully all the pros and cons of denouncing or extending the Neutrality Pact. . . . It is unprofitable for the Soviet Union to bind itself until 1951. The Pacific war will end much sooner, and we must have our hands free by then. It seems we need to denounce the Neutrality Pact before 13 April 1945
>
> I consider this question entirely clear, therefore we should decide when to do it: a few days before 13 April or sooner. But for the imminent intended meeting known to you [the Yalta conference - G.J.] and the arrival in Moscow of Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Sun Tsy-Wen [T.V. Soong – G.J.] this could be done on 10–12 April. But since the meeting is to take place, we must do this sooner. If we denounce the Pact after the meeting, it will be assumed all over the world, and above all in Japan, that we did so under pressure from our allies. But if we do it before the meeting, this will be received by the whole world, including Japan, as an autonomous step by the Soviet government, independent of its allies. Our denunciation must be so structured that the Japanese hope that, given serious concessions from their side, the Neutrality Pact may be extended for another five years.



РАССЕКРЕЧЕНО

Сов. СЕКРЕТНО.

экз. №. 1.

"10" января 1945 года.

№ 11-Л.

Инф. В.+Д. (без перепечатки)

А.М.

НАРОДНОМУ КОМИССАРУ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ДЕЛ

тов. В.М. МОЛОТОВУ.

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Японцы начинают проявлять беспокойство по вопросу о продлении пакта о нейтралитете между СССР и Японией на ближайшие пять лет.

Статья 3 пакта о нейтралитете гласит:

"Настоящий Пакт вступает в силу со дня его ратификации обеими Договаривающимися Сторонами и сохраняет силу в течение пяти лет.

Если ни одна из Договаривающихся Сторон не денонсирует пакт за год до истечения срока, он будет считаться автоматически продленным на следующие пять лет."

Японцы очень хотели бы автоматического продления пакта на следующие пять лет, но именно потому, что японцы очень этого хотят, нам следует тщательно взвесить все "за" и "против" денонсации или продления пакта о нейтралитете с Японией.

Советскому Союзу невыгодно связывать себя до 1951 года. Тихоокеанская война закончится гораздо раньше, и нам нужно к тому времени иметь свободные руки. Стало быть, нам нужно до 13 апреля 1945 года денонсировать пакт о нейтралитете.

Этот вопрос я считаю совершенно ясным, и поэтому нам следует решить, когда это сделать: за несколько дней до 13 апреля этого года или раньше. Если бы в ближайшее время не намечалась известная Вам встреча и приезд министра иностранных дел Китая Сун Цзы-вэня в Москву, то это

Ст. Научный НКИД СЕКРЕТНО

Figure 8 First page of Lozovskiy's note to Molotov regarding denunciation of the Neutrality Pact, annotated by Molotov 'Inf(orm) V(yshinskiy) + D(ekanozov), without retyping.' (Russian Foreign Policy Archive).

In this connection I propose: To hand our statement denouncing the Pact to the Japanese, and to publish it, before the meeting known to you.

To continue the same cautious wait-and-see policy in relation to Japan, meanwhile pressing firmly on individual questions, as we did in 1944.

To begin negotiations with the Japanese about the conditions for prolonging the Pact in about October–November 1945, when the situation in Europe will have been completely clarified, and that in the Pacific become significantly clearer.

Attachment: Draft demarche to Japanese ambassador denouncing the Neutrality Pact.

Signature: Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs S. Lozovskiy.[1]

Draft statement to the Japanese Ambassador on Denunciation of the Neutrality Pact

The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs requests the Japanese Embassy to bring the following to the notice of the Government of Japan:

In connection with Article 3 of the Neutrality Pact between Japan and the Soviet Union of 13 April 1941, envisaging the conditions for its prolongation, the Soviet Government by this present notifies the Government of Japan that it would like to discuss with it the conditions for possible prolongation of the Neutrality Pact for the next five years in the second half of the current year of the Treaty.[2]

Lozovskiy's expression of his personal opinion on development of Soviet–Japanese relations came on the eve of the Yalta conference. He came out decidedly against the USSR's entry into the war with Japan, at least in 1945.[3]

However, Stalin followed his own course. He had no need to consider the 'public opinion' he mentioned to Roosevelt at Yalta, when discussing the political conditions for Soviet entry into the war with Japan. Not in vain was the USSR's foreign policy universally called Stalinist. He could not let slip the chance to take revenge on Japan for defeating Tsarist Russia in the war of 1904–5, or for Japanese brutality in the Russian Far East during the Civil War of 1918–22. And although in 1944–5 Japan more than once offered the Soviet Union significant 'acquisitions' and serious political concessions, it was important to Stalin to seize them by force, ignoring the fact that doing so meant shedding the blood of Soviet soldiers.

Following the Stalinist course, the Soviet Union consequently set about fulfilling its Yalta obligations. At 3 p.m. on 5 April 1945, Molotov received Ambassador Sato and made this statement on behalf of the Soviet government:

> The Neutrality Pact between the Soviet Union and Japan was concluded on 13 April 1941, i.e. before Germany's attack on the USSR and before the outbreak of war between Japan on one side, and Britain and the United States of America on the other.
>
> Since that time the situation has changed radically. Germany attacked the USSR, and Japan, an ally of Germany, is aiding it in its war against the USSR. In that situation the Neutrality Pact between Japan and the USSR has lost all sense, and extension of this pact has become impossible.
>
> By virtue of the above, and in conformity with Article 3 of the aforementioned pact, which envisages the right of denunciation one year before expiry of the Pact's five-year validity, the Soviet government by this present notifies the government of Japan of its wish to denounce the Pact of 13 April 1941.

Sato promised to convey the statement to the Japanese government.[4]

The conversation between them is of scholarly interest. Here are its main points from 'V.M. Molotov's Diary'.

Molotov reads the Soviet government statement.

> Sato receiving the text, states that all that is left to him is to transmit it to his government. At the same time he permits himself to ask Molotov for some clarifications. He would like to know what the Soviet government thinks of the period that will begin on 25 April of this year, and last until the expiration of the pact, that is one more year. The ambassador says he thinks his government expects that during that year, beginning on the 25th of this month, the Soviet government will maintain the same relations with Japan it has maintained up to the present, bearing in mind that the Pact remains in force.
>
> Molotov replies that our statement was made in conformity with the Pact, the third Article of which envisages the right and procedure to denounce it. Factually Soviet–Japanese relations revert to the situation in which they were before conclusion of the Pact. Molotov says the Soviet government is acting in conformity with the Treaty. Sato observes that in that case the Soviet and Japanese governments interpret the question differently. The Japanese government holds to the view that if one side denounces the Treaty one year before its expiration, the Pact remains in force for one year, denunciation notwithstanding. However, according to explanations now given by the People's Commissar, it seems that from the moment of denunciation, the Pact ceases to exist. If the Soviet government so interprets this question, then its interpretation differs from the Japanese government's.
>
> Molotov replies that there is some misunderstanding. The Soviet

government's position is expressed in today's statement. He reads ... '... in conformity with Article 3 of the aforementioned pact, which envisages the right of denunciation one year before expiry of the Pact's five-year validity, the Soviet government by this present notifies the government of Japan of its wish to denounce the Pact of 13 April 1941'.

Molotov explains that on expiry of the five-year period ... Soviet–Japanese relations will obviously revert to the status quo ante conclusion of the pact. Sato replies, if that is so, the Japanese government will accept that interpretation.

Molotov says this statement is precisely set out in the text the ambassador has received.

Sato thanks Molotov for his clarifications, and adds that he would like to express his personal feelings. He deeply regrets that the Soviet Government has not found it possible to sustain the relations that existed between the two countries. The Japanese government would like to renew the Neutrality Pact. Sato says that his government would like to preserve peace in the Far East, which is maintained there thanks to the Pact. He thinks that despite denouncing the Pact the Soviet Government has not changed its point of view about maintaining peace in the Far East. This is very important, since at the present time there is conflict everywhere, but peace has been preserved in the Far East thanks to the two governments' wise policy. Sato says he would be obliged to Molotov if he would explain the Soviet government's position.

Molotov replies that the Soviet government's position is precisely formulated in today's statement. We see how much this time differs from that in which the Pact was concluded. Germany was not then at war with the Soviet Union, and Japan was not at war with the United States and England. The motives for the Soviet government's decision are plain.... We are acting in accordance with the right provided to us by the Pact. The period of the Pact's validity has not ended....

Sato thanks Molotov for his reply, and says that he will forward today's Soviet government statement and Molotov's additional clarifications to Tokyo. He hopes his government's point of view will be conveyed to the Soviet government....As for future questions, the Japanese government will surely wish to negotiate with the Soviet government with the aim of preserving peace in the Far East. The situation in West and East is very complicated. Needless to say, it would be desirable to preserve peace where possible. He hopes the Soviet government shares this Japanese government's viewpoint.

The ambassador says he would be obliged if Molotov would give him an opportunity to come to review the international situation, after the Japanese government sends him instructions....

Molotov replies that he will gladly meet the ambassador.

The Japanese press on the denunciation of the Neutrality Pact[5]

The Japanese press carried many items on 7 April about the denunciation of the Pact. The full text of Molotov's statement appeared twice in all newspapers. The headline was the same everywhere: 'Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact will not be extended, said Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs to Ambassador Sato.' Leading articles and commentaries were issued under headlines such as: 'There will be no changes in our position. Friendly relations continue to exist as before. The international situation and Japanese–Soviet relations. The reason – a radical change in the situation. A measure which was expected. The term expires in April next year. A very great mission has been fulfilled. A service to peace.'

> Malik reported to Moscow that 'The general tone is emphatically calm, or more precisely, calming. Japan's military and domestic situation requires that. It is particularly emphasised that the Pact remains in force for another year, and the denunciation entails no change in relations. The Japanese government ... will prevent expansion of the sphere of war as much as possible, and strive to preserve Japanese–Soviet friendship and neutrality. Therefore there should be no anxiety that any changes will occur in Japanese–Soviet relations. ... The Japanese people hopes the governments of both countries will evaluate the future situation calmly. It is observed that the pact was concluded at a time of Japanese 'blitzkrieg diplomacy', during Matsuoka's return from Europe. At that time Japan's relations with the USA and Britain were becoming more troubled. For Japan, conclusion of the Japanese–Soviet Pact meant reinforcement of the Tripartite Alliance, and for the Soviet Union it was profitable from the viewpoint of putting German–Soviet relations in order.
>
> The press is placing unusual emphasis on the 'friendliness' of Japanese–Soviet relations ... and observes somewhat reproachfully that
>
> > now the Soviet Union ... has unilaterally notified that the Pact will not be extended. However, denunciation was to be expected, if only on the basis of Premier Stalin's statement in November 1944, when Japan was publicly called an aggressor state, or from denunciation of the Soviet-Turkish treaty, or other reasons. From the very start of its participation in the European war, the Soviet Union has firmly maintained a policy of freedom of action in relation to the Pacific, and always refused to participate in international conferences which Chungking attended. However, given its decision to take part in the San Francisco conference, and other facts, it was easy for us to conclude that the Pact would not be extended.

> The real reason for denunciation is that because of the sharp change in Soviet favour of the Soviet–German war situation, the need to prolong the Pact, which played a role in securing the Soviet rear, has disappeared. Besides, the Soviet Union ... wants to unburden itself of all restrictions in order to conduct an independent foreign policy.... By denouncing the Pact, the Soviet Union is making a gesture towards America and Britain, strengthening its influence at the San Francisco conference, and at the same time enhancing its right to a voice on East Asian problems. Even if there is no war between Japan and the Soviet Union, when the world is divided into two camps, existence of the Japanese–Soviet Pact becomes unnatural.
>
> However, even when a Neutrality Pact exists, even then neutral relations are not preserved by virtue of the pact's existence. We should not forget why neutrality could be maintained. Japan and the Soviet Union are faced with a real problem of stabilising their relations even further, and cooperating daily in the interests of all mankind, and establishing a permanent world policy.... We would like to hope that the governments of both countries would bear this in mind and evaluate the general situation coolly.

The T*okyo Shimbun* ... characterises Japan's international position as follows:

> Currently we face the danger of an enemy landing in Japan itself. Development of the war situation permits no optimism whatsoever. The European Axis countries are under enemy pressure. Development of our diplomacy towards the Soviet Union is going against our expectations.

The denunciation has undoubtedly influenced the forming of the new Cabinet. First, its formation was somewhat delayed, and second, it was formed without a Foreign Minister or Minister for East Asian Affairs. For the time being Prime Minister Suzuki occupies these posts. The press assumes that the USA and Britain will now try even harder to disrupt Japanese–Soviet relations.... The date of convening of the San Francisco conference, 25 April, is a device conceived by our enemies the USA and Britain, and has a delicate relationship to the Japanese–Soviet Pact. Hope is expressed that the Soviet Union will remain true to itself, and maintain the principles of a self-sufficient foreign policy. Finally, however, hope is expressed that Japan ... has made adequate preparations for any possible occurrence.... One paper writes that the Imperial government is preparing itself for possible changes in circumstances.

There are no attacks on the Soviet Union. The press does not

> comment on the fact of Japanese aid to Germany in its war against the Soviet Union, nor does it contest the mention of this in Comrade Molotov's statement. The Press agrees that the current situation differs radically from that in which the Pact was signed.

On the morning of 7 April Information Bureau spokesman Iguchi stated, in a studiedly calm tone, that British and American radio broadcasts had reported that the Soviet Union had denounced the Neutrality Pact with Japan. . . . Iguchi declined to comment, on grounds of his 'lack' of a precise text of Molotov's statement. However, he pointed out that in any event the Neutrality Pact would remain in force for another year. On the same day the evening *Tokyo Shimbun* published the full text of Molotov's statement. In a home service radio broadcast on 7 April, this question was commented on as follows (recorded and given in Adyrkhayev's translation).

> Four years have passed since conclusion of the Neutrality Pact between Japan and the Soviet Union. On 5 April 1945 a Soviet Government statement was made to Sato, our Ambassador in Moscow, to the effect that in view of the current international situation it does not wish to extend the period of this Pact's validity. Thus the Neutrality Pact will cease to function in April of next year. However, in the past four years the Pact has played an enormous positive role, since both sides have implemented it, and this, as the whole world well knows, has exercised influence on the peaceful relations of both countries. The Soviet Government recently made a similar statement denouncing its pact with Turkey. It had already become clear by then that an identical statement could be expected regarding the Japanese–Soviet pact. Since the USSR takes account of the international situation and its own strengths in conducting its foreign policy, these facts show that it has adopted a new independent foreign policy.
>
> There is no doubt that even after the period of this Pact expires, neutral relations between Japan and the Soviet Union will continue as before, and there will be no changes of any kind in the peaceful relations between these countries.

Radio commentaries at 7 p.m. added: 'This Soviet Government action is connected with the San Francisco conference. However, the USSR, of course, will not change its peaceful relations with Japan, and Japan for its part will apply every effort to continue good relations with the Soviet Union.'

Later, much briefer, commentaries on 8 and 9 April, noted that 'the Soviet decision was not unexpected. . . . The decisive factor determining it is the acutely altered situation in the war against Germany. As for Japan,

the existence or non-existence of a pact will not prompt any changes in its policy'. . . . However, 'taking full account of the rapid development of events in Europe', the Foreign Ministry mouthpiece *Nippon Times* wrote:

> Japan adheres to its unaltered policy, but at the same time is fully prepared to face any eventuality. . . . Termination of the treaty as such presents no special problem for either country.
>
> There are numerous examples in the present war of a surprise start to military operations, existence of a treaty notwithstanding. The essence is the problem of 'sincerity' between countries. Between Japan and the Soviet Union there is no problem that cannot be resolved in friendly fashion. Judging by its statement about Turkey, the Soviet Union is taking a line of not being bound by relations based on a past situation. The current statement can also be viewed as based on the same thought. It must not be assumed that the statement will directly engender changes in Japanese–Soviet relations.

The *Asahi* newspaper on 9 April denied Anglo-American claims that it was the Soviet Union's denunciation of the Pact that toppled the Koiso cabinet. The newspaper argued that the cabinet resigned on 5 April, whereas Sato's telegram about the denunciation was received only on the morning of the sixth:

> Some reports indicate that the basic view in Japanese Foreign Ministry circles on the Soviet denunciation of the Neutrality Pact is as follows. Once the war with Germany ends, the Soviet Union may sharply increase pressure on Japan, raise its demands, and even break off diplomatic relations, but without declaring war. By so doing the Soviet Union will free its hands to participate in the division of Japan. . . .
>
> Political and military circles close to the new cabinet's entourage view this question more pessimistically, conceding that the Soviet Union will declare war on Japan, though they have not lost hope that it will perhaps not do so until the term of the Neutrality Pact expires. They consider that, whatever the Soviet Union's future position, Japan should pay no attention to it, and continue as before to concentrate all its forces on resolving the main task, the struggle with America. They start from the premise that Japan's current situation is so bad that it cannot get worse. To divert its attention and part of its forces towards the Soviet Union would mean risky and fateful dispersal of forces.

The Japanese press, though devoting many words to the Pact's denunciation, was silent on 13 April 1945, the fourth anniversary of its signature. Only the *Nippon Times*, in a brief, apparently Foreign Ministry-inspired, note in its 'News and Views' section, again claims that Japan expected the denunciation, and that it by no means signifies that there are or will be any

changes in relations between Japan and the Soviet Union. The note's compilers admit changes in the international situation, but emphasise that

> the pact was signed on the very eve of these changes, and the fisheries agreement of March 1944 was signed in full comprehension of this new situation and in the spirit of the Neutrality Pact. Consequently, this subsequent turn of events is not in the slightest degree a justifiable reason for denouncing the Pact at this time. . . . The reason is that for the Soviet Union the Pact has now become unnecessary or undesirable. The anti-Axis camp is extravagantly joyful, as if this Soviet action will inevitably lead to sensational events. But we have nothing to fear. Since we understand the situation well, on the basis of our long-standing relationship with the Soviet Union, and have a correct assessment about what kind of country it is, existence or non-existence of a Pact is not essential for us.

That was the Japanese press reaction, which, of course, reflected the view of Japan's rulers on the substance of Soviet–Japanese relations, and the Neutrality Pact's influence on them. To me personally this calm and balanced Japanese position seems objective and sensible, because in fact nothing terrible had yet happened. Yes, the Pact had been denounced. But so what? Relations between the USSR and Japan were normal. Soviet leaders often said so. There were no territorial problems between them. The concessions issue had been resolved. The ambassadors in Tokyo and Moscow were deciding all current bilateral questions in a friendly atmosphere.

Of course, the Japanese government knew of the USA's persistent efforts to drag the Soviet Union into the war against Japan. But for that to happen there would have to be weighty issues that could be resolved only by war, and a plausible pretext. As yet there was none. Therefore most military men and politicians in Tokyo still gave little credence to the likelihood of a Soviet attack.

As for the Soviet side, the official statement denouncing the Pact had two focal points: one, Japan is aiding Germany, with which the USSR is at war; two, Japan is at war with Great Britain and the USA, allies of the Soviet Union.

Yes, the international situation had indeed changed radically since the Neutrality Pact was concluded. So even I can understand the position of the Kremlin's leaders, who decided to free their hands on the eve of radical changes in the entire system of international relations in both Europe and the Far East. But I concede only that. For the Pact had 'worked', to the benefit of Soviet–Japanese relations, in precisely the most difficult years, 1941–3 for the USSR, and 1944–5 for Japan. So Molotov's point two above is obviously fabricated. As for Japan's aid to Germany, that was scarcely vital, worth a mention, but only an excuse. Nor should we forget that the Soviet Union was giving similar and perhaps even greater

assistance, including in the Intelligence field, to the United States, with which Japan was at war. It was Soviet propaganda and the 'scholars' who served it, that in later years, when the Soviet attack had to be justified, took to alleging systematic violations of the Neutrality Pact by Japan.

It is worth noting that in those dramatic days for Soviet–Japanese relations, the Koiso cabinet fell, and the Suzuki government was formed. It could seem that this happened because of the Soviet Union's denunciation of the Pact, which undoubtedly greatly worsened Japan's international position. But I personally think it was mere coincidence. The reasons for the Koiso cabinet's fall were the internal crisis in Japanese society, and the major defeats in the East Asian war.

On 9 April 1945 Shigenori Togo was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs. In 1940 Togo had begun negotiations about the Pact, but he did not carry them to their conclusion. Matsuoka did that. As Malik wrote in his diary, the Japanese understood full well that it was impossible to resolve all issues between the USSR and Japan by diplomatic means. But at that stage the main danger for Japan was its war with the USA, and its main task was to get out of that war. So the 'pro-Soviet' (especially in American eyes) Togo was to ensure the USSR's neutrality, and create at the top level in the USA and Britain at least the appearance of serious negotiations beginning between Japan and the USSR. He should thus somewhat ease Japan's resolution of its main task – achieving a compromise with Britain and the USA – by scaring them with the threat of a Japanese–Soviet deal at Anglo-Saxon expense. In Japanese diplomatic history this tactic had been employed more than once in Japan's relations with Russia and Britain. That, Malik considered, was Togo's basic mission in the new cabinet.[6]

Malik first visited Togo on 20 April 1945. During the conversation Togo several times repeated the phrase 'I, as a friend of the Soviet Union'. He said:

> After conclusion of the Neutrality Pact the German–Soviet war erupted. The whole world was hurled into the flames of war. However, *on this dark scene friendly Japanese–Soviet relations, founded on the Neutrality Pact, remained the only bright spot* [my emphasis – B.S.], and I hoped this bright spot would chase away the clouds and become the focus to help peace to advance in the whole world. But the news of the treaty's denunciation very much grieved me personally. Since the treaty remains in force for one whole year, I think you and I will have numerous opportunities to talk circumstantially about this, and for now I ask you only to convey my feelings of regret to Mr Molotov.[7]

Togo expressed the wish to meet Molotov on his way back from the San Francisco conference of 25 April, and asked Malik whether Molotov would fly via the Bering Straits or across the Atlantic.

Malik's conclusions: Togo's assessments, remarks, feelings and wishes, and his wish to meet Comrade Molotov, he dismissed as 'usual Japanese waffle'. Malik clearly wanted to please his Moscow masters by such unpardonable expressions, and by the 'unfettered' nature of his evaluations.

At that time the Japanese government was preparing its reply to the Soviet statement. Since Molotov was then in San Francisco, Sato handed it to Lozovskiy on 27 April 1945. Here is its text.[8]

> The Japanese government acknowledges receipt of the Soviet Government's notification that it does not wish automatically to extend the Neutrality Pact between Japan and the Soviet Union when its term expires in April of next year.
>
> In so doing, however, the Japanese government cannot but express its surprise that the Soviet government this time considered the Neutrality Pact to have become meaningless, justifying this on the grounds that Japan is helping Germany and that Japan is at war with the USA and England. The imperial government wishes to state on this occasion that it cannot agree with this explanation of the motive, since Japan cooperates with Germany in war with their common enemy, the USA and England, precisely as the Soviet Union continues to cooperate with the USA and England in the war against their common enemy, Germany, and that this fact has not essentially hindered the Soviet side from affirming on numerous occasions up to the most recent time, that neutral and friendly relations between Japan and the Soviet Union exist, and can exist, on an independent basis, irrespective of the above-mentioned complication.
>
> 27 April 1945

After Sato handed over the statement, he and Lozovskiy had a discussion.

Sato said that for him the Soviet government statement denouncing the Pact was unexpected. As late as 16 September of last year, when he spoke to Molotov about the Japanese government's proposal to send a mission on special assignment to the USSR, Molotov, though not considering it possible to receive the mission, had replied that relations between our countries were developing in a good direction, and that this was helped by the treaties and agreements recently concluded. Molotov had said relations between the USSR and Japan were good, and emphasised the existence of the Neutrality Pact. That was why it had been a complete surprise to hear this pact denounced. Of course, the Soviet government was entitled to decide this issue as it thought fit, but the ambassador considered that relations between our countries were friendly and normal not solely because a Neutrality Pact existed between them. These relations, he thought, could be maintained even without a Pact, the more so since the Neutrality Pact remained in force for a whole year.

Lozovskiy replied that when Molotov returned from San Francisco he would probably find time to meet Sato to discuss the future of Soviet–Japanese relations.[9]

Events in the world were then moving at lightning speed. On 8 May Germany signed unconditional surrender. Japan was left to face the anti-Axis coalition alone.

10 Japan seeks Soviet mediation
May–July 1945

The fall of Berlin, the deaths of Hitler and Mussolini and, finally, Germany's unconditional surrender, aroused alarm and anxiety in the Japanese people. The leitmotif of all talk about it was 'After Germany's defeat it will be Japan's turn'.

In Tokyo rumours that everyone had had enough of the war, and that high officials and other responsible persons were thinking how to get out of it, were becoming ever more frequent. As Malik reported, 'they may, as an extreme step, make a final offer – to retain Japan itself and the existing Imperial order. Beyond that these dignitaries will not go, and they will not agree to unconditional surrender.'[1] And further:

> In the event of military defeat in Japan itself, the military proposes to transfer military operations against the USA to Manchuria, and to continue the war there. . . .
>
> At the same time, it is being said in Tokyo that the Foreign Ministry is working hard to get Japan out of the war, and for that purpose working equally hard on Soviet–Japanese relations. Japan's fundamental objective is Soviet peace mediation with the USA. For this mediation Japan is prepared to surrender its fishing rights in Soviet waters, and to cede Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands to the Soviet Union (the latter making sense in the Japanese view, to bring the USSR and USA into collision).[2]

Japan's outline 'peace conditions' are adumbrated in Japanese Foreign Ministry plans, in the shape of total withdrawal from the South Seas area, removal of Japanese forces from China, and granting of independence to Manchukuo and Korea. Since Manchukuo would be an 'independent' state, the thorny question of the Chinese Eastern Railway would lose its acuteness for Japanese–Soviet relations, as it would then be decided between the USSR and Manchukuo. Foreign Ministry–originated rumours are also circulating, that the USSR is already engaged on the problem of making peace between Japan and the USA.

At the same time, following Germany's surrender there was an

extraordinary session of the Japanese cabinet, at which the text of a governmental declaration was adopted. It stated that 'Japan profoundly regrets the surrender of its ally, Germany,' but then indicated in high-flown language that the change in the European military situation did not to the least extent change the Empire's war aims, which above all comprised 'the very existence and self-defence of Japan', and that it 'together with its allied countries of East Asia will fight to the end'.[3]

This government statement was obviously intended primarily to raise military and civilian morale. Simultaneously, Japan's leadership set about devising a strategy for the changed situation. On 14 May, after a 3-day session, the Supreme Council for Conduct of the War declared that Japan's situation need not be considered hopeless. War Minister Anami said: 'Japanese forces still occupy enormous enemy territories, and our enemies have landed only on small islands. Therefore I object to thinking of conditions for Japan as a defeated country.'[4] Furthermore, military figures defended the idea that the day of 'national salvation' would come when the Japanese Army gave battle on Japanese soil. The Americans would then, they argued, agree to a compromise peace. At the same time they calculated that Japan's growing difficulties could be somewhat reduced by diplomatic manoeuvring. The Army leaders therefore insisted on steps being taken to avert Soviet entry into the war.

Togo knew diplomacy's time had run out, but nevertheless thought Soviet goodwill obtainable. Premier Suzuki supported Togo, and emphasised that negotiations with Moscow must also aim at securing its mediation for concluding an overall peace with the allies. After a stormy discussion on 14 May 1945, the Council ordered the Foreign Ministry to implement a number of diplomatic steps aimed at:

1 averting Soviet entry into the war;
2 securing a benign Soviet attitude;
3 achieving peace with Britain and the USA by Soviet mediation.[5]

On 15 May Japan denounced all its treaties with Germany. The press emphasised that Japan thereby freed itself from all fetters in its international relations, and returned to a free and independent position. This was an indirect admission, Malik wrote, that the Anti–Comintern and Tripartite Pacts had hampered Japan in its relations with the USSR, since ... alliance with Germany had placed no constraints on Japan's relations with China or East Asian countries, nor on its expansion in the Pacific. Apropos of this the *Nippon Times* wrote 'the conditions have changed, the ideals remain unchanged'.

The main points in press commentaries:

> Japan alone must fulfil to the end the mission of the Second World War. Most neutral countries have willy–nilly submitted to the USA

> and England. Apart from one great power, the Soviet Union, Japan retains neutral relations only with Sweden, Switzerland, Argentina and another two or three small countries. We, of course, do not know the future trends of actions by the Soviet Union, now freed from the burden of war in Europe; however, post-war problems in Europe, not to mention internal exhaustion and the need for reconstruction, are a new burden for the Soviet Union. Over the duration of the Second World War Japan and the Soviet Union have observed a Neutrality treaty, and trusted each other.[6]

Japanese assessments of the USSR's role after the defeat of Germany

The Soviet Union conducts skilful diplomacy. However, having lost over 10 million men, it will not risk serious deterioration in its relations with the USA and England until it has exploited fully and to the utmost its favourable situation as the only country which has ended its war. The character deficiencies of the USA and England enable the USSR to act independently, so there is no certainty of clashes in Europe. To believe there are means to overestimate the Soviet Union's real strength. In the Pacific war, the Soviet Union simply wants the USA and Japan to weaken each other. That is clear. The secret thoughts of the Comintern, which, in determining world policy, classified both Japan and America as capitalist countries, are entirely clear. If we even think of the Soviet Union in the role of a normal mediator, it is more to its benefit for the war between Japan and America to continue as long as possible. In that time it will successfully occupy itself with post-war construction and activity in Europe.[7]

After Germany's defeat Malik defined the following main points:

> There is a view in Japanese governing circles that the USSR will not fight Japan, but will wait and prepare to exercise strong political pressure according to how events develop. The Japanese government is increasingly hopeful of a split in the United Nations, especially over the questions of Poland, Austria, Hungary and post-war Germany.
>
> There are serious intentions to use mediation by the USSR to end the war with the USA. It has apparently been decided to replace the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow, ... to send a new Ambassador, with broad plenipotentiary powers and a firm intention to improve relations with the Soviet Union. Hirota is mentioned as a likely candidate.[8]

In the light of the above, Malik's conversation on 21 May 1945 with Sukeatsu Tanakamaru, of the 'Nichiro' fishing firm, merits attention.

> He began by describing himself as a man bound to the Soviet Union by economic interests, knowing the USSR, and therefore unable to be

> indifferent to the fate of Japanese–Soviet relations. Foreign Minister Togo had often complained to him that he, who began the negotiations on the Neutrality Pact with the USSR, had not been permitted to complete them. Now the treaty was expiring, and Togo was greatly disappointed that this treaty, which he initiated, has had such a short life.

To Malik's comment that *the treaty remains in force* (my emphasis – B.S.) Tanakamaru stated 'In the past year the Japanese government intended to send Hirota to Moscow, with special powers, seemingly on the question of prolonging the Neutrality Pact, or in general on all questions of Soviet–Japanese relations.'[9]

Seeing that the Soviet government had no burning desire to volunteer mediation, the Japanese Foreign Ministry decided in mid-May on more active steps, although Togo himself considered that 'measures in relation to the USSR are already too late'.[10] Since Germany's defeat, the anti-Axis powers were planning to redeploy their forces quickly to the Far East. This made Japan's rapid defeat inevitable, and a compromise peace unattainable. But in pursuit of it, Togo authorised Hirota (Figure 9), a former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, to sound Malik out on possible mediation. Their first semi-official conversation took place on 3 June in the Hotel Hora.

Hirota said it was he who had planned in 1944 to go to Moscow on a special mission. Malik replied that the object of his journey had then been incomprehensible. Even Ambassador Sato, when telling Molotov of Japan's desire to send the mission, had been unable to explain why it was to come.

Hirota went on to say that earlier there had been differences of opinion in Japan about Japanese–Soviet relations, but that was no longer the case. It was now universally held that since the Soviet Union occupied a large part of Asia, ensuring Asia's security required cooperation between the USSR, Japan and China. And the basis for that must be friendship between the USSR and Japan.[11]

The Hirota–Malik discussion continued on the next day.

Hirota was completely frank:

> Between the USSR and Japan there is a Neutrality Pact. Both sides are observing this Pact. There would be no anxiety if the Pact were not expiring within a year. But since the Pact does expire then, our country must think of the future. While the Pact is still in force, Japan wishes to strengthen its friendly relations with the Soviet Union even more ... the question of how to improve them is now being profoundly studied. Since this affects both the USSR and Japan, I hope and wish that Japan can improve its relations with the USSR, then extend that feeling of friendship also to China, a major Asian country, and thus draw China into our company.

Figure 9 Koki Hirota.

Hirota stressed that the government shared his views. However, he offered no specific proposals for improving Soviet–Japanese relations, insisting that the Soviet side should itself put questions at a practical level. Malik concluded that the 'unexpectedness and suddenness' of Hirota's visit testified that the Japanese 'are now past outward forms and plausible pretexts'. They wanted to achieve substance as soon as possible, namely stable relations with the Soviet Union.

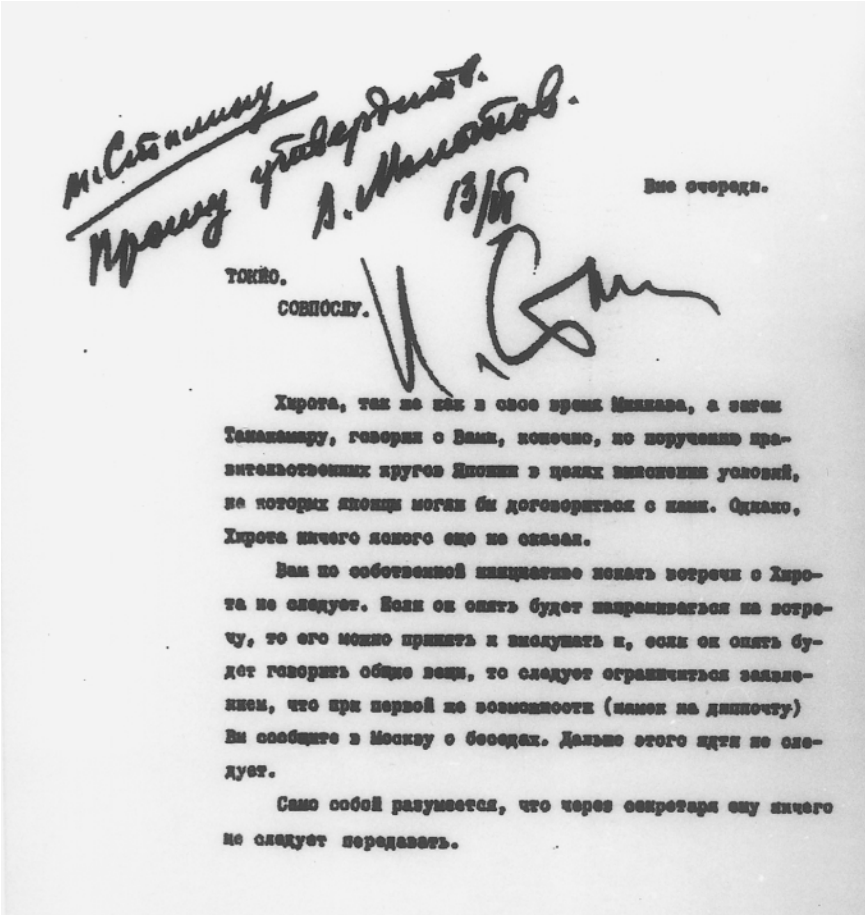
At first it was apparently proposed to begin soundings in a leisurely way through the 'unofficial' Tanakamaru, but the most recent [US] air raids compelled the Japanese to 'put the spurs in' at once. Malik considered the meeting was inspired and prepared in advance. Hirota began and ended with wishes to conclude a treaty with the Soviet Union, in any form, and for as long a period as possible.[12]

In a telegram to Moscow on 7 June 1945 Malik wrote:

> This Japanese wooing of the Soviet Union is entirely logical and reasonable, given the general international situation and Japan's serious, indeed hopeless, military situation. That this tendency would inevitably intensify was clear even a year ago. . . . If the general international situation makes it expedient for us to conduct such negotiations with the Japanese, then it seems to me that we should present the maximum number of problems demanding solution. . . . In doing so it can justifiably be calculated that in compensation for a treaty with the USSR, the Japanese could as a maximum concession return Southern Sakhalin to us, give up fishing in Soviet territorial waters, and even hand over part of the Kurile Islands to us. *To expect them to agree voluntarily to any substantial change in our favour of Japan's position in Manchuria, Korea, Kwantung and North China is difficult. This can happen only as a consequence of Japan's total military defeat and unconditional surrender. Without that, no negotiations with Japan will provide a fundamental solution to the problem of prolonged peace and security in the Far East. In light of the above, conclusion of an agreement such as that which the Japanese propose,* and which commits us to do much, is hardly expedient [my emphasis – B.S.]. However, we can listen to what they propose. Since Hirota declined to put specific proposals, if he persists in saying he wants to meet me soon, I should perhaps reply through the secretary, who was present at the discussion, that, having as yet no specific proposals from him . . . I cannot at present express my point of view concretely.
>
> I request instructions.[13]

These came on 15 June (Figure 10). Molotov wrote:

> Hirota, like Miyakawa in his time, then Tanakamaru, of course spoke to you under Japanese government instructions to find out the conditions under which Japan could have a treaty with us. . . . Do not take the initiative in seeking a meeting with Hirota. If he again requests a meeting, he may be received and heard out, and if he still talks generalities, confine yourself to saying that at the first opportunity (hint at diplomatic mail) you will tell Moscow of the conversations. Do not go beyond that.



Вне очереди.

ТОКИО.
СОВПОСЛУ.

Хирота, так же как в свое время Миякава, а затем
Танакамару, говорил с Вами, конечно, по поручению пра-
вительственных кругов Японии в целях выяснения условий,
на которых японцы могли бы договориться с нами. Однако,
Хирота ничего нового еще не сказал.

Вам по собственной инициативе искать встречи с Хиро-
та не следует. Если он опять будет напрашиваться на встре-
чу, то его можно принять и выслушать и, если он опять бу-
дет говорить общие вещи, то следует ограничиться заявле-
нием, что при первой же возможности (намек на дипПочту)
Вы сообщите в Москву о беседах. Дальше этого идти не сле-
дует.

Само собой разумеется, что через секретаря ему ничего
не следует передавать.

Figure 10 Draft cipher telegram from Molotov to Ambassador Malik in Tokyo, approved by Stalin, 13 June 1945 (Russian Foreign Policy Archive).

Hirota three times sought another meeting, but Malik obeyed his instructions and refused each time. Only on 24 June did a new conversation take place. Hirota proposed to discuss basic problems concerning both countries: Manchukuo, China, development of economic relations, etc. In particular he spoke of the possibility of delivering rubber, lead, tin, tungsten and other commodities to the USSR, in exchange for Soviet oil.

Malik noted with satisfaction that during his time as Ambassador Soviet–Japanese relations had developed quite well on the whole, although for a number of reasons there had been regrettable incidents, influenced by some Japanese circles or other.

> *At present,* [he continued], *relations between our countries are based on the Neutrality Pact, which has played a positive role, is still playing it, and will continue to do so until its date of expiration* . . . (gap in transmission) . . . *I incline to think that our countries' mutual relations have developed normally on the basis of this Pact.* [my emphasis – B.S.] Malik drew Hirota's attention to the point that the Soviet government had denounced the Pact legally, but not broken it off. It still existed.[14]

The next Malik–Hirota meeting took place on 29 June. This time Hirota was more specific. He even brought with him two prepared notes, which he used during the conversation, then handed to Malik. First Hirota spoke of a treaty to regularise and normalise future relations. The Japanese proposed its basic principles in the preamble.

> To establish stable, permanent friendly relations between Japan and the USSR, and cooperate in maintaining permanent peace in East Asia. For this purpose, to conclude an agreement between the USSR and Japan on mutual maintenance of peace in East Asia and establishment of relations of non-aggression between the two countries.

Hirota went on to read:

> On questions of Manchukuo and other issues, the Japanese side is agreeable to:
>
> 1 Neutralisation of Manchukuo (after the end of the Greater East Asia War, Japan withdraws its forces, and both Japan and the USSR undertake respect for Manchukuo's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and non-interference in its internal affairs).
> 2 Japan is prepared to liquidate its fishing rights, if supplied with oil.
> 3 Japan is ready to consider all other questions the Soviet side wants considered.

Malik replied that he would forward the proposals to Moscow at once.

On 8 July Malik received additional instructions from Molotov. 'Be even more cautious, in the sense of not becoming involved in these or similar discussions evaluating the Japanese proposals. You must not provide any reason for the Japanese to depict your talks as negotiations.'[15]

On subsequent days Hirota, Prince Konoe and Tanakamaru all sought meetings with Malik; but he said he was ill, and received nobody.

Seeing that nothing was being achieved in Tokyo, Togo decided to transfer the main Japanese effort to Moscow. He was in a hurry, because information had appeared about another 'Big Three' meeting, and he wanted to start a Soviet–Japanese dialogue before it began. So again the

idea arose of sending a special Japanese emissary to Moscow, entrusted with broad plenipotentiary powers.

Only on 12 July did the Emperor approve Konoe's candidature as his special envoy. On the same day Togo instructed Sato to visit Molotov and put the question of sending a special representative to the USSR. 'Although the special representative cannot reach Moscow before the Russian leaders leave for the three-power conference,' Togo wrote, 'it must be arranged for him to be able to meet them as soon as they return to Moscow.'[16]

On 13 July Sato saw Lozovskiy, and handed him a letter addressed to Molotov, informing him that the Emperor wished to send Prince Konoe to Moscow as his official representative. The following message from the Emperor was attached:

> Strictly Confidential
>
> His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, deeply concerned at the sufferings and sacrifices of all the belligerent countries' peoples, which are increasing from day to day as a result of the present war, expresses his will to end the war as soon as possible. Since in the East Asian war the USA and England insist on unconditional surrender, the Empire will be compelled to wage war to the end, mobilising all its forces and means, for the honour and existence of the Fatherland. However, as a result of this circumstance, intensified bloodshed by the peoples of both belligerent sides is inevitable. His Majesty is intensely disturbed by this thought, and expresses the desire that for the benefit of mankind peace be restored as soon as possible.[17]

After reading the message Lozovskiy told Sato that it had no addressee, and he did not understand for whom it was intended. Sato replied that it was addressed to nobody in particular, but the Head of State, Kalinin, and Head of the Soviet government, Stalin, should see it. His Majesty would send a special message with Konoe. The Japanese government wanted the Japanese representatives to meet the Head of the Soviet government immediately after his return from the 'Big Three' conference. Sato added that he had spoken two or three times before with Molotov about sending a Japanese Envoy Extraordinary on a special mission to Moscow, but the representative now under discussion had a totally different mission. He would come as the Emperor's personal representative. Sato asked the Soviet government to bear that in mind, emphasised the special importance of Konoe's mission, and therefore asked for Molotov to see this message before leaving for Berlin, so that he could give at least a provisional answer before going. This would help Konoe's mission to prepare.... As the train journey from Tokyo to Moscow took a long time, he would like to ask on the Japanese government's behalf for the Soviet government to provide this mission with an aircraft, and send it to the Manchuria or Tsitsihar railway station, from where it could convey the mission more quickly to Moscow.

Lozovskiy replied that he would try to inform the Soviet government. But a reply could hardly be expected that day, as Stalin and Molotov would leave Moscow that night or at dawn the next day.[18]

As we now know, they were leaving for Potsdam, to meet Truman and Churchill. In the next chapter we shall touch on the discussions that took place there. Here we merely note that on 25 July 1945 the USA, Great Britain and China published the Potsdam Declaration, demanding Japan's unconditional surrender. But the Japanese government continued to hope it could incline the Soviet Union to its side, so that it would offer to mediate a compromise peace. So on 25 July Sato met Lozovskiy again.

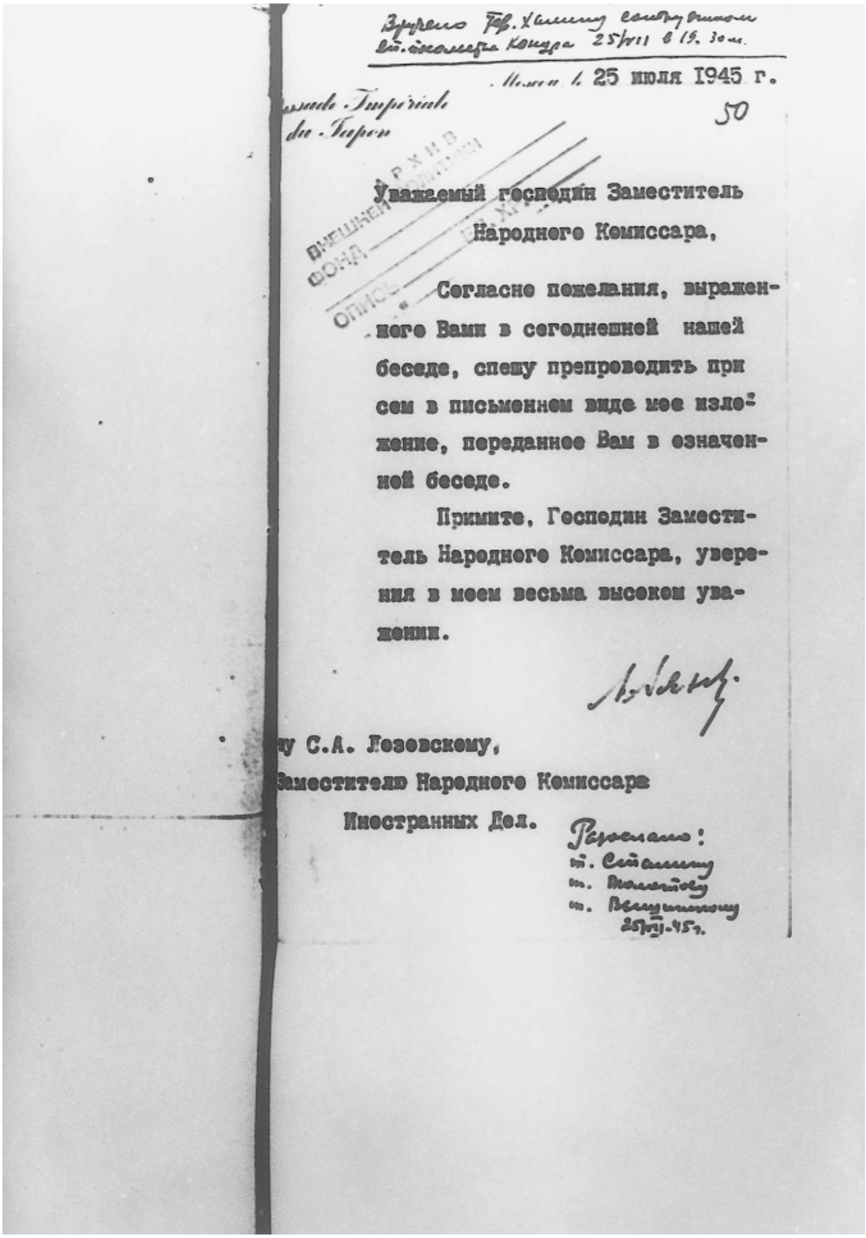
Sato recalled that on the evening of 18 July he had received a letter from Lozovskiy, noting that the Soviet government saw no possibility of replying to the Emperor's message, because it contained no specific proposals. Therefore Sato wished to specify the circumstances, and to inform the Soviet government that the aim of Konoe's mission was to ask the Soviet government to intercede and mediate to end the present war, and to make specific proposals for that purpose. The Konoe mission's task also included negotiating about improving Soviet–Japanese relations, which would constitute the basis of Japan's foreign policy both during and after the war.

Sato explained that he was communicating this under instructions from his government, and repeated that the special instruction to send Prince Konoe derived from the Emperor's personal desire to avoid bloodshed on both warring sides. To that end Konoe would submit specific proposals, and ask the Soviet government to give them its attention. Sato hoped that the Soviet government would find it possible to hear Konoe out, and would urgently give its agreement to the mission's coming to the USSR. He considered it superfluous to add that as a former Prime Minister, Prince Konoe enjoyed great trust at Court, and occupied an outstanding place among political figures in Japan.

Lozovskiy said that the issue was very important. He would like a written text of Sato's communication, to avoid misunderstandings of the individual proposals. Lozovskiy asked the ambassador whether his statement meant that the Japanese government was asking the Soviet government for its mediation in ending the war between Japan on the one hand, and Britain and the USA on the other. Sato replied affirmatively, and said that the Emperor himself wanted an end to the war.

Sato promised to provide a written version of his statement. Since the question was very delicate, Sato asked Lozovskiy to treat his communication as extremely confidential until the Soviet reply was received.[19] That same evening Sato sent Lozovskiy his statement in writing. On this document in the Archive (Figure 11) there is a note: 'circulated to Comrades Stalin, Molotov, Vyshinsky, 25 July 1945'.

On the basis of his conversation with Sato, and the clarifications provided by him, Lozovskiy wrote a draft reply, which was sent to Potsdam for approval. It said:



25 июля 1945 г.

Уважаемый господин Заместитель
Народного Комиссара,

Согласно пожелания, выраженного Вами в сегодняшней нашей беседе, спешу препроводить при сем в письменном виде мое изложение, переданное Вам в означенной беседе.

Примите, Господин Заместитель Народного Комиссара, уверения в моем весьма высоком уважении.

...у С.А. Лозовскому,
Заместителю Народного Комиссара
Иностранных Дел.

Разослано:
т. Сталину
т. Молотову
т. Вышинскому
25/VII-45 г.

Figure 11 Copy of letter on Japanese Embassy letterhead from Ambassador Sato to Lozovskiy, 25 July 1945, with note 'distributed to: c(omrade) Stalin, c(omrade) Molotov, c(omrade) Vyshinskiy, 25 VII 45.' (Russian Foreign Policy Archive).

> In reply to your statement of 25 July, in which you inform us that the Emperor of Japan has expressed the wish to send Prince Konoe to Moscow to request mediation by the Soviet government on the question of ending the war between Japan on the one side and the USA and Great Britain on the other, and also to conduct negotiations with the Soviet government on strengthening Soviet–Japanese relations, I have, on the Soviet government's instructions, the honour to convey to you the following:
>
> Your statement says that Prince Konoe has specific intentions and ideas both on the matter of Soviet government mediation in the present war, and also on the issue of strengthening Japanese–Soviet relations, but you say nothing about what specific intentions and ideas Prince Konoe proposes to put in Moscow.
>
> The Soviet government is convinced that any approach to the USA and Great Britain on the question of ending the war between Japan and these countries is doomed to failure unless it contains specific proposals. In these conditions the Soviet government, while grateful to the Japanese government for its confidence, nonetheless finds it difficult at present to take mediation upon itself.
>
> On the other matter, the Soviet government would also like to know what specific proposals the Japanese government has for improving Japanese–Soviet relations.

At the end of the letter it was suggested 'it would be better for the interested parties if Prince Konoe communicates his specific intentions and ideas to the Soviet government in advance, through the Japanese Embassy in Moscow or the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo.'[20]

At the same time, 28 July, the following dialogue was taking place in Potsdam.

> STALIN: I would like to tell you that we, the Russian delegation, have received a new proposal from Japan ... (the Japanese note was read out in English). There is nothing new in this document. There is only one proposal; Japan proposes cooperation to us. We are thinking of replying in the same spirit as last time.
>
> TRUMAN: No objection.
>
> ATTLEE: We agree.
>
> STALIN: End of my communication.[21]

In connection with this decision, on the draft reply to the Japanese ambassador handed to him for approval, Molotov wrote 'won't do'. This decision, telephoned from Berlin, was passed to Lozovskiy.[22]

Finally, the last Sato–Lozovskiy meeting took place on 30 July. Here is a note of the conversation from 'Lozovskiy's diary'.

> Sato asked about the Soviet government's answer. I replied that Stalin and Molotov are in Berlin, so there is no answer yet.
>
> Sato said that on 26 July the heads of the USA, Britain and China had published a joint Declaration to Japan. This declaration contains the intention to impose unconditional surrender on Japan, but the Japanese government holds to its view. Japan cannot surrender on such conditions. If Japan's honour and existence are preserved, then the Japanese government will take very broad conciliatory positions in order to end the war. The Japanese government has asked the Soviet government for mediation, and we would like the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Generalissimo Stalin, to take account of these wishes.
>
> Sato fears that the joint declaration by Truman, Churchill and Chiang Kai-Shek may obstruct the Soviet government mediation that the Japanese government is requesting. However, since the Soviet government's leaders are in Berlin, he hopes they will give appropriate attention to this, and remove the obstacles.

Lozovskiy again 'repeated his promise to report the ambassador's request to his government'.[23]

As we now know, this was a 'cat and mouse' game. Moscow was obviously 'playing for time', since on those very days Molotov was meeting Truman in Potsdam, and discussing Soviet entry into the Pacific war. To justify this step, Molotov on 29 July asked Truman to request the Soviet government, in the name of allies, to join the war against Japan.[24]

Only a few days remained before the Soviet Union would declare war on Japan.

11 The USSR joins the war against Japan

We have reached the last 20 days before 'The Longest Day'[1] in Japan's war history. I would like to discuss whether war between the USSR and Japan could have been avoided, i.e. *could the neutrality pact have been preserved?*

The United States and Great Britain were still firmly resolved to beat Japan as quickly as possible. But there had been some changes in their position, which had not gone unnoticed in Tokyo. As the war's end approached, attitudes in Washington began to change, towards modifying the previous demand for unconditional surrender. At a Cabinet meeting on 1 May 1945, Navy Minister Forrestal put it bluntly. 'Does it make sense for us to finish off Japan? What is our policy towards Russian influence in the Far East? What do we intend to put up against that influence – China or Japan?'[2]

Speaking on the day Germany surrendered, President Truman called only for unconditional surrender of the Japanese armed forces, thereby limiting the very concept of surrender. On the same day Captain Ellis Zacharias, a Naval Intelligence officer with many Japanese acquaintances, including the Emperor's brother (Prince Takamatsu), Prime Minister Suzuki, and Admiral Yonai, and fluent in Japanese, began regular broadcasts to Japan. He invited the Japanese to think seriously of ending the war, emphasising the possibility of an 'honourable peace', and dropping veiled hints that it would be to Japan's advantage to surrender before the USSR joined the war.[3] In Washington Deputy Secretary of State Grew (formerly US ambassador in Japan) passed the word around that Japan's Emperor, Court and high financial circles were 'moderates', with whom cooperation was entirely possible. The United States, keen under its new President to reduce Soviet influence in drafting the Far East peace settlement, told its Soviet ally about the Potsdam Declaration only after it had already been released to the press. The Japanese government showed some interest in Ellis' proposals, but the military would not permit direct contact with the United States, and already on 22 June the Supreme Council for Direction of the War had received the Emperor's instruction to seek Soviet help for opening formal peace negotiations.

When the Potsdam Declaration was published, Deputy Foreign Minister Shunichi Matsumoto told his chief, Togo, that 'the Declaration is essentially a proposal for surrender on conditions', and that the only way to end the war was to accept those conditions as offered. Togo agreed in principle, but foresaw difficulties with the military. So he wanted a government decision which, without mentioning the Potsdam Declaration, would facilitate increased efforts to implement the third point of the plan accepted on 14 May 1945 by the Supreme Council for Conduct of the War, and reinforced by the Emperor on 22 June, namely to secure Soviet agreement to mediate. He felt that if that succeeded, Japan might secure better conditions than those of the Potsdam Declaration.

On 27 July the atmosphere at the Supreme Council session and the Cabinet meeting afterwards was totally hostile to acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration's conditions. Nevertheless, Togo proposed not to reject it outright, so as not to make further negotiations with Moscow more difficult. He had to work hard, but managed to persuade his colleagues that in the circumstances it was best not to reply at all, but also to avoid doing anything that could be understood abroad as rejection.

Far-seeing Japanese diplomats and politicians tried to persuade the government to accept the Declaration. For example Kase wrote from Switzerland that its terms were less stringent than those of the Crimea Declaration on Germany. He analysed Washington's attitude to Japan in detail, emphasising that influential American circles favoured a compromise peace. Sato in Moscow took the same approach. He sent a telegram supporting Kase.[4]

However, some of the military were worried that the troops and the people would see the lack of an official reaction to the Potsdam Declaration as tacit acceptance of it. That would mean that the military caste would be sacrificed, and many military men put on trial as war criminals. They therefore put their trust in a strategy of 'resistance on the mainland', i.e. continuing the war on Japan's own territory, and demanded that the government publicly reject the Declaration.

On the next day, 28 July, at a conference in the Emperor's palace, War Minister General Anami and Chiefs of Staff General Umezu and Admiral Toyoda exploited Togo's absence to persuade the aged Prime Minister Suzuki that failure to react to the Potsdam Declaration was having a strong negative effect on the army's fighting spirit. They demanded he make a firm statement rejecting the Allies' demand for surrender.

At a press conference that day Suzuki said 'The Potsdam Declaration is a supplement to the Cairo Declaration. We attach no great importance to it, and are ignoring it. We shall steadfastly continue to go forward to successful conclusion of the war.'[5] Suzuki's statement was immediately carried to the whole world by radio. Washington thereupon said that it would use all America's military might to literally wipe Japan off the face of the earth.

Togo angrily told Suzuki that not even the Prime Minister was entitled

to overrule a Cabinet decision. Suzuki himself realised that his statement had undermined Japan's diplomatic efforts to establish peace. But, he told Togo, 'It is hard, or rather, impossible, for me to take back what has already been said'.[6]

On 30 July Sato visited Lozovskiy, hoping to receive the Soviet reply to Japan's proposal to send Konoe to seek mediation. Lozovskiy told him that Stalin and Molotov had not yet returned to Moscow, so no definite answer could be given. Sato touched on the Potsdam Declaration, which 'contains the intention to impose unconditional surrender on Japan', and said Japan would not surrender on the terms it prescribed.[7]

Tokyo continued to wait for a reply. But it came from Washington, not Moscow. On 6 August 1945 the USA dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. On the next day President Truman said on radio that similar bombs, of unprecedented destructive power, would be dropped on other Japanese cities.

On the same day Japanese Army services reported that Hiroshima had indeed been attacked 'by a small number of B-29 aircraft', which had caused 'significant damage', confirmed that a new type of bomb had been used, and said that the details of the explosion were being investigated. Togo informed the Cabinet of Truman's speech, but it did nothing. The military leaders rejected Togo's suggestion that the government should meet to consider ending the war.

But Togo still hoped for a favourable Soviet response. Stalin and Molotov had returned to Moscow on 5 August, and on the next day Sato informed Togo that he was to be received at the Foreign Ministry on the evening of 8 August. But on 7 August Togo ordered him to go there at once and demand a reply.

The moment of greatest tension had arrived. On 8 August Togo gave the Emperor his opinion that Japan must accept the Potsdam Declaration as soon as possible. In response the Emperor ordered him to tell the Prime Minister that in view of the 'new type' of weapons which had been used, Japan could not continue the war, and must make every possible effort to end it as soon as possible. She must accept the inevitable. The tragedy of Hiroshima must not be repeated.

Suzuki attempted to summon an emergency session of the Supreme War Conduct Council, but it was postponed because one member was absent on 'urgent business'. An irony of fate! *At that moment, 8 August, Japan was already preparing to stop the war by proclaiming its acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration.*

The goddess Amaterasu had clearly turned her back on Japan. Soviet entry into the war could still be averted, and Nagasaki saved from the atomic bomb. But events continued developing to Japan's detriment. On the same day, at 1700 Moscow time (2300 Tokyo and Soviet Far East time) Molotov received Sato and in the name of the Soviet government made the following statement.

After the defeat and surrender of Hitler's Germany, Japan has remained the only great power still in favour of continuing the war. The demand for unconditional surrender of the Japanese armed forces, made on 26 July of this year by three powers, the United States of America, Great Britain and China, has been rejected by Japan. By this action the Japanese government's proposal to the Soviet Union for mediation in the war in the Far East forfeits all grounds.

Noting Japan's refusal to surrender, the Allies have proposed that the Soviet Union join the war against Japanese aggression, and thereby shorten the time for ending the war, reduce the number of casualties, and cooperate in the swiftest restoration of universal peace. Faithful to its duty as an ally, the Soviet Union has accepted the Allies' proposal, and subscribed to the Declaration made by the Allied powers on 26 July of this year.

The Soviet government considers that its policy is the only means capable of bringing the onset of peace closer, freeing the peoples from further casualties and suffering, and giving the Japanese people the possibility of avoiding the dangers and destruction experienced by Germany after its rejection of unconditional surrender.

In view of the above, the Soviet government declares that from tomorrow, 9 August, it will consider itself in a state of war with Japan.[8]

[While Japan was vainly seeking Stalin's mediation, Soviet preparations to enter the war had begun soon after Yalta. During March and April 670 T-34 tanks and much other equipment were sent to the Far East. General Meretskov, commanding Karelian Front (from north of Leningrad to the north coast), had forced Finland out of the war in September 1944, and pursued the remaining German forces there into Northern Norway. After liberating Kirkenes he was ordered to go no further into Norway and, as the first of the Front commanders to work himself out of a job, was promoted to Marshal on 26 October. During November his headquarters was transferred to Yaroslavl, but not disbanded. Soon after the Yalta conference he was told to prepare for transfer to the Far East, and on 31 March the entire headquarters left Yaroslavl by special train. Secrecy was such that Meretskov did not tell his staff where or why they were going, and speculation was rife until well into the second day, when they realised they were heading for Siberia, and could easily guess why.

The next Front commander to become available was Marshal Malinovsky, who had taken Budapest and Vienna. He too was despatched eastward with his entire headquarters. There would be three Fronts, the third to be commanded by General Purkayev, a successful Army commander, who had been in charge in the Far East since mid-1943. Commander-in-Chief over the three Fronts, the Pacific Fleet and the Amur River Flotilla would be Marshal Vasilevsky, Chief of General Staff for most of the war,

and Marshal Zhukov's partner in devising and coordinating most of the Red Army's major victories over the Germans from Stalingrad onwards.

Secrecy was paramount. If the Kwantung Army's leaders should find out that three Soviet Marshals had arrived in the Far East, they would realise that the Soviet stalling over mediation was a mask for preparations to attack, and might in desperation launch an offensive before the Red Army was ready. So the three travelled as Colonel-Generals Maximov, Morozov and Vasilev respectively.- G.J.]

Politburo members and the Soviet government assessed the extent of the Red Army's readiness to begin fighting in the Far East at a meeting in the Kremlin on 26 and 27 June 1945. Stalin, Molotov, Voznesensky, Khrushchev, the military commanders, and officers of the General Staff and staffs of the three Far East Fronts were present. After a report by Marshal Malinovsky, commanding Trans-Baikal Front, the participants exchanged views. Marshal Meretskov, supported by Khrushchev, proposed occupying Hokkaido, but Voznesensky, Molotov and Marshal Zhukov opposed doing so. Voznesensky's opinion was that the Soviet Army should not 'expose' itself to the strong Japanese defences on the main islands. Molotov emphasised that landing Soviet troops on Hokkaido would be a gross violation of the Yalta agreements, and Zhukov said it would be foolhardy. [Despite that, Stalin in mid-August asked for an occupation zone in the northern part of Hokkaido, and received a rather brusque refusal from Truman. - G.J.]

Overall the impression was that the General Staff and the Main Naval Staff had already prepared their plans. When Stalin asked how many troops would be needed, Zhukov reported 'four full-strength Field Armies with artillery, tanks and other equipment'. Stalin did not sum up the proceedings; he confined himself to saying that the Soviet Command was ready for war with Japan.

[Hardly coincidental, and additional evidence of Stalin's preoccupation with his self-image as a military leader, is that the unprecedented rank of 'Generalissimo of the Soviet Union' was created on the first day of this meeting, and conferred upon him on the second day.[9] Orders to plan their offensives, and complete all preparations for them by the end of July, went out to the three Fronts on the next day, 28 June. On 3 August Vasilevsky reported to Stalin that if necessary he could attack on the morning of 5 August, but that he would like an additional 3 to 5 days. So Stalin agreed on 5 August that his forces should cross the Manchurian border at 1800 Moscow time on 10 August, which was midnight 10–11 August Transbaikal time.

But during the afternoon of 7 August Stalin, without giving any reasons, ordered the attack brought forward two days, to 1800 Moscow time on the next day. One authoritative post-Soviet account suggests that he did so in case the Japanese had learnt the appointed time, and also that to attack at that time precisely fitted his undertaking to join the war

against Japan '2–3 months after the end of the war in Europe'. It is true that by Soviet reckoning the German surrender came on 9 May, exactly 3 months before, and that if the Japanese were expecting the attack to begin on 10 August, it made sense to start it earlier than they anticipated. However, neither reason seems convincing enough to justify Stalin's last-minute intervention, which gave the commanders little more than 24 hours' notice to launch a complex operation involving almost 1.7 million men. Local reconnaissance had found no evidence that the Kwantung Army had any idea what was in store for it, and the Allies were hardly likely to quibble over a day or two.

So the explanation must be sought elsewhere. The previous starting time had been set on 5 August. On 6 August, at 0815 Japanese time, i.e. 0215 Moscow time, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. By the end of that day the news had travelled round the world. It needed no military genius to conclude, even before President Truman's broadcast threat on 7 August, that if Japan did not then surrender, the Americans would drop another as soon as possible, even if they had only one, so as to give the Japanese the impression that many more would follow. If the second bomb prompted Japan to surrender, Stalin's forces only had to move in quickly to get all the territories he wanted; but he would have got them entirely courtesy of the Americans, with no military victory of his own to 'avenge' the defeat of 1904–5 and celebrate his new rank of Generalissimo. It therefore seems most likely that he brought the time of the attack forward so as to be in the war before a second atomic bomb was dropped. He made it with just under 12 hours to spare – hostilities began in Manchuria at 1 minute past midnight on 9 August, and the second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki at 2 minutes before noon of that day. And, as discussed later, Soviet entry into the war, coming on the heels of the bombing of Hiroshima, produced agreement between the Emperor and Prime Minister, several hours before the second bomb was dropped, that Japan must surrender. So the Soviets would subsequently claim to have played the decisive role in Japan's defeat as well as Germany's.- G.J.]

We need not dwell on the military operations. But we shall analyse whether the Soviet action was in accord with the treaty relations between the USSR and Japan. For this let us turn to the text of the Neutrality Pact.

Article 3 stated that 'The present pact comes into force from the day of its ratification by both Contracting Parties and retains force for five years. If neither of the Contracting Parties denounces the pact a year before its expiration, it will be considered automatically extended for the following five years.'

Both countries ratified the Pact on 25 April 1941, and therefore it was in force until 25 April 1946. It could be denounced one year before that date, but nevertheless remained in force until 25 April of the following year. *So it is completely beyond doubt that the Soviet Union, whatever the reasoning by which it justified entering the war against Japan, violated the*

Neutrality Pact by so doing. After all, under Article 1 the USSR had assumed the obligation to 'maintain peaceful and amicable relations' with Japan, and to respect its territorial integrity for the entire duration of that pact.

A few questions arise in this context:

1 Were there differences between the USSR and Japan that could only be settled by war, i.e. by the blood of Soviet people?
2 Who needed the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan?
3 Precisely who took the decision that the USSR should enter the war against Japan, i.e. who is guilty of breaching the Neutrality Pact?

Let us take the first question. As we have shown already, there were no problems between the Soviet Union and Japan that could be resolved only by resort to arms. During 1941–5 Soviet–Japanese relations were not notably warm or friendly, but were *normal and businesslike*. In Tokyo and Moscow, and later in Kuybyshev, there were in all those years Soviet and Japanese Ambassadors, who regularly met the Foreign Ministers and their Deputies, and resolved problems which arose on a practical level. The whole world was engulfed in the fire of war, and only two major neighbours, the Soviet Union and Japan, remained at peace.

If we look very closely at Soviet–Japanese relations, we can see that by taking part in the war both the USSR and Japan harmed each other's state interests. Thus in the first months of the war Soviet Pacific Fleet sailors mined their coastal waters, to protect strategically important areas against possible enemy landings. These measures were officially described as directed against Germany, Italy and Finland [none of which had any warships in the Northern Pacific, or any possibility of putting warships there – G.J.]. They were in reality undertaken because a Japanese attack was anticipated. Construction faults caused many hundreds of these mines to break loose, and be carried by the currents throughout the Sea of Japan, creating real danger for Japanese shipping. In November 1941 the passenger liner 'Kehi Maru' blew up on one of these mines, and over a hundred people died. Several fishing boats also suffered from the mines.

These were very difficult months for the USSR, and had Japan chosen to, it could, of course, have exploited these incidents to undertake some hostile action against the Soviet Maritime Province. But it refrained from doing so, and thereby kept the peace.

In later years the Soviet Union provoked Japan by transporting cargoes from the United States, including strategic equipment and materials, such as oil, past Japan's coasts to Vladivostok. It can theoretically be argued, of course, that this was trade between the USA and USSR, and no concern of any other state. But America was at war with Japan, and Japan could reasonably assume that these cargoes were destined for, let us say, military reinforcement of the Soviet Far East, or even for China.

During 1942–4 dozens of American aircraft, damaged by Japanese anti-aircraft fire, made forced landings on Soviet territory, and that could have aroused Japanese suspicions of a secret agreement between the USSR and USA. This list of Soviet actions detrimental to Japan's interests could be significantly extended. Most substantial among them were the supply to the Americans of secret information about the Kwantung Army's deployments and strength, movement of heavy lorries to China via Soviet Central Asia to meet US Army needs,[10] etc.

On the other side, Japan in those years created great difficulties for Soviet shipping, by limiting the areas where our ships could sail. In violation of the Portsmouth Treaty, it practically closed the La Perouse and Tsuruga Straits, and permitted transit only by inconvenient, perilous and remote routes. Especially provocative were actions by Japanese warships in relation to Soviet-flag ships, received from the United States under Lend-Lease, and used to deliver cargoes from America across the Pacific to Vladivostok. Brute force was used to detain Soviet ships. For a long time Soviet sailors were not allowed to contact the Soviet Consulate in Tokyo, and were intimidated in various ways, and so on. It is true that all the incidents were resolved in due course, and the Soviet ships were released. But these incidents created tension in Soviet–Japanese relations, and disrupted the normal course of development of a dialogue between the USSR and Japan.

This book did not set out to research the entire complex of Soviet–Japanese relations. We note only that *both sides violated the Neutrality Pact equally*, but did so covertly, and covered the traces of their violations in every way they could. For example, the Soviet Union told the Japanese that American airmen landing on Soviet territory were all interned. In reality they were sent to an assembly point in Central Asia, and there the NKVD helped arrange for them to 'escape' to Iran.

I remind the reader that in these years the USSR and Japan succeeded in resolving the most difficult question for them, that of abolishing the Japanese concessions in Northern Sakhalin; and every year they extended the fisheries agreement, which was always a sore problem in Soviet–Japanese relations.

In the numerous discussions with Japanese officials, their Soviet counterparts invariably emphasised their satisfaction with the state of Soviet–Japanese relations. For example, on 8 September 1944 Ambassador Malik did so at his first meeting with Shigemitsu after returning from Moscow,[11] and so did Molotov on 16 September 1944, during a conversation with Ambassador Sato.[12]

That was in September 1944. Perhaps something that spoiled their relations occurred in subsequent months? No. For example, on 29 May 1945, just over 2 months before declaring war on Japan, Molotov said, at one of his regular meetings with Sato, 'As for Soviet–Japanese relations, they have developed really well, and our two countries have preserved peaceful relations.'[13]

But what was the USSR's attitude to the Neutrality Pact?

In the years under review, in many conversations between Malik and Japanese Foreign Ministry officials, or between Molotov and Sato, the Soviets approved the way relations were developing, and invariably emphasised that this was a consequence of the Neutrality Pact. Even after Germany's exit from the war, Moscow went on saying that the Pact was still operative, and that Japan had no cause for anxiety about the future of Soviet–Japanese relations. Let us recall, for example, Molotov's already-mentioned discussion with Sato on 29 May 1945. Molotov told him *'we have not torn up the (Neutrality) Pact, but have refused to prolong it, because the situation has changed since the time when it was concluded'* (my emphasis – B.S.).

On 21 May 1945, in a conversation with Tanakamaru, Malik said that *the (neutrality) treaty continues in force*. He said the same on 24 June 1945, at a meeting with Koki Hirota, a former Prime Minister: 'Relations between our countries are based on the Neutrality Pact, which has played a positive role, is still doing so, and will continue to do so until it expires.' Then Malik drew Hirota's attention to the point that the Soviet government had legally denounced the pact, *but had not torn it up*.[14] Malik, of course, did not know that the Soviet General Staff was already drafting the orders for three Fronts to plan major offensive operations against the Kwantung Army.

All this gave the Japanese to understand that the Neutrality Pact would remain in force for a year after its denunciation, as prescribed in its third Article.

So the answer to the first question posed at the beginning of this chapter is: *there were no irreconcilable differences between the USSR and Japan that could be settled only by war*.

So why did the USSR declare war on Japan? As the ancient Romans used to say, *cui bono?* (Who benefited?)

[President Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945, and was succeeded by his Vice-President, Harry Truman, who was not only a novice in foreign affairs but was considerably more anti-Soviet than Roosevelt. Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, had already begun poisoning the atmosphere of Soviet–American relations by the time the San Francisco conference began on 25 April. Truman thereupon asked his military and political advisers whether it might not be better to win the war against Japan without Soviet participation. They advised that it would be extremely difficult to do so, and would result in unacceptably large American casualties. The Chiefs of Staff also concluded in a memorandum of 12 May 1945 that the Russians would decide for themselves whether or not to join the war against Japan, and would take little notice of anything the United States undertook to do. They went on to say 'the entry of the Russians will have an enormous military effect, because it will bring the date of the war's end closer, and thereby save American lives.' On 14 May, a

mere 5 days after the German surrender, Truman wrote to Churchill, expressing disquiet at 'what the Soviets might do, when Germany is under the control of a small contingent of our occupation forces, and a significant part of the forces which we could keep here will be fighting in the East against Japan. I am in complete agreement with you that we must hold a trilateral meeting as soon as possible, so as to reach agreement with Russia.'

His expressed disquiet about 'what the Soviets might do' seems to indicate a fear that the Red Army might use its numbers to drive the 'small contingent' of allied occupation troops out of Germany. This would provide an additional reason to seek Soviet involvement in the war against Japan, as a way of securing removal of substantial Soviet forces from Germany. But Truman's main reason for seeking Soviet participation was undoubtedly the advice of his senior military that it would save American lives. At that time Truman, only recently told of the atomic bomb programme, could not be certain that the bomb would work (the first test would not take place until 16 July). And neither he nor anyone else could foresee that the destruction of Hiroshima on 6 August, closely followed by the Soviet declaration of war, would force a Japanese decision to surrender even before the second atomic bomb was dropped. - G.J.]

Truman wrote in his memoirs that his most urgent reason for going to Potsdam was 'to get personal confirmation from Stalin of Russia's readiness to come into the war against Japan'.[15] [But Stalin did not need to be held to his promise. He was in fact determined to get into the war, to avenge Russia's defeat of 1905, and to seize more in return for a few days of fighting than his allies who had borne the burden of years of war with Japan. – G.J.]

The Soviet government's officially-proclaimed principal reason for declaring war was that Japan had rejected the Potsdam Declaration, and that the allies had thereupon asked the Soviet Union to join the war. That was so, of course, but citing the allies was only a pretext. [Agreement that the Soviet Union would join the war against Japan within 2–3 months after the surrender of Germany, and the rewards it would receive in return had been reached at a meeting between Stalin and US ambassador Harriman on 12 December 1944 – G.J.]. They had duly appeared in the Yalta agreement, signed on 11 February 1945. In a conversation with Patrick Hurley, US Ambassador to China, on 15 April 1945, Stalin said that he wanted the Yalta Agreement kept secret from the Chinese government, because it might leak the information, until his preparations were completed, probably not before the first half of July. After that he would not fear widespread publication of the Agreement, *because then he would already be seeking an excuse to join the war against Japan* (my emphasis – B.S.). However, until the expiration of that period account would have to be taken of the possibility of provocative acts by the Japanese, who were now concentrating forces in Manchuria.[16] So Stalin was steadfastly

following a deliberately chosen course towards war with Japan from at least late 1944.

It was in those very weeks that Japan was most intensively seeking Soviet mediation. But through the mouths of Malik and Lozovskiy, the Kremlin put various questions, demanded they be formulated in writing, i.e. used various pretexts to avoid giving a specific reply, and stalled for time. Then followed the Potsdam Conference, which on 26 July summoned Japan to surrender.

Three days later Molotov and President Truman met in Potsdam. Their conversation was published in the press.[17] However, this author found in the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy Archives a part of their conversation that relates to Japan, and was not published in the USSR.[18] Here it is:

> **Molotov** says that he has a proposal connected with the situation in the Far East. For the Soviet Union it would be a convenient reason to enter the war against Japan if the Allies would ask it to do so. It could be indicated that because of Japan's rejection of the demand to surrender, the USA and Britain, desirous of speeding the end of the war and thereby reducing the bloodshed, had asked the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan. Molotov adds that it went without saying that the signing of an agreement with China was a necessary condition for the USSR's entry into the war.
>
> **Truman** remarks that Molotov's suggestion seems very sensible to him, but that to reply to it he would first have to consult his staff.[19]

This conversation illuminates the whole picture of Soviet entry into the war in the Far East. *The Soviet Union is ready to move against Japan, is seeking a 'convenient reason' to do so, and wants a 'request' from the USA and Britain as justification.*

It is well known, and I have described it in detail in my monograph *The Yalta Conference*,[20] that since December 1941 both these countries regularly sought an undertaking from the USSR to join the war against Japan. At the Teheran Conference (December 1943) the Western Allies 'bought' Stalin's agreement in principle by accepting the obligation to open a Second Front in Northern France in the summer of 1944. Although this took place long after the Stalingrad and Kursk battles, much Soviet territory was still under Nazi occupation, and the end of the war was not in sight. So Stalin's decision then touched on Soviet vital interests.

But agreement in principle was not enough for the Allies. Throughout 1944 they demanded practical implementation, by joint planning of the forthcoming military operations in the Far East, and for deployment of US strategic bombers to Siberia.

Stalin was not ready to assume any such obligations until February 1945, and agreed then to do so only after the defeat of Germany. In the Yalta agreement the Soviet Union received its 'fee' for joining the Pacific

war, particularly Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. The above enables us to approach an answer to the second question: who needed the Soviet Union to join the war against Japan, thereby violating the Neutrality Pact? *Above all the USSR's allies, chiefly the United States.* The alternative, in the American Chiefs of Staffs' own [pre-atom bomb – G.J.] calculations, was another 18 months of war, and a million dead or wounded American servicemen. But this, of course, is only half the answer. The other half is linked to the name of Stalin, who followed his own course in relation to Japan.

We have already said that professional diplomats, including Deputy Foreign Minister Lozovskiy, thought that the Soviet Union had better not involve itself in the Far East war until at least the end of 1945. This would enable Moscow to assess its strategic interests in the Far East and, the main thing, avoid loss of life by the Soviet people, who had borne unheard-of sacrifices in the Soviet–German war that had only just ended.

Malik's previously-mentioned report 'On the question of Japanese–Soviet relations' (July 1944) listed twenty-seven vitally important problems for the USSR in the Far East. He fully conceded that, given the interconnection between problems of the post-war structure in East and West, 'The Soviet Union may perhaps be able to take part in resolving Pacific Ocean problems after the defeat of Japan, without taking part in the Pacific war, and while having a Neutrality Pact with Japan.'[21]

Later, in a telegram of 7 June 1945 about his discussions with Hirota, Malik wrote:

> There may be some justification for considering that in compensation for a treaty with the USSR, the Japanese may as a maximum concession give us back Northern Sakhalin, give up fishing in Soviet convention [sic] waters, and perhaps even transfer part of the Kurile Islands to us. *It is difficult to expect from them any voluntary agreement to any substantial change to our benefit of Japan's positions in Manchuria, Korea, Kwantung and Northern China. Such is possible only as a result of Japan's complete military defeat and unconditional surrender. Without this, no negotiations with Japan will provide a radical solution to the problems of achieving lasting peace and security in the Far East.*[22] [my emphasis – B.S.].

This passage already concedes that it would be appropriate for the Soviet Union to enter the war with Japan to satisfy important state interests of its own. [And except for taking the whole rather than 'part of' the Kuriles, the territories it actually acquired by war were those Malik considered it could gain by negotiation. – G.J.]

However, Stalin would not forego the chance to take 'revenge' on Japan for its defeat of Russia in 1904–5, which, in his own words, lay like a 'black spot'. In his speech on 2 September 1945, the day Japan signed the

act of surrender, he said: 'Our people believed and expected the day would come when Japan would be beaten and the spot wiped out. For forty years we of the older generation have awaited this day.'[23] That answers the second half of the second question.

How did events unfold further? At Potsdam the Soviet Union more or less observed all due formalities in relations with its allies, though it signed no treaty with China. But after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August, time was of the essence. Just as the Japanese had once feared 'missing the bus', so now did the Kremlin. [So the Red Army was hustled into battle in Manchuria 2 days earlier than planned. – G.J.]

While the Japanese High Command had publicly ignored the Potsdam Declaration and bombing of Hiroshima, the Soviet declaration of war confronted it with inexorable defeat. At 7.30 a.m. Japan time on 9 August, with Soviet forces beginning to pour into Manchuria, Prime Minister Suzuki met the Emperor. He accepted Suzuki's view that Japan must now surrender, and undertook to deliver a decision to that effect to the Supreme Council for Conduct of the War when it met later that day. Suzuki told the meeting 'This morning's entry of the Soviet Union into the war puts us definitively into a hopeless situation, and makes further continuation of the war impossible.'[24] [That is, the decision that Japan must surrender had already been taken at the highest level, as a direct consequence of the first bomb and Soviet entry into the war, before the second bomb was dropped. – G.J.]

On 2 September 1945 Japan signed the deed of surrender. The guns fell silent. The time had come for quiet reflection, for evaluating the actions of the opposing sides.

The first accusation against the Soviet Union for violating the Neutrality Pact reverberated at the Tokyo trial. The defence attempted to prove that throughout the war Japan had steadfastly maintained neutrality towards the USSR, which, however, had ignored that fact, and in August 1945 violated the Neutrality Pact by attacking Japan. W. Blakeney, an American defence lawyer, asserted that although the Soviet Union had denounced the Pact on 5 April 1945, that, under Article 3, meant only that it would not be extended for another 5 years. The obligation to maintain neutrality remained in force until 13 April 1946, so by attacking Japan on 9 August 1945, the Soviet Union grossly violated the Neutrality Pact.

American defence lawyer Lazarus made the same point.[25] Other advocates and the accused followed suit. All cited Article 3 of the Neutrality Pact to assert that the USSR had violated it. But that was all a waste of time. The Tokyo trial was a trial of the vanquished by the victors. Its tone was set mainly by the *United States*, which despite its pathological anti-Communism, *had nevertheless drawn the USSR into the war against Japan*. The USA had to punish the aggressors for the 'shame of Pearl Harbor', for the many thousands of Americans who had died in the war. [And both it and its Allies had to exact punishment for the atrocities com-

mitted by Japanese forces against prisoners of war and civilians – G.J.]. And it looked sympathetically upon the Soviet government's efforts to justify its violation of the Neutrality Pact in the eyes of Japanese and world public opinion, expressed by presenting tendentious accusations at the trial, and by accepting Soviet-formulated charges of 'Japanese aggression against the USSR'.

But that is a separate subject. Here we adduce only those basic points of the verdict that relate to the Neutrality Pact.

> Despite the neutrality pact with the USSR, Japan considered itself linked to Germany as a participant in a conspiracy against the USSR, and was waiting for a favourable moment to exploit. In any event, it intended to time its attack on the USSR for the most favourable moment in the Soviet–German war. . . . It is evident that Japan was not sincere in concluding the Neutrality Pact with the Soviet Union, and considering its agreement with Germany more profitable, it signed the Neutrality Pact to make it easier to implement its plans for an attack on the USSR. So Japan's 'neutrality' in the war between Germany and the USSR actually served, and most likely was intended to serve, as a screen for giving assistance to Germany until Japan's own attack on the USSR.
>
> Evidence presented to the Tribunal indicates that Japan, far from being neutral as it should have been in accordance with the Pact concluded with the USSR, was providing significant aid to Germany. . . . The Tribunal considers that a war of aggression against the USSR was envisaged and planned by Japan during the period under examination, that it was one of the basic elements of Japanese policy, and that its aim was to seize territory of the USSR in the Far East.
>
> By the spring of 1942 the Kwantung Army had drafted a plan for the military administration of Soviet regions to be occupied by Japan. With Umezu's approval this plan was sent to the General Staff. It included sections such as 'administration, maintenance of peace and order, organisation of industry, monetary circulation, communications and transport'.
>
> The Tribunal recognises that Japan's highest functionaries engaged for the entire period of the war in espionage against the USSR to the benefit of Germany, and that they put every kind of obstacle in the way of Soviet shipping. The Tribunal assessed these facts too as violations of the neutrality pact.

What can one say about such charges? Many of them are, of course, true. *But they are one-sided, charges laid by the victor*. In fact, as we have shown above, both Japan and the USSR violated the Neutrality Pact. But that, so to speak, was for internal consumption. In overt Soviet publications everything was entirely different. No theme in Soviet propaganda

was more jealously guarded than the 'historic integrity and justice' of Stalin's foreign policy. The ideological section of the Communist Party Central Committee and its unblinking eyes, the regional censorship sections, watched vigilantly over it. Without their approval no book, newspaper or journal article could be published.

After Stalin's death there were several periods of 'thaw' in the USSR, but they mostly affected the internal life of Soviet society. The fundamental dogmas and evaluations of the history of foreign policy remained unshaken. We remember with what reluctance the USSR Supreme Soviet at last condemned the secret Molotov–Ribbentrop protocols in 1989. It was the same with the Katyn affair, the Caribbean crisis, etc.

I make so bold as to say that in the social sciences of present-day Russia, despite the variety of critiques of Soviet ideology and internal life, historical truth about the USSR's foreign policy still has enormous difficulty in making its way. This situation has long endured, because important posts in the leading country-studies and historical Research Institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and in the historical journals, are still all filled by emigres from the Communist Party Central Committee, Foreign Ministry pensioners (former Soviet diplomats) and ex-members of the Special Services. They exert an important influence on decision-making in the scholarly councils of Institutes and on editorial boards, and it is quite difficult for independent researchers to obtain approval or grants for scholarly work, even where financial support is forthcoming from abroad.

All this is relevant to the history of Soviet–Japanese relations and Soviet diplomacy towards Japan, including assessments of the Neutrality Pact. The fundamental documents by which we in Russia are guided even now in examining pre-war and wartime Soviet–Japanese relations, are those of the Tokyo Military Tribunal, citations from which figure as 'sources' and 'irrefutable historical truth' in all Soviet literature about Japan.

Of course I concede the need for scholarly analysis of the nature of this treaty, and attempts to understand the motives of the Contracting Parties in concluding the pact. For example, it seems to me that in formulating Article 2 Matsuoka did not have in mind the possibility of war between Japan and the USA, still less a Japanese attack on American territory. What worried him most was a possible military alliance between the USA and USSR directed against Japan, as he told Molotov frankly during their negotiations. American military bases in the Soviet Maritime Province or Kamchatka always seemed a real nightmare for the Japanese. And Japanese diplomacy's task throughout the entire war amounted to seeing that the USSR stayed faithful to Article 2, i.e. remained neutral in the Japanese–American conflict.

As for the third question – who specifically is guilty of taking the decision that the USSR enter the war with Japan, i.e. who is guilty of violating the Neutrality Pact – the answer is simple but at the same time quite complex. Simplest of all is to heap it all onto Stalin. That is partly true, but

not the whole truth. Yes, Stalin had unlimited power, and nobody could contest or even cast doubt on any decision of his, however treacherous or adventuristic it might be. *But I would nominate above all the Soviet System, which made Stalin's regime possible.* A System in which power belonged to a ruling oligarchy, which appointed, confirmed and protected itself. A System in which the voice of a simple Soviet individual was of no interest to anyone, and he or she could not even express an opinion, because the media were under the power of that same ruling elite. Today, when that regime has been overthrown, when people have swallowed the first breaths of the fresh air of freedom, including in the field of scholarly creativity, one involuntarily thinks of how much was lost and how much still has to be done to restore what was lost. This applies to Russian history in general, and to Russo-Japanese relations in particular.

Afterword

G. Jukes

Since Dr Slavinsky finished writing his book, in August 1995, there has been a further flood of new documents from the former Soviet archives. For the most part, they merely confirm what he has already deduced, or what has previously been gleaned from the German or Japanese archives, and contain more revelations for Russian readers than for their Western counterparts. For example, they confirm his contention that the Tripartite Pact, signed by Germany, Italy and Japan in September 1940, was ostensibly directed against the United States and British Empire, not the Soviet Union, and that Stalin notified his willingness to join it, but set conditions that Hitler would not accept. Both these facts have been known for decades outside Russia, but as Dr Slavinsky pointed out, inside the Soviet Union the second of them was subject to a conspiracy of silence that ended only with the Soviet regime itself. What emerges from his account is that the German offer was taken seriously enough in Moscow for Molotov to make at least two requests for replies to the note of 25 November 1940 in which he had set out the Soviet conditions for joining the Tripartite Pact.

Where Hitler was concerned, Article 5 of the Pact, which specified that it was not directed against the Soviet Union, was, of course as deliberately misleading as Ribbentrop's assurances to Molotov that the Pact was aimed at the United States. German preparations to invade the Soviet Union had begun in principle as early as 2 June 1940, during the British evacuation from Dunkirk, when Hitler said that he expected the British would agree to a 'reasonable' peace, leaving his hands free for his 'great and proper task, the elimination of Bolshevism'. On 21 July he told his Army Commander-in-Chief, Brauchitsch, to make 'mental preparations' for attacking the Soviet Union. Ten days later, he told Chief of Army General Staff Halder that Russia was Britain's last hope, and must be crushed in a campaign starting in spring 1941.[1] On 17 September 1940 he conceded defeat in the Battle of Britain, by declaring the invasion postponed till spring of 1941 (but tacitly abandoned altogether), and preparing for the attack on the Soviet Union then became the Wehrmacht's primary task. By mid-November, when Ribbentrop and Hitler were cajoling Molotov to join in the proposed carve-up of the British Empire, the plans were being com-

pleted. German troops had been moving eastwards into Poland and Romania for several months, and Fuehrer Directive No. 21 for Operation 'Barbarossa',[2] ordering all preparations for invading the USSR to be completed by 15 May 1941, would be signed on 18 December.

Does this mean Dr Slavinsky errs in laying so much emphasis on the disclaimer of anti-Soviet intent in Article 5 of the Tripartite Pact, and on the German invitations to the Soviet Union to become its fourth member? No, because Hitler purposely misled not only the Soviet but also the Japanese and Italian governments about its purpose.

In September 1940 Ribbentrop sent Heinrich Stahmer, his principal adviser on Japanese affairs, to Tokyo to reinforce ambassador Ott in negotiating the Pact, and they had their first meetings with Matsuoka on 9 and 10 September. They defined German policy as aimed at preventing the current conflict developing into a world war, and especially at keeping the United States out of it. They told Matsuoka that what Germany particularly wanted from Japan was its cooperation in deterring the United States from entering the war[3]. They argued that only adoption of a strong and unequivocal attitude by Japan, Germany and Italy could so deter it. Matsuoka agreed with 'making America the object of the pact'.

Ribbentrop himself went to Italy on 19 September 1940. At meetings with Mussolini on that day and on 22 September, he presented the Pact's function as deterrence (or intimidation) of America. Count Ciano, Italy's Foreign Minister, recorded that Mussolini expressed 'his complete agreement with the plan for an alliance with Japan which will have the effect of paralysing American action'.[4]

So when the Tripartite Pact was signed, on 27 September 1940, Japan and Italy signed under the impression that it was directed against the United States. Hitler did nothing to disillusion either of them. They would later be given no more than last-moment hints that invasion of the USSR was imminent, Mussolini a bare week beforehand, and Japan's ambassador Oshima in Berlin just 3 days in advance. The Japanese repaid Hitler in kind, by not telling the Germans in advance that they intended to attack Pearl Harbor, and thereby frustrating the German objective of deterring the USA from entering the war.

The crux lay partly in Hitler's inability to clarify his ideas about the British. From *Mein Kampf*[5] and from his attempt to persuade them to agree to a compromise peace,[6] it is clear that he would have much preferred to have them as allies against the Soviet Union. While he was trying to persuade Molotov to seize the German offer to join in carving up the British Empire ('this vast estate in bankruptcy' as he described it), Ribbentrop, on his instructions, was to put great effort into persuading the Japanese to go south.[7] He hoped that Japanese capture of Singapore, the main British base in the Far East, would not only deter the United States from joining the war, but make the British government more responsive to Germany's peace offers. This he saw as more important than

enlisting Japanese help and thereby making the USSR fight a war on two fronts.

Here another factor is involved, a twofold underestimation, of both the Red Army and the Japanese. Stalin's 1937 purge of the military leadership, followed by the incompetent Soviet performance in the 1939–40 'Winter War' against Finland, convinced Hitler and most of the German generals that the Soviet Union was a giant with feet of clay. They believed they could destroy the Red Army quickly, in the same way as they had destroyed the Polish and French armies, and their plan anticipated doing so in a 5-month campaign, with no need for Japanese help.[8] Nor were low opinions of the post-purge Red Army confined to Germany. Two weeks before the invasion in June 1941, the British Joint Intelligence Committee predicted that Moscow would fall in at most 6 weeks, and probably in 3 to 4 weeks.[9] American estimates were of the order of 6 to 8 weeks for total German victory.[10]

Until Japan entered the war in December 1941, it was also common to underestimate the Japanese armed forces. The alliance with Japan, expressed in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936 and the Tripartite Pact of September 1940, was very much a personal initiative of Ribbentrop, and both pacts contained reservations that amounted to escape clauses. The only action Hitler took in Japan's support was to declare war on the USA after the attack on Pearl Harbor. That was not required by the Tripartite Pact, which obliged Germany to support Japan only if the United States attacked it, not vice versa, and his reasons for doing so can only be guessed at.[11]

The British and American military also seriously underestimated Japanese military capabilities. Their underestimate of the Red Army was based on the same reasoning as Germany's. But if underestimation of Japan had any rationale beyond pure ignorance, it was that Japan's defeat of Russia in 1904–5 had faded from all bar Soviet memories, and Japan's role in the First World War had been minor, involving no serious test of its military or naval prowess. Since then Japan had fought only China, which by no stretch of the imagination could be counted a major power in the 1930s. Underestimation was furthered by Chiang Kai-Shek's propaganda apparatus, which fed a credulous outside world a diet of entirely fictitious victories.[12] The British and Americans could seriously underestimate the Japanese, without the aid of any formal theory of racial supremacy. Nazi Germany did have such a theory, formulated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. There he described Japan as 'culture-bearing' rather than 'culture-creating', and attributed its progress in science and technology exclusively to external Aryan influences, which, if withdrawn, would cause it to 'fossilise'[13] He described Britain's post-First World War attempt to extend the Anglo-Japanese alliance as understandable for countering American power, but 'from the racial point of view perhaps unpardonable'.[14] Realpolitik dictated that these attitudes should be played down in Nazi

Germany's relations with Japan, but Nazi racial theory made German thinking at least as likely as British and American to underrate Japan.

Such a tendency could only have been reinforced by the Japanese Army's defeats at the Red Army's hands on the Korean–Soviet border in 1938, and in Outer Mongolia in the summer of 1939. In fact the casualties incurred by the Soviet forces in defeating the Japanese probes in 1938[15] were sufficient for Stalin to have their commander, Marshal Blyukher, arrested; he was not court-martialled only because his interrogators beat him to death beforehand. And the force that invaded Outer Mongolia had the misfortune to encounter superior Soviet forces commanded by General G.K. Zhukov. In 1941 he would inflict Germany's first land defeats of the war, at Yelnya, Leningrad and Moscow, and after playing a leading role in most of the great Soviet victories from Stalingrad onwards, in 1945 ended the European war by capturing Berlin. But Blyukher's losses would be disclosed only to a later Soviet generation, and Zhukov's emergence as the Red Army's most outstanding general still lay in the future. All the outside world knew at the time was that the Japanese had twice lost to the despised Red Army. The professional assessment at the time would inevitably be that the Japanese army was of low capability.

The German Order of Battle for 'Case Barbarossa' (the invasion of the Soviet Union)[16] speaks louder than words. The 153 divisions deployed by Germany were to be supplemented by thirty-eight divisions and ten brigades from Finland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Italy, and a division of volunteers from Spain. But Japanese participation, even though it could force a two-front war on the USSR, was not sought. Instead the German leaders urged Japan to attack Singapore, so as to weaken Britain's position in South-East Asia, and divert American attention from Europe to the Pacific.

These propositions formed part of Hitler's Directive No. 24, on cooperation with Japan,[17] issued on 5 March 1941, 3 weeks before Matsuoka arrived in Berlin. It ordered all possible help in strengthening its fighting power to be given to Japan, including information on Germany's war experience, and (unspecified) economic and technical aid. But the final sentence of the Directive was 'No mention whatsoever of Case "Barbarossa" shall be made to the Japanese.' And no other of Hitler's War Directives made any reference at all to Japan, or to any role it might play. German flights of strategic fancy,[18] or Allied nightmares, from time to time pictured a German advance from the Middle East and/or Transcaucasus joining hands somewhere in India with Japanese forces advancing from Burma. But by February 1944, when the Japanese launched their abortive invasion of India, the Anglo-Americans had long ago expelled Axis military power from North Africa, and the Red Army had pushed the Germans back several hundred miles from the Caucasus.

The nearest the Germans and Japanese came to a joint venture was the establishment of a squadron of German submarines at Penang in Japanese-occupied Malaya in 1943. However, the principal objective of the German

force was not cooperation in Japan's war, but attacks on enemy shipping making its way to Persian Gulf ports with supplies destined for the Soviet Union. A secondary function was to use submarines and blockade-running surface ships to supply Germany with scarce high-value raw materials such as tin, rubber and tungsten from Japanese-occupied territories. Japanese cooperation was minimal, obstruction frequent, and results were modest. Of the forty-one German submarines that operated East of Suez, thirty-two were sunk or captured by American or British anti-submarine forces. One blockade-runner got through in 1943, but none thereafter.[19] So despite the lip-service paid by Matsuoka and others to the primacy of the Tripartite over the Neutrality Pact, Germany and Japan fought separate wars. The Tripartite Pact played no tangible role in either's war, whereas, as Dr Slavinsky points out, the Neutrality Pact considerably benefited the war efforts of both its signatories up to the point when the Soviet Union, urged on by its allies, first abrogated and then violated it.

Matsuoka's first meeting in Berlin was with Ribbentrop, on 27 March 1941. In the spirit of Directive No. 24 Ribbentrop attempted to calm Matsuoka's fears of the United States by arguing that a display of decisiveness, such as the seizure of Singapore, would be most likely to deter America from declaring war.

Although Hitler regularly denigrated the United States, he was also well aware of America's vast military-industrial potential, and of the decisive role it had played in the First World War. It was important to keep the United States out of the war, but by March 1941 the signs of deepening US commitment to British survival were very evident. Roosevelt, re-elected for a third 4-year term on 5 November 1940, on 29 December proclaimed his intention to make the United States 'the great arsenal of democracy', and on 10 January 1941 sent the Lend-Lease Act to Congress. Despite strong isolationist opposition, it passed the House of Representatives on 8 February, and the Senate on 8 March. From then on Britain's access to American supplies of all kinds would no longer depend on ability to pay for them. The US Navy's collaboration with the British and Canadian Navies in protecting Atlantic shipping already fell little short of war. Grand-Admiral Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, considered American entry into the war as inevitable, and had unsuccessfully sought Hitler's permission to attack American shipping in British waters. On 13 March 1941 the German Embassy in Washington reported that the administration was considering having the US Navy escort merchant ships between US ports and Iceland. If true, this would greatly relieve the pressure on the British and Canadian navies, which would need to provide escorts west of Iceland only for convoys to or from Canadian ports.[20]

Matsuoka was due in Berlin in less than 2 weeks, and was to be encouraged to face down the United States by displaying decisiveness, so Hitler could not afford to be seen failing to react decisively to this American 'provocation'. On 14 March 1941 he ordered the Atlantic 'combat zone'

extended westward to meet the boundaries of the Pan-American neutrality zone, and to include the waters around Iceland. Despite this, he gave strict secret orders against attacking any American ships.[21] The contrast between the public proclamation of the extended combat zone, and the secret ban on attacking US ships in it suggests that the sole purpose of his action was to set Matsuoka an example of 'decisiveness' for Japan to emulate.

After their two defeats at the Red Army's hands, the Japanese generals had no reason to underestimate it. The southern push, against colonial forces of a defeated and occupied France and Holland, a hard-pressed British Empire, and a United States which Japanese militarists easily persuaded themselves lacked the stomach for a fight, looked easier in every respect except in the distances to be covered. It also offered immediate gains in raw materials, particularly oil, rubber and minerals, that Japan lacked, and that the Soviet Far East could not provide. So the southern option would almost certainly have been chosen even without German urging. But the fact that the Germans did so urge indicates Hitler's continued tendency to see Britain as the main enemy, and to underestimate both the Red Army and the Japanese armed forces. It also justifies Dr Slavinsky's contention that from the Japanese point of view the Tripartite Pact was anti-American, not anti-Soviet. Decisive opposition to Japan's southward thrust could come only from the United States, and there was no reason to expect the Soviet Union to come to America's assistance.

Furthermore, when the Tripartite Pact was signed in September 1940, Germany and the Soviet Union were already linked by a non-aggression pact (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939). Since signing it they had jointly dismembered Poland; then the Soviet Union, with German acquiescence, had annexed the three Baltic States, attacked Finland, and taken territory from it and Romania. To those not privy to Hitler's intentions, among them the Japanese government, the Soviet Union at the time of Matsuoka's visit looked more like Germany's next ally than its next victim. And as Dr Slavinsky points out, Prime Minister Prince Konoe was so indignant at Germany's action in invading the USSR that he unsuccessfully demanded Japan denounce it and the Pact.

One other recent discovery that supports Dr Slavinsky's account of Stalin's territorial ambitions and aspiration to 'avenge' the defeat of 1904–5 as motives for attacking Japan relates to a much later period of the war. Two Australian scholars, Professor Desmond Ball and Dr David Horner, of the Strategic and Defense Studies Centre at the Australian National University, found in US archives two Japanese messages, deciphered by the Americans in November 1944, which gave information from American, Australian and British secret documents about Allied military strengths and intentions. The messages identified the source of the information as the Soviet 'Embassy' (actually then a Legation) in Canberra. The documents containing the information had not been provided to the Legation through any official Allied channels, so it could have

obtained them only by espionage. Both messages were transmitted from Harbin in Manchuria to Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo, and it considered the information important enough to retransmit it to its Army Commanders in South-East Asia.[22] The question that arises is how the information came to be in Harbin and in Japanese hands.

Its most likely source was one or more of a group of communist public servants in Canberra, later identified as Soviet agents, who passed copies of the documents, or notes made from them, to a member of the Soviet Legation. There would be no reason for that Legation to communicate anything directly to Harbin, and it had no radio transmitter at that time, so the most likely routing for the information would be by cipher telegram or diplomatic courier to Moscow. It could be that a Japanese agent there secured access to them, and somehow passed them to the Japanese Consulate-General in Harbin, which enciphered them and transmitted them to Tokyo by radio. But that explanation fails on two grounds. First, there is no evidence in Japanese or Soviet sources that the Japanese had an agent in Moscow with clandestine access to the People's Commissariats of Foreign Affairs, Defence or State Security and, second, there is at least one piece of positive evidence that they did not.

This is another deciphered Japanese message found by Ball and Horner.[23] It is dated 29 August 1944, and contains a set of letters and numbers to be used to identify the 'reporting officer' (controller of agents) in London (D1), New Delhi (D2), Ceylon (D3), Sydney (D4), Melbourne (D5), Washington (D6), Ankara (D7) and Chungking (D8). Moscow is not listed, which suggests that although Japan had an Embassy there, its 'resident' had not succeeded in recruiting any agents in the People's Comissariats (Ministries) of Foreign Affairs or Defence.

The most likely explanation therefore is that the information went by official Soviet channels from Moscow to the Soviet Consulate-General in Harbin, which passed it on to the Japanese Consulate-General and/or the Kwantung Army Intelligence Group, both of which were located there. The information could presumably have been forwarded via the Japanese Embassy in Moscow, or the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo. However, to send it via Harbin, a city with a large population of Russians, many of them anti-Soviet emigres, made it easier to denounce it as forgery, or disown it as an anti-Soviet 'provocation' if the Allies found out what was happening, and made an issue of it.

They did, of course, find out, because the Japanese cipher in which the messages were transmitted had been broken, and they were read. But the issue was not raised with the Soviets, because Anglo-American ability (codenamed 'Ultra') to read German and Japanese codes and ciphers was among the most closely guarded secrets of the war. Information obtained from them was exploited only with great circumspection, because if the Germans or Japanese should get to know their messages were being read, they would obviously change their codes and ciphers. This would at best

mean a gap in information until the new systems could be broken, and at worst a total loss of it, if the new systems proved unbreakable.

The Soviet government was never officially told the 'Ultra' secret, and was given information garnered from German messages only in paraphrased form and with the source disguised. In fact it knew what the source was, because those in London indoctrinated to see 'Ultra' materials included Soviet agents Philby, Blunt, Long and Cairncross. Whether it knew that Japanese ciphers were also being read is less certain, as none of its four London sources had any 'need to know' in respect of operations against Japan. But whether it did or not, the investigation into the leaks from Australia could not include any direct approach to the Soviets.

A possible additional ground for believing that in late 1944 the Soviets were deliberately leaking information about their allies to the Japanese is the strange case of General Yanagita, Head of the Kwantung Army Intelligence Group. Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945 he was immediately taken by train from Harbin to Moscow and imprisoned there. No war crimes or other charges were ever laid against him, but contrary to normal practice in such cases he was not sent to a prisoner-of-war camp for Japanese senior officers to await repatriation. He remained in prison, and had no contact with any other Japanese, until he died of a heart attack in 1956.[24] The reasons why he was treated in this way have never been explained. But given his position, he must have known the origins and content of messages such as the two that were sourced to the Soviet Legation in Canberra. If repatriated he was sure to be interrogated by the American occupation authorities. He would have no reason not to tell them that in 1944 official Soviet sources had been supplying him with intelligence about the military strengths, deployments and intentions of countries then allied to the Soviet Union and fighting Japan. If quartered with other captured Japanese generals, he might tell one or more of them, and they in turn would tell the Americans after they were repatriated. Either way would provide first-rate Cold War propaganda fodder for the West, so in the absence of any other obvious reason to detain him, that could be why General Yanagita received this unusual treatment.

Dr Slavinsky's account takes note at several points of Stalin's long-standing ambition to recover the territory ceded by Russia under the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth. Although not yet unchallenged leader of the Soviet state in 1925, he was by then already the most powerful member of the Communist Party and of the government. So the Declaration regarding that treaty, made simultaneously with the signing of the Peking Convention in 1925, could not have been made without at least his acquiescence, if it was not at his instigation. Stalin's preoccupation with recovering lost territories of the former Russian Empire was, of course, already apparent in his 1939–40 deals with Germany, under which he 'recovered' the vast majority of the territory that the Russian Empire had lost as a consequence of the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917. However, his ambition to

avenge Russia's defeat in the 1904–5 war appears the longest cherished of all. Its intensity is apparent in the extracts cited by Dr Slavinsky from his discussions with Matsuoka in 1941, with Roosevelt and Churchill in 1943 and 1945, and in his victory speech on 2 September 1945. By recovering Southern Sakhalin, the right to a base in China, and the two Russian-built railways in Manchuria, he would succeed where the last Tsar had failed. He would go even further by regaining the Kuriles, ceded to Japan by treaty in 1875, in return for Japan's relinquishing its claims to Sakhalin. The war gave him the opportunity to achieve these long-cherished aims, and he could be thwarted only if his allies forced Japan to make peace before he was ready to attack it.

In late 1944 that possibility could not be ruled out. Everywhere except in Central China Japan had long been on the defensive. By November 1944 the Americans had been advancing through the Pacific islands for more than 2 years, and had reached the Philippines and Marianas, from where on 24 November US Air Force B-29 aircraft began regular and highly destructive bombing raids on Japan's cities. In northern Burma, British Empire, Chinese and American forces had restored the Burma Road supply route from India to China, and the British had begun driving the Japanese out of the rest of the country. As yet Japan's control on land in the Indonesian archipelago, Malaya, Thailand and French Indo-China was only indirectly threatened. However, American (and to a lesser but significant extent, British and Dutch) submarines, surface warships and aircraft were already taking a very heavy toll of the ships that carried raw materials and food to Japan. Air raids on vital land installations such as oil refineries, storage tanks and port installations were intensifying, and it was obvious that invasion would not be long delayed.

Nor was Japan's situation any more enviable in the Central and South Pacific. In New Guinea an Australian counteroffensive beginning in September 1942 had driven the Japanese back to the north coast, where joint operations with US forces led to their total annihilation. The US Navy had won a series of major battles since mid-1942. These had entailed heavy losses of ships, aircraft and men on both sides, but US losses could be replaced by new construction and by transfers from the European theatre, whereas Japan's far greater losses could not be replaced at all.

The timing of Soviet intervention against Japan depended on two factors outside Soviet control – the end of the war in Europe, and American willingness to supply vehicles and ships for the Soviet Far East campaign. The war in Europe would continue at least into the spring of 1945. Victory was assured, but the alliance was a mere marriage of convenience, and Stalin suspected that the Germans would open their western front to allow the Anglo-Americans to occupy as much of Germany as possible. He had probably heard of Montgomery's proposed pencil-thrust advance to take Berlin before the Red Army could do so. He may also have known that on 10 September Eisenhower had rejected Montgomery's proposal,

but he would not necessarily see Eisenhower's decision as final. To take no chances, he planned the taking of Berlin as one of the Red Army's largest battles, committing an entire Front (Army Group) to take the city, and two others to protect its northern and southern flanks. To accumulate the necessary stocks of equipment and supplies, especially of ammunition, would take several weeks, and there would be little to spare for the Far East until the Berlin campaign was over.

Then once the war in Europe ended, all three allies would redeploy forces from west to east to fight Japan. Here too the Anglo-Americans had the advantage. Their forces had further to go, but had a variety of routes at their disposal, eastward via the Suez Canal or Cape of Good Hope, or westward via Panama, and they had enormous numbers of ships. But there was no surfaced road across Siberia, so Soviet forces could be redeployed by only one route, the Trans-Siberian Railway, and the speed of their redeployment would be limited by that heavily overworked route's capacity to fit additional trains into its schedules. In fact the required numbers of troops, tanks and guns could be transported to the Far East in time only if the United States agreed to provide the jeeps and trucks they needed by direct shipment across the Pacific to Soviet Far East ports.[25] Furthermore, to ferry and escort troops assigned to the conquest of Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, far more shipping would be needed than was locally available, and that gap also could be filled only by the United States. At Yalta it agreed to provide the vehicles and to lend over 250 ships.[26] Should the Americans find Japan inclined to surrender before Soviet intervention, they could easily delay the deliveries, and thereby postpone that intervention.

So the fact that Soviet transits would be within one country and over shorter distances than their allies was more than counterbalanced by the Anglo-Americans' superior logistical resources. If the allies chose to, they could redeploy to the Pacific in overwhelming strength much faster than the Red Army could, and their ability to do so might result in a Japanese surrender before Soviet forces joined the war.

Stalin must also have known that the Kwantung Army was not as strong as his allies thought. Documents from the Russian archives released in 1997 include some intelligence assessments which are detailed enough to show that the Soviet Far East forces were keeping a very close eye on the Kwantung Army. However, few of these reports are included in the collection, and there are strange gaps; for example no reports from Soviet agents in Tokyo made between 14 September 1941 and 24 January 1945 are included. The report of the latter date said that

> since May 1944 Japanese garrisons located in Manchuria have been gradually redeploying to the Philippines or Kurile Islands. The majority of the fifteen-ton tanks possessed by these garrisons have been transferred to Burma, where a significant number of them have already been lost'.[27]

It is unlikely that earlier reports told a different story; and quite inconceivable that no reports were made between September 1941 and January 1945.

Similarly, the published documents include a very detailed report on the Kwantung Army by the Intelligence Section of Pacific Fleet Headquarters, undated, but clearly written in May 1942.[28] It assessed the Kwantung Army as having increased from twenty-three to twenty-seven infantry divisions between 1 January and 10 May 1942, and is detailed enough to list its armaments right down to the number of light machine guns. But no other such report is included in the published documents. There is, however, one fairly detailed report from the Amur River Flotilla, which assessed the Kwantung Army as possessing twenty-four infantry divisions, only one of them motorised, as at 31 December 1943, i.e. three divisions less than in May 1942. No later assessment by either, and none by Far East Front headquarters later than 11 December 1941, is included, although it is inconceivable that these bodies, facing the only force capable of inflicting a two-front war on the USSR, did not make regular Intelligence assessments and report them to Moscow.

A possible reason for withholding the evidence, especially for the years 1944–5, could well be that suggested by Dr Slavinsky in his Introduction to explain why some other documents have not been declassified, namely that they would 'cast a shadow over relations with the United States'. They would probably confirm the statement in the Tokyo report of 23 January 1945, cited above, that from May 1944 numerous Kwantung Army units had been moved south, to fight the Americans in the Philippines and the British in Burma. Dr Slavinsky mentions that units were indeed removed to the south, but claims that they were fully replaced by reservists. The implication, that this involved no weakening of the Kwantung Army is, however, unsound. Reservists not mobilised until so late in the war were of the lowest physical categories. By the end of 1944 thirteen of the twenty-four divisions in place at the end of 1943 had been removed to the southern theatres of war, and their replacements were a mix of inferior quality reservists and conscripts who had just reached call-up age. Not only that: the number of divisions was retained near its former level only by reducing the size of the divisions, or grouping heterogeneous formations together and calling the result a division. As a senior officer testified after the war,' 'We wanted to provide a large number of divisions – a show of force. If the Russians only knew how weak were our preparations in Manchuria, they would be bound to attack us.' The decline in manpower quality was accompanied by a numerical decline, from the 943,800 of May 1942 to about 723,000 in mid-1945.

As with the army, so with the air force. In mid-1944 two Air Divisions, the majority of the Kwantung Army's air support, had been transferred to the Philippines. By the time the Soviet Union joined the war, the Kwantung Army's air strength was down from the 1,050 aircraft of May 1942 to

230, 175 of them of obsolete types,[29] and no match for the 5,000 aircraft deployed by the three Soviet Fronts and Pacific Fleet.

Almost all units were short of fuel, explosives, ammunition and weapons. Even rifles and items of uniform were in short supply. The Allied stranglehold on the sea routes made resupply almost impossible, even if the supplies were available. In his memoirs Vasilevsky, who clearly preferred silence to lying, mentioned the number of divisions, but not the number of men, in the Kwantung Army, the length of the roads and railways and the number of airfields in its area, but not the number of tanks, guns or aircraft.[30]

The American nightmare of a Kwantung Army capable of fighting on for years after Japan itself had fallen was a chimera. To find out precisely where the USA got its information about the Kwantung Army, other than from deciphered Japanese messages, is beyond the scope of this study. But formal exchanges of military intelligence information between the Anglo-Americans and Soviets were in place well before the end of 1944.[31] The most likely source of detailed Order of Battle intelligence on the Kwantung Army was the Soviet General Staff. What if published Soviet documents should show now that information on the Kwantung Army given to the USA in 1944–5 was doctored to make it appear more formidable than the Soviets really thought it was? A shadow would indeed be cast on relations with the United States, where the image of Russia as devious and untrustworthy has not in all circles disappeared along with the Cold War.

The most detailed Soviet-era account of the defeat of the Kwantung Army adds to it the army of the puppet state of Manchukuo, the 'forces of the ruler of Inner Mongolia, Prince De Wan', and 'the local forces of the province of Suyuan' in order to produce a total of 1.2 million.[32] But its account of the campaign contains no indications that any of these 'satellite' forces played a significant role in the few days of fighting that preceded the Japanese surrender. Figures released in 1993 indicate a far lower total, of 723,800, of whom 83,700 were killed in the fighting and 640,100 taken prisoner when the entire army surrendered, of whom 609,400 were Japanese and the remainder mostly Chinese, Koreans and Manchus.[33]

Possibly the atomic bomb should also be taken into account. Information on the US programme's progress was being received from some participants who were Soviet agents, but in November 1944 it was not yet clear when the first bombs would be available. Nor could it be forecast whether they would be as powerful as expected, or even whether a political decision to use them would be taken. So if the atomic bomb played any role at all in Stalin's thinking in 1944, it can at most have been marginal. However, against Japanese cities, then consisting largely of wooden houses, a conventional bombing campaign using high-explosive and incendiary bombs could have devastating effects on civilian morale, as well as on industrial production, and the United States had begun just such a campaign from airfields in the Marianas.

So in late 1944 Stalin could not yet set a date for joining in the war against Japan, and had to consider that it might end before he was ready to do so. Passing intelligence to the Japanese about their enemies' capabilities and intentions would help to keep Japan in the war till he was ready to attack it. Compared to what he had already done to his own colleagues, party, military and people, giving away his allies' plans to their enemy would rank as a mere peccadillo. Besides, if his actions helped to frustrate his allies' plans, the more resoundingly could he claim that his eventual intervention had been 'decisive'. For many years after his death Soviet writings on the Second World War would make that very claim.

His ambition to be proclaimed not merely a great leader, but a great *military* leader is mentioned by Dr Slavinsky, but merits greater emphasis, because it began to manifest itself obsessively at this time. On 12 November 1944 he abolished the functions of 'Stavka representatives', mostly very senior military professionals, who were sent to the front to control and coordinate major campaigns such as Stalingrad and Kursk. In performing these functions Zhukov had sometimes controlled three Fronts and Vasilevsky two. Each was in effect 'downgraded' to command of a single Front, and thereafter Stalin himself was the sole coordinator and controller. On 26–27 July 1945, he chose the 2-day meeting called to finalise the preparations for attacking Japan to have the rank of Generalissimo, dormant in Russia since the death of Suvorov in 1800, formally revived and conferred on himself. Then after the dropping of the first atomic bomb, on Hiroshima, he hastily brought the attack on Japan forward by 2 days, probably for fear of a precipitate Japanese surrender that would deprive him of a military victory. There were alternatives open to him. He could, as Dr Slavinsky suggests, have acted on Malik's 1944 report, that great concessions could be squeezed out of Japan in return for Soviet mediation of an end to the war. Or he could have given the Japanese an ultimatum that unless they surrendered within a given number of days, they would be attacked by Soviet forces which outnumbered them by over two to one in manpower, and by anything up to twenty times in tanks, artillery and aircraft. Or, after the first atomic bomb was dropped, he could have waited to see if, as was probable, a second bomb would be dropped soon and produce a Japanese surrender, enabling his forces to seize all their objectives without having to fight.

He did none of these things, and his behaviour from then on suggests a continuing obsession to monopolise military glory as he had earlier succeeded in monopolising political power. Once the war was ended he swiftly relegated his most gifted and best-known field commanders to the shadows. Zhukov was dispatched to minor provincial commands, first at Odessa and then at Urals Military District, and Malinovsky to Far East Military District, as far from Moscow as possible. Rokossovsky and Konev were sent to command forces outside the Soviet Union, Rokossovsky the Northern Group of Forces in Poland (and from 1949

Poland's Defence Minister), Konev the Central Group of Forces in Austria and Hungary. Only Vasilevsky, less prominent in the public eye because he had held a field command only briefly, was retained in Moscow. A set of six truisms Stalin enunciated in 1941 was elevated to become the apex of strategic theory as 'the permanently-operating factors of victory in war'. The disastrous retreats of 1941–2 were transmogrified into a larger-scale version of Kutuzov's strategy against Napoleon in 1812, presenting Stalin as deliberately luring the Germans into the depths of Russia, the better to destroy them.

All these signs of military megalomania justify concluding that a Soviet breach of the neutrality pact was inevitable, no matter what Japan did, because Stalin's obsession could be satisfied only by a military victory. That achieving it would entail over 95,000 additional deaths (12,031 Soviet and 83,700 Japanese),[34] would not bother a dictator who had signed off a list of 3,167 names with 'Shoot them all', on a single day, 12 December 1938.[35] It also implies that the Anglo-American wooing of him was unnecessary. He had always intended to recover what Russia had lost in 1905, so had every intention of joining the war against Japan. Playing 'hard to get' was a tactic intended to ensure that his allies did not simply acquiesce in his ambitions, but actively assisted him to attain them. And it worked.

Notes

NB. All titles below published in the former USSR are in Russian unless otherwise stated.

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8 *Foreign policy of the Soviet Union in the period of the Fatherland War. Documents and materials. Vol. 3. 1 January–3 September 1945*, pp. 362–3.
9 Deane (1947) p. 239.
10 AVP RF 'Transit via USSR to China of trucks for the American Army'.
11 AVP RF, Japan Dept, 1944, op. 28, p. 256, d. 14, ll. 152–7.
12 AVP RF, F.06, 1944, op. 6, p. 60, d. 818, ll. 7–10.
13 AVP RF, F.06, op. 7, p. 2, d. 30, ll. 163–8.
14 'Behind the scenes of the Pacific battle (Japanese–Soviet contacts in 1945)', Vestnik MID SSSR (Herald of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR), No.19(77), 15 October 1990, p. 51.

15 Truman (1955) p. 411.
16 AVP RF, F.048, op. 48, p. 431, d. 11, ll. 160–3.
17 We have no documentary materials on this conference. Evidently they are in the archive of the President of the Russian Federation, access to which is extremely difficult. The only source we have is the recollections of a participant in the Kremlin conference, retired Colonel D. Belorusov, who at the time was Head of a section of the Staff of Transbaikal Front. See *Izvestiya*, 28 July 1992.
18 *The Soviet Union at International conferences in the period of the Great Fatherland War 1941–1945. Vol. 4. Berlin (Potsdam) conference. Collection of documents*. Moscow, 1980, pp. 234–43.
19 AVP RF, F.06, op. 4, p. 2, d. 31, l. 96.
20 Slavinsky (in press) *The Yalta Conference and the Problem of the Northern Territories*.
21 AVP RF, F.06, op. 6, p. 58, d. 803a, l. 240.
22 'Behind the scenes of the Pacific battle (Japanese-Soviet contacts in 1945)', Vestnik MID SSSR (Herald of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR), No.19(77), 15 October 1990, p. 49.
23 *Foreign policy of the Soviet Union in the period of the Fatherland War. Documents and materials. Vol. 3. 1 January–3 September 1945*, pp. 54–7.
24 Inoue, Okonogi and Suzuki (1955) p. 264; *Japan's Longest Day*.
25 Stenogram of Tokyo trial of 16 May 1947, pp. 22, 423.

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1 Fest (1974) pp. 641–2.
2 Trevor-Roper (1966) pp. 93–8.
3 Compton (1968) pp. 192–4.
4 Muggeridge (1948) p. 392.
5 Hitler (1939) pp. 132–3, 564.
6 Speech of 19 July 1940.
7 Hildebrand (1973) pp. 100–4.
8 Halder (1962–6) p. 46.
9 Hinsley (1979) pp. 481–2.
10 Langer and Gleason (1953) p. 538.
11 For speculation about them see Fest (1974) p. 655.
12 Tuchman (1981) pp. 321, 384–5, 424–9, 493–5.
13 Hitler (1939) p. 252.
14 Ibid. p. 544.
15 792 dead or missing, 2,752 wounded, over twice the Japanese casualties. Krivosheyev (1993) pp. 71–2.
16 Fest (1974) p. 648.
17 Trevor-Roper (1966) pp. 104–6.
18 E.g. in Warlimont (1964) p. 226.
19 Busch (1955) pp. 155–6.
20 The USA took over occupation of Iceland from the British in July 1941, and the US Navy began escorting convoys west of Iceland in September.
21 Compton (1968) pp. 159–73.
22 Ball and Horner (1998) pp. 85–114, 135, 343.
23 Ibid. pp. 87–8.
24 Kirichenko, in *Znakom'tes' Yaponiya* No. 19/98.
25 They did, and also supplied steam locomotives. Vasilevskiy (1989) p. 240.
26 Kuznetsov (1989) p. 433.
27 Russkiy Arkhiv, *Velikaya Otechestvennaya*, Vol 7(1), Moscow, Terra, 1997, p. 207.

28 Ibid. pp. 246–9.
29 Coox (1966–8) pp. 3200–7.
30 Vasilevskiy (1989) pp. 242–3.
31 Oral information from Sir Kenneth Strong, Chief of Intelligence to Eisenhower in the Second World War, 1963 – G.J.
32 Zakharov (1969) p. 74.
33 Krivosheyev (1993) pp. 391–2.
34 Ibid. pp. 223 and 391.
35 Volkogonov (1990) p. 577.

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