

RUSSIA/USSR – FOREIGN POLICY 1918-1930

FACTORS – FOREIGN POLICY

- **Security!** (Fear of invasion)
- **Ideology**
- **Background – views of the leaders** (Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin + Chicherin, Litvinov, Molotov)
- **Domestic situation**
- **Economy**
- **Relations to other countries**

L. Trotsky: Foreign Commissar 1917-1918 ex-Menshevik (in the Politburo)

- *Favored World Revolution*

EVENTS:

- **1917 – October Revolution** (Decree on Peace – “*no annexations, no indemnities*”). Truce.
- **1917-1918 – Peace Treaty Brest-Litovsk.** Negotiation for a separate Peace Treaty. Trotsky withdrew from Brest-Litovsk and claimed, “*neither war nor peace*”. WWI continued. Bukharin suggested that the war should be transferred into a “*revolutionary war*”. Lenin intervened and forced the Russian delegates to sign (Trotsky refused and did not go back to Brest-Litovsk)

G. V. Chicherin: Foreign Commissar 1918-1930 ex-Menshevik (not in the Politburo)

- *Favored close relations with Germany*
- *Anti-British*
- *Peaceful coexistence*

AIMS: Strengthening the *security of Russia/USSR* and *promote World Socialist Revolution*. After a few years the Soviet security became the top priority in Soviet foreign policy.

EVENTS:

- **1918-1920(21) – Russian Civil War!** In 1918 several of the allied countries intervened on the “*White side*” – against the Bolsheviks. Great Britain, France and the US officially wanted Russia back in WWI against Germany (but they also had other reasons – The British Secretary of War Winston Churchill saw this as a crusade against Bolshevism; France had invested millions of francs in Russian industries and banks that were nationalized; Japan was keen on trying to annex new territory – and the US followed the Japanese to hinder them from annexing new territory). The Bolsheviks used the foreign intervention in their propaganda – “*Mother Russia had been attacked by aggressive foreign countries*” so if you want to save the country you need to fight with the Bolsheviks.
- **1919 – Formation of COMINTERN (“*Third Communist International*”)** In March 1919, the Comintern was set up to promote world revolution. But the Soviet Union also needed to establish diplomatic relations with countries in the capitalist world. At times these two contradictory aims led to problems as policies on foreign affairs collided with the objectives of the Comintern.
- **1919-21 – Russo-Polish War.** Poland attacked Russia in 1919/1920. Success in the beginning, but then the Civil War came into a phase where most of the “*White troops*” had been defeated or withdrawn so the Bolshevik Red Army could now focus on the war against Poland. The majority of the Bolshevik leaders wanted to stop at the Polish border, but Lenin decided to continue into Poland (towards Warsaw). He wanted to “*build a bridge*” to the German revolutionaries... The campaign failed and Lenin realized that he needed to put the international revolution on hold. Bolshevik Russia needed peace and industrial resources from trade. He therefore (reluctantly) accepted a policy of “*peaceful coexistence*”.

NOTE: The foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War and the Russian invasion attempt of Poland caused tension and suspicion between Russia and the Western democracies. Isolation – “*Red Scare*”

- **1921 – Anglo-Soviet trade agreement**
- **1922 – Treaty of Rapallo** (Soviet Union and Germany – diplomacy, trade and military development)
- **1923 – Soviet agents in Persia, Afghanistan and India.** British protests against the activities of Soviet Agents – threat to cancel the Trade Agreement from 1921.
- **1924 – Great Britain recognized the USSR** (Labour Government – Ramsay MacDonald)
- **1924 – “Zinoviev Letters”** published in the Conservative newspaper Daily Mail (four days before the election). Fake letters that caused tension between Great Britain and the USSR. The Conservative won the British election and would dominate the government to 1930. They suspended the dealings with the USSR all through 1925.
- **1926 – GB General Strike – USSR** (The Russian Central Council of Trade Unions sent a cheque for £26,000 (a considerable sum) to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the national leadership of the trade unions. The TUC leadership sent it back to prevent the British government from claiming that they were in the pay of the Bolsheviks). More tension between Great Britain and the USSR.
- **1926 – Treaty of Berlin.** Reaffirmed the terms of the Treaty of Rapallo (to remain for five years). Pledge of neutrality if either one was attacked by another power. Strengthen the economic and military cooperation between the USSR and Germany. In 1932 47% of the total Russian import came from Germany. German firms in the USSR manufactured guns, shells, aircrafts, tanks...
- **1927 – 1930 Diplomatic relations between GB and the USSR broken** temporarily. In 1927 the British police mounted a full-scale raid on the premises of the Russian trade mission in London, which was suspected of being the center of a Soviet spy ring. Known as the Arcos raid, it led to the breaking off of diplomatic relations.
- **1927 – USSR support for the Chinese Communist Party** (Stalin’s advice)
- **1927 – “War Scare” situation.** Stalin used the situation and used the 1921 decision – the “*ban on factionalism*” to get rid of the “*rightist opposition*”.

Change of foreign policy under Stalin – towards “Socialism in One Country” and protect the interests of the USSR!

Situation around 1930:

- Lenin had favored security as well as the spread of the proletarian revolution. Stalin favored security and focused on the development of the USSR – **not** the spread of the proletarian revolution. Instead he wanted the USSR to be the leader of the combined socialist world. The interest of the USSR should always come first. Foreign Communist Parties should be subservient to the USSR.
- Germany was a favored trade partner in the 1920’s (Treaty of Rapallo – diplomatic, economic and military cooperation – in 1932 47% of the total Russian import came from Germany)
- Great Britain was seen with suspicion and the relations between Russia/USSR and Great Britain were strained in the 1920’s (even though Great Britain made a trade agreement with Russia in 1921 and diplomatically recognized the USSR in 1924)
- By the end of 1932 the USSR was recognized as a European power again. Foreign powers had begun to do business with Russia again. There was no united “*capitalist front*” against the USSR. In 1933 the USA recognized the USSR.

RUSSIA/USSR – FOREIGN POLICY 1931-1939

M. M. Litvinov: Foreign Commissar 1930-1939 (May) ex-Menshevik (not in the Politburo)

- *Favored disarmament*
- *Pro-British*
- *Favored collective security*
- *USSR joined the League of Nations 1934*
- *Suspicious of Germany*
- *Signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact 1939*

AIMS: *Security for the USSR and Collective Security – against fascism.*

EVENTS:

- Between 1931-1933 – Japan took over the Chinese region of Manchuria. It became a Japanese puppet state named Manchukuo. Stalin saw it as a threat to Siberia.
- Hitler became the German Chancellor, January 1933. In “*Mein Kampf*” he had claimed that Ukraine was going to be used for grain acquisition, Caucasus for oil and the Urals for minerals. Hitler was openly an anti-communist. In 1936 he established the Anti-Comintern with Japan. Its main goal was to combat Communism.
- At first Stalin though was fairly positive about Hitler and the Nazi take-over. It could prevent an Anglo-French rapprochement with Germany and hold back French ambitions in Europe. Hitler also promised to continue previous arrangements with Russia. In 1933 he ratified a 10-year extension of the Neutrality Pact (negotiated in 1931).
- When Germany and Poland agreed to settle their differences and make a non-aggression pact Stalin became “*concerned*”.
- Because of these problems the Soviet Unions started a campaign – “**Soviet return to Europe**”.

The “*Soviet return to Europe*”:

- The Secret military co-operation with Germany ended (although Stalin in an attempt to appease Hitler continued to support him and Germany with raw materials).
- In May 1934 Russia signed a “*Russo-Polish*” non-aggression pact
- In June 1934 the relations between the **USSR and Romania** was resumed, with the Soviet Union recognizing the loss of Bessarabia.
- In September 1934 the USSR **joined the League of Nations** (which at this time Germany and Japan just left...).
- In May 1935 **Russia and France signed a mutual defence treaty**. They would support each other if either were attacked by another power.
- Later in May **Russia also signed a mutual defence treaty with Czechoslovakia**. Russia would come to Czechoslovakia’s aid only if France fulfilled their 1924 non-aggression treaty with Czechoslovakia.
- In July/August during the 7th Comintern Congress (in Moscow) the revolutionary action taken against the “*Bourgeois Governments*” was halted. Now Stalin encouraged co-operation instead – within “**Popular Fronts**” against right-wing Fascism. France and Spain were the only countries to form Popular Fronts.
- In October 1935 Italy started the invasion of Abyssinia. Russia demanded oil, coal and steel sanctions against Italy – in vain... The relation between Russia and Germany reached another “*low*” 1936-1937, following the German denunciation of the 1925 Locarno agreement in March 1936 and the establishment of the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936.
- In July 1936 the **Spanish Civil War** started. Hitler and Mussolini aided Franco and the Nationalists. The USSR urged (through the foreign Minister Litvinov) the League of Nations to intervene on the behalf of the Spanish Republican Government. Instead of intervening Great Britain and France stood behind a non-intervention agreement that most European countries followed – but not Germany, Italy and in the end the USSR (that sent a modest amount (up to 1938) of equipment and help to the Republican Government, which was paid for by the Spanish Gold Reserve...).
- In July 1936 the Straits Convention was signed in Montreux. This conference restored Turkish sovereignty over the Straits but allowed Black Sea powers to send their warships through in time of peace, while warships of other countries were banned. This treaty replaced the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) which demilitarised the Straits, which would be guaranteed by Britain, France, and Italy – and permitted the transit of all merchant and warships while Turkey was at peace. The USSR had supported the Turkey demands at Montreux and they had now been to some extent successful.

- Due to the recent events **in 1936 Russia decided to introduce conscription**. Two years before this, in 1934, Stalin had already changed the FYP (Five Year Plan) which now more focused an arms build-up.
- In December Russia helped the Nationalists and the Communists in China to reach a truce – the Xian Compromise. This ended the First Chinese Civil War. Now the two sides formed an alliance to fight the Japanese.

Relations with Japan and China in the 1930's:

- Stalin wanted to **avoid trouble with Japan**. In 1935 he sold Russia's share of the East China Railroad to the Japanese (now Russia had completed the last part of the trans-Siberian railroad through Russian territory all the way to Vladivostok).
- To deal with the Japanese threat Russia helped bring the Xian Compromise to its conclusion. Lots of Soviet equipment and some advisers were sent to China. **In 1937 China and Russia signed a non-aggression pact**. Soviet aid to Chiang Kai Shek (Jiang Jieshi) between 1937-1939 included \$250 million in loans, 1500 military advisers and 2000 “volunteer” pilots.
- Several border clashes between Russia and Japan in 1938 led to a full-scale battle on the East Siberia-Manchukuo border (called *the Battle of Lake Hasan* by Russia). After almost two weeks of fighting (including planes, tanks, heavy artillery) the Japanese were driven back, and armistice was signed.
- In May 1939 new fights between Russia and Japan occurred. Now the Japanese troops were driven back from the Nomonhan district of Outer Mongolia. A truce was signed.

Relations with Germany by the end of the 1930's:

- Stalin changed his stern policy against Germany after the deteriorated relations with Japan and the appeasement policy of Britain and France plus their refusal to conclude an alliance with Russia.
- The USSR was not invited to the Munich Conference of September 1938. At this conference the British Prime Minister Chamberlain and the French Prime Minister Daladier agreed to let Germany annex the Sudetenland (and later most of Czechoslovakia). Thereby France dishonoured their 1924 Treaty with the Czechs. Stalin saw it as an attempt of the Western Powers to divert Hitler's focus towards the East. Russia had publicly announced its willingness to support the Czechs, but they had gained no support.
- After Germany seized the rest of Czechoslovakia **in March 1939 the USSR (Litvinov) proposed a conference between the British, French, Polish, Soviet and Turkish representatives to consider future military action**. The British government rejected the proposal as “premature” and no conference followed.
- Later in March Hitler denounced the 1934 German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact. This was according to Stalin another sign of Germany's intentions in the East. **Litvinov outlined a French, British and Russian alliance with military commitments against Fascist Powers**. Britain once again refused to agree on Litvinov's suggestion. However, in April 1939, both France and Britain guaranteed Poland, signing a Pact of Mutual Assistance with Poland. This was a bit of relief for Stalin. Now he could remain neutral and see the western powers destroy each other.

Situation 1930's:

- At the beginning of the 1930's the USSR had been accepted by most countries and traded with several Western Powers. The relation with Germany after Hitler came into power became worse. This led to tension between the countries. Litvinov tried to open up for cooperation with the Western Powers.
- In Asia Japan expanded their territory – from Korea into Manchuria which meant that Japan and the USSR now had a common border. The aggressive Japanese foreign policy led to tension between the countries.
- In China a Civil War between nationalists (*Jian Jieshi*) and communists (*Mao Zedong*) made the situation worse. Stalin tried to keep the door open to both sides – something that built up tension between Mao Zedong and Stalin. This tension would last after Mao came into power (1949)
- In 1934 the USSR abandoned the previous attacks on “bourgeois governments” and a new policy of cooperation against fascism was established (**1935 – Popular Fronts**). The Soviet Union joined the League of Nations 1934 and tried to find a way to work together with France and Great Britain.
- The Soviet domestic situation (**Great Purges 1935-38/39**) affected the relation with France and Britain
- The **appeasement policy, critique against the Purges** and the **refusal to form a front against the aggressive German foreign policy** made Stalin consider Germany. In 1939 Germany proposed renewed trade between Germany and the USSR. Litvinov, a Jew and married to an English woman, was replaced...

RUSSIA/USSR – FOREIGN POLICY 1939-1945

V. M. Molotov Foreign Commissar 1939-1949 Bolshevik (in the Politburo)

- *Favored improved relations with Germany (Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939)*

EVENTS:

- In **May 1939 Molotov became the new foreign Minister of Russia**. He set out to try to find a peaceful settlement of issues between Germany and Russia. The result was the “**Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**” signed in August 1939. This pact included a trade agreement, a non-aggression pact and a “*secret clause*” – which established spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, with Poland being divided between Germany and the USSR. Just a few weeks later the Second World War started with a German attack against Poland...
- In **April 1941 Russia and Japan signed a Neutrality Treaty** for five years (but it could be denounced after four years). It was not until the 8th of August 1945 (two days after the Hiroshima bomb) that Russia denounced this Treaty and attacked the Japanese in China. This was the start of “*the Nine-Day War*” which was successful.