



Prelude to the Russian Campaign, From the Moscow Pact (August 21st 1939) to the opening of hostilities in Russia (June 22nd 1941), by Grigore Gafencu, © n.a., Translated by Fletcher-Allen, Frederick Muller Ltd., London 1945.

Grigore Gafencu was Rumanian ambassador to Moscow and Foreign Minister.

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(At the end of Molotov's Nov. '40 trip to Moscow): When it came to the point of issuing to the Press the words exchanged between the two Ministers, Molotov intervened, modestly requesting that the suggestions rather hurriedly put forward should not be made public. Herr von Ribbentrop was obliged to be equally as discreet as his guest, and his speech remained equally undisclosed.

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But Hitler was counting on the adhesion of all the countries of the south-east to the "New Order" – that is to say, to a Continental organization within the German hegemony – and in this scheme Turkey was obviously an essential part.

To gain the acquiescence of the USSR to a scheme of such a scope, and to assure her benevolent neutrality during operations that were not without a certain risk, it was essential to open discussions with M. Molotov, offer him an advantageous scheme for the Straits and, since even the best scheme could not compensate for the loss of Constantinople, it was necessary to offer him other advantages and turn his attention to the East, by firing his imagination and putting an edge on his appetite for Persia and the Persian Gulf.

Molotov's silence prevented the Berlin conversations from taking such a turn. This unrespon-

sive attitude on Russia's part, strengthened by the simple statement that Russia had always had important interests in the Straits – interests which all evidences showed that she had no intention of renouncing – had the significance of an anticipatory plea to bar, politely but with unshakable firmness, any compromise of new proposal that the Reich might make on the point.

From the German point of view, such a plea to bar was equivalent to an attitude plainly hostile, and indicated that the USSR had decided not to accept the "New Order" for Constantinople and the Straits.

While complimenting Count Schulenburg on the perfect behaviour of his guest, of whom he took leave with regret, Hitler from that moment knew that Germany could not march parallel with Russian imperialism, and that the destinies of the Third Reich and those of the Soviet Union must inevitably clash.

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Sir Stafford Cripps, who had gone to meet Mr. Eden in a special aircraft put at his disposal by the Soviet Government, returned from Turkey with the firm conviction that Russia and Germany would be at war before summer.

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...Manuilsky, the Vice-President of the Comintern, at a Party meeting, stated that war between Russia and Germany was inevitable.

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...M. Gavrillovitch stayed with Stalin, and the conversation continued to daybreak. The master of the USSR never stopped smiling.

"What if Germany becomes angry, and attacks you?" asked the Yugoslav diplomat, astounded by the speed with which matters had been arranged.

"Let them come!" replied Stalin, unperturbed and serene.

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...The entry of an increasing number of people into the "orbit of war" did not really trouble him at all, despite his affirmations, and served his private resolve to be the only one to keep his military forces intact until the final day of reckoning; he was, on the other hand, perfectly sincere when he talked of preserving the benefits of peace to the USSR, by every means.

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23 March 1941: Japanese Foreign minister Matsuoka has dinner at the US Embassy in Moscow before going to Berlin and coming back to Moscow again in April to sign the Russo-Japanese non-aggression pact.

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“This success of Soviet diplomacy,” said the Red Star, “has contributed to give to relations between the USSR and Japan solid foundations on which they can henceforward develop peacefully, and it has again confirmed the independent attitude of the Soviet Union.” Pravda was even more explicit. Endeavoring to show where British and American newspapers contradicted themselves, one suggesting that the Pact had been imposed by Germany, and others that it had weakened Russo-German relations, said: “It is high time that it was realised that the USSR follows its own policy, independent and free of all external influence. This policy is determined solely by the people of the Soviet, the sovereign State, and peace.” Then Pravda recalled that the relations between the USSR and Japan had always developed “outside American or European influence,” and that they had reached “the conclusion natural to its development.” ...

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek clear minded Romanian Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu, writing at the time, goes on: Certainly, as always, it had followed the policy of peace – the same policy that it followed with respect to Germany and other Powers; but the guarantee of security it had ensured in Asia in no way bound its freedom of action in Europe: on the contrary, the USSR was better guaranteed in the East, and therefore the better able to pursue in the West the *settlement* (our italics) of the great problems in which it was interested. To make this attitude still clearer, Pravda sometimes adopted a sharper tone. “Faithful to its policy of peace, the USSR has not allowed, and will not allow, anyone at any time to dictate a policy contrary to its interests”. Carried away by its enthusiasm and borrowing from the Nazi vocabulary some of its most valued expressions, the non-official Party organ threw out aphorisms that apparently might open difficult prospects: “The new Pact allows the USSR and Japan, each in its own way, to fulfil its historic mission...”

We may venture and hope that Pravda was read every day by the US Embassy, who was paid for doing that, if not by the State Department; we have just read that Mr. Matsuoka went for dinner at the US Embassy of all places, during his March 22-24 first trip to Moscow, and that, last but not least, the above last Pravda writing confirms Stalin's quote at the toast celebrating the Russo-Japanese non-aggression pact and its definitely anti-Tripartite (for Japan) clauses. Putting 2 and 2 at the time together the State Department was indeed receiving ominous news about 'faits accomplis' concerning it directly from the USSR and Japan.

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From the political point of view, there was no doubt that the USSR, in regard to the Reich, no longer maintained the same attitude as on the morrow of the Moscow Pact. Russia then had considerably contributed to the outbreak of war; it was obvious that she did not think of contributing in the same manner to bringing it to an end.

...It was natural, in these circumstances, that the two partners should come to a parting of the ways during the course of hostilities (the partition among themselves of Poland and the war in the West)

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Between the defenders of the old order, who fought alongside great Britain, and the partisans of the "New Order", who fought with the Axis, there was, then, a third party – that of the Soviet order and interests, which, without taking an active part in the war, still discounted its results, and waited to say the word – a heavy and decisive word – when the battle was over. But in this manner a neutral Russia might become more embarrassing than a Russia at war, because by its neutrality it upset all calculations, thwarted all maneuvers, made every military success illusory, and still retained for the day of peace and the settlement of accounts a more favorable position than it could have gained by fighting.

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An eastern campaign would not only have the advantage of resolving by the sword the complicated situation that had developed between the Reich and the USSR since the Moscow Pact; it might also avert in time the miserable fate that threatened to fall on the world if the USSR should still be erect (intact, we might add) and strong at the end of the war.

(in which the US would not have had time to take part in, given the overwhelming

power of the German armies that finally attacked Russia, we might add again).

From the onset of the European crisis, Hitler had been haunted by the thought that war in the west would cause such destruction that at the end victors and vanquished would be left prostrate under the same ruins, and that only the Bolsheviks would gain by the general catastrophe. (1)

(1) Hitler expressed this idea, in precisely these terms, during the course of an interview he gave me on April 19th, 1939, at the Reich's Chancellery in Berlin.

One can say that Hitler never got so close to the truth as on that day.

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The only source of food for the Germanised continent was the USSR...

Hitler's "New Order" was born, and developed, under the protection of Stalin's Red Order. Moscow knew that only too well. An article in the Red Star, commenting on the downfall of Belgrade, in more than usually reserved terms observed, not without malice, that the destruction of Yugoslavia deprived Germany of an important source of food supplies, and consequently increased the value of the economic relations between Germany and the USSR.

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Jacques Bainville had perfectly comprehended the chain of reasoning that already had once forced upon a conqueror, of course, increasingly audacious and risky, towards the East when he said, concerning Napoleon's Russian campaign: "The idea of defeating England by way of Europe and Asia, the sea by the land, led to its consequences, seemingly absurd at first sight, but logically connected."

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Count Schulenburg was right in fearing the Russian war for Germany. In resigning himself to such a decision, **Hitler** was certainly wrong. But **he was in such a position that, whatever he did, he would always have been wrong.**

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The month that was to end so badly marked the zenith of the economic collaboration between the Soviet and the Reich.