

THE INCORPORATION OF THE BALTIC STATES BY THE SOVIET UNION

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At the end of the First World War, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became independent states. For the Lithuanians independence meant the reestablishment of the Lithuanian state, originally founded in 1253 when Min-daugas was crowned King by the authority of Pope Innocent IV. In 1569 Lithuania joined Poland in a federal union under an elective monarchy which survived until 1795. Between 1795 and 1914 Lithuania was ruled by Russia; during most of the First World War it was occupied by the German forces. The Estonians and Latvians, who before 1917-1918 did not experience political independence, were at various times in history occupied by Germans, Swedes, and Russians. In 1795 both nations fell under the Russian rule which continued until the First World War.

The independence of the Baltic nations following World War I was the result of the reawakened nationalism which swept the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the war which divided and exhausted the historic enemies and former rulers of these nations: Germany and Russia. In 1917 and 1918 the leaders of the Baltic peoples formally demanded the right to self-determination. However, neither Russia nor Germany were willing to surrender their former possessions peacefully. Thus, soon Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian aspirations to independence were challenged by the armed bands of the retreating Germans and the regular forces of the new rulers of Russia, the Bolsheviks. A bitter conflict ensued which ended in a total military victory of the new states.

The Treaty Background of the Baltic - Soviet Relations, 1920 - 1939

With the cessation of hostilities, the establishment of normal relations between the Baltic states and the Soviet Union became imminent.¹ On February 2, 1920, Estonian and Soviet governments accomplished this in the form of a peace treaty. Article 2 of the document declared :²

... Russia unreservedly recognises the independence and autonomy of the State of Estonia, and renounces voluntarily and for ever all rights of sovereignty formerly held by Russia over the Estonian people and territory by virtue of the former legal situation, and by virtue of international treaties, which, in respect of such rights, shall henceforth lose their force.

No obligation towards Russia devolves upon the Estonian people and territory from the fact that Estonia was formerly part of Russia.

Several months later Moscow concluded virtually identical treaties with Lithuania and Latvia thereby officially renouncing all legal, political, and territorial claims in the Baltic republics.

The peace treaties were reinforced by new agreements. On September 28, 1926, Lithuania and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Nonaggression which reasserted the absolute sovereignty and territorial integrity of the contracting parties. Article 3 pointed out that both countries undertake "to refrain from any act of aggression whatsoever against the other Party." Article 5 provided for the establishment of conciliatory commissions to deal with conflicts which could not be settled diplomatically. Subsequently, similar agreements were made between the Soviet Union and the other two Baltic states.

In 1928 the world rejoiced when major powers signed and ratified the so-called Briand-Kellogg Pact (The Treaty of Paris) which outlawed war "as an instrument of national policy" and obligated the signers to seek peaceful solutions to international disputes.³ The Soviet Union quickly adhered to the Pact and her action was followed by the Baltic republics.⁴

The ambiguity of the Briand-Kellogg Pact produced a wave of explanations and definitions concerning the meaning of the term "aggression". In order to make the Pact more applicable in practice, the Soviet Union and her Baltic neighbors signed the London Convention of the Definition of Aggression (1933). Articles 2 and 3 of the Convention asserted that "the aggressor in an international conflict shall... be considered to be that State which is the first to commit any of the following actions: (1) Declaration of war upon another State; (2) Invasion by its armed forces, with or without a declaration of war, of the territory of another State." Moreover, the Convention explained that

.. no act of aggression... can be justified on either of the following grounds...

A The internal condition of a State

E. g., its political, economic or social structure; alleged defects in its administrations; disturbances due to strikes, revolutions, counter-revolutions or civil war.

B The international conduct of a State

E. g., the violation or threatened violation of the material or moral rights or interests of a foreign State or its nationals; the rupture of diplomatic or economic relations; economic or financial boycotts.. ⁵

The agreements concluded between the Soviet Union and the Baltic states in the 1920's and the early 1930's clearly indicated Moscow's unconditional acceptance of the new boundaries in the west. Thus, when in 1939 the Soviet-Baltic relations entered a critical phase, the Kremlin by its own action had already ruled out all valid claims to the territories and sovereignty of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Nazi-Soviet Agreements Concerning the Baltic States, 1939

After Munich and the occupation of Czechoslovakia, it became obvious that in order to satisfy Hitler's megalomania Nazi Germany was prepared to provoke a major international conflict. This German policy caused a number of European nations to engage in hasty efforts to form coalitions against the aggressor. The Western Allies, realizing that Italy was already committed to the German side, turned to the Soviet Union, the only major European power that had not yet taken sides between the existing blocks. But when the British and French negotiators arrived in Moscow, the Soviet leaders made it quite clear that they were in no hurry to seek an alliance with the West. Apparently, they were still trying to determine whether such an alliance would be more helpful to their imperialistic designs in Eastern Europe than a deal with Hitler, who at this time was also beginning to show signs of interest in the negotiations with the Kremlin.

The Soviet-Allied negotiations in Moscow dragged without results during the summer of 1939. Obviously, neither side fully trusted the other. The men in the Kremlin insisted that the neutrality of all countries bordering the Soviet Union be guaranteed by the three powers. Moreover, they also demanded the right to station Red Army units in Poland and to "fortify" Soviet position in the Baltic states. Britain and France, on the other hand, were reluctant to accept demands clearly incompatible with the sovereignty of these countries. Consequently, toward the end of the summer the negotiations became increasingly hopeless.

Realizing what was happening in Moscow, the Nazi government decided to approach the Kremlin and find out if a Soviet-German understanding was possible. Moscow's response was positive and early in August Ribben-trop could publicly declare that "there was room for the two of us (Soviet Union and Germany) on the Baltic and that Russian interests by no means needed to clash with ours there."⁶ In other words, Germany was apparently ready to offer the Kremlin what it was unable to obtain from the Western Allies. At the moment Hitler was more interested in Soviet Union's neutrality than in Germany's influence in this area.

The sudden realization of the existence of common interests produced the Treaty of Nonaggression which on August 23 was signed in Moscow by Molotov and Ribben-trop. The Treaty contained a secret protocol that for the first time officially revealed the true Soviet and German intentions in the Baltic. Article 1 of the Protocol stated:

In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna (Vilnius) area is recognized by each party.⁷

The Protocol indicated that at this time the Soviet leaders were content to assign Lithuania to the German sphere of influence. However, only one month later they seem to have changed their minds. On September 25, the German Ambassador in Moscow reported to his Foreign Office Stalin's proposal to settle the Polish question (i. e., to formalize the partition of the occupied Poland) in order to avoid future misunderstandings between the two powers. Specifically, Stalin offered the Nazis additional territory of Poland east of the Soviet-German military demarcation line (it included the whole province of Lublin and part of the Warsaw province), asking that in return Germany waive its claim to Lithuania as was agreed in the Secret Protocol. If Berlin consented to this change, concluded the report, "the Soviet Union would immediately take up the solution of the problem of the Baltic countries in accordance with the Protocol of August 23, and [would expect] in this matter the unstinting support of the German Government."⁸

Hitler liked the idea and on September 28, 1939, the two states concluded a second treaty. This agreement, officially known as the Soviet-German Boundary and Friendship Treaty, also contained a secret protocol which was signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop in the form of an amendment to the secret protocol of the first treaty. It declared that the first protocol

shall be amended in item 1 to the effect that the territory of the Lithuanian State falls to the sphere of influence of the USSR, while on the other hand, the province of Lublin and the parts of the province of Warsaw fall to the sphere of influence of Germany. . . . As soon as the Government of the USSR shall take special measures on Lithuanian territory to protect its interests, the present German-Lithuanian border, for the purpose of a natural and simple delineation, shall be rectified in such a way that the Lithuanian territory situated to the southwest of the line marked on the attached map should fall to Germany.⁹

Thus, by the end of September all Baltic states were assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence. The fate of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was to be determined not by the people, but by two totalitarian dictators with global ambitions. From this date on, the Kremlin's policy in the Baltic was motivated by the letter and the spirit of the secret protocols. Moscow's policy toward the Baltic republics, adopted after the secret protocols, was the same in origin and objectives; it varied only slightly in tactics as each case was surrounded by somewhat different circumstances.

The Treaties of Mutual Assistance

Already in September the Soviet government took the first steps to implement the terms of the secret protocols. In quick succession the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian foreign ministers were asked to come to Moscow and immediately sign what the Russians euphemistically called mutual assistance treaties. In all cases the Kremlin insisted that the pacts were necessary to insure the security of the Soviet Union and to protect the independence of its three western neighbors. In their negotiations with the Latvians and Lithuanians, the Soviet leaders several times identified Germany as a potential threat to the Soviet Union and the Baltic states.¹⁰

The foreign ministers of the Baltic states made a determined effort to resist Moscow's demands. They pointed out that the proposed treaties would compromise the announced neutrality of their countries, cause friction with the Soviet Union, and seriously jeopardize the national sovereignty of the Baltic people. Having realized that the Soviet leaders would not change their minds on the fundamentals, the ministers suggested counter-proposals to make the terms more acceptable to their nations. These attempts to reach a meaningful compromise were personally rejected by Stalin and Molotov who repeatedly insisted that the Baltic representatives did not understand what was good for their countries.¹¹

In the end the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian governments were faced with two choices: to reject Soviet demands and make preparations for an imminent military invasion, or to accept them and hope that the Kremlin would honor its own terms. During the negotiations in Moscow, the Soviet leaders frankly stated that if their demands were rejected, the Soviet Union would not hesitate to use force. Molotov's statement to the Estonian delegation was typical: "The situation needs immediate solution. We cannot wait long. I advise you to accede to the wishes of the Soviet Union **in order to avoid something worse. Do not compel the Soviet Union to use force in order to achieve her aims...** At present all hope for foreign assistance would be an illusion. **Thus you can be sure that the Soviet Union in one way or another will see to her security.**"¹²

Actually, there was no choice. The armed forces of the Baltic states were too small and unprepared to resist the massed Soviet troops along the border. Also, there was no possibility of outside help. The German representatives in the Baltic capitals advised the three governments not to reject Moscow's treaties. The Western Allies, already at war with Germany, were hardly interested in any action which might have strengthened the existing Nazi-Soviet alliance. Thus, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had no choice but to sign the unwanted pacts.

The three mutual assistance treaties were basically the same.¹³ They all stipulated mutual assistance "in the event of aggression or the menace of aggression" by a European power against the signers; Soviet military aid; the establishment of the Soviet land, air, and naval bases within the Baltic states; a pledge not to conclude alliances or to take part in coalitions directed against either of the contracting parties; and a disavowal of any attempt to intervene in each other's internal affairs through the implementation of the treaty terms.

The mutual assistance treaty with Lithuania also stipulated the return of the city of Vilnius and the adjoining region. Since the early 14th century Vilnius has been the capital of Lithuania. In 1920, according to the Treaty of Peace with the Soviet Union, Vilnius and its region were declared to be an integral part of the Lithuanian territory. Several months later, on October 7, 1920, Poland and Lithuania signed a treaty which also recognized Vilnius and its region belonging to Lithuania. However, one day later Polish armed forces occupied the city and most of the surrounding area. Subsequently, the Vilnius dispute took the form of a long battle of words between the Lithuanian and Polish representatives in the League of Nations. At the time of the Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland, Vilnius and the region were occupied by the Red Army and later assigned to the Soviet Union. During the Polish occupation of Vilnius, the city of Kaunas became the provisional capital of Lithuania.

The key articles were those dealing with mutual assistance and military bases. Potentially the latter constituted the greatest threat to the sovereignty of the Baltic states. The articles on bases gave the U.S.S.R. unlimited opportunities to intimidate host governments and later charge them with treaty violations. Also, in the event Moscow decided upon invasion and complete occupation of the three countries, the Soviet troops could simultaneously attack from inside and outside. The danger in the mutual assistance articles was that they were vague and did not make clear, except in Lithuania's case, whether the Kremlin could impose unwanted military assistance. At this time few thought that Moscow would later use treaty provisions against alliances and coalitions to accuse the Baltic governments of bad faith.

Except for the above articles the treaties appeared to be compatible with the sovereignty of the contracting parties. Therefore, despite the clearly implied loss of freedom in foreign affairs, the internal inviolability of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania depended on the Soviet Union's willingness to adhere to the terms of the agreements. Although the pacts were forced upon the Baltic states and the negotiations in Moscow were conducted in a threatening atmosphere, the documents themselves left some hope that annexation was not in the Soviet government's plans.

In order to dispel any doubts about the Kremlin's good will and determination to abide by the provisions of the Treaties, on October 31, speaking before the Supreme Soviet, Molotov declared:

The pacts with the Baltic states in no way imply the intrusion of the Soviet Union in the internal affairs of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as some foreign interests are trying to make believe... These pacts are inspired by mutual respect for the governmental, social, and economic system of each of the contracting parties. We stand for an exact and honest fulfillment of agreements signed by us on a basis of reciprocity and declare that foolish talks of Sovietization of the Baltic States is useful only to our common enemies and to all kinds of anti-Soviet provocators.¹⁴

The Occupation of the Baltic States

The relations between the Soviet Union and the Baltic republics were at first relatively normal despite a number of incidents which arose from the establishment of the Red military bases. The governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were determined not to provide Moscow with excuses to violate the recently concluded treaties. Thus, traffic accidents, burglaries, drunken brawls and other violations of local laws were usually settled in such a way that Soviet soldiers remained blameless. On foreign policy issues, the three governments also tried hard not to antagonize their eastern neighbor. Consequently, during the Finnish-Soviet war strict neutrality was maintained and when the League of Nations voted to expel Russia, the Baltic representatives were instructed to abstain. But these efforts to maintain friendly relations proved to be futile. The situation drastically changed after the conclusion of the Soviet-Finnish war. Having achieved its objectives in the north, Moscow now could give full attention to the as yet "unresolved problem" of the Baltic states. Lithuania was chosen as the first target.

On May 25, 1940, Molotov accused the Lithuanian government of direct responsibility in the alleged mistreatment of Red Army personnel. The Kremlin's note specifically charged that local authorities kidnapped two soldiers from a Soviet military base and planned to murder them. It ended with a threat that if the Lithuanians did not immediately stop further provocations, and did not take the necessary steps to find and return the missing soldiers, Moscow would be forced to use "other measures."¹⁵

The Lithuanian government, though dubious about the factual basis of the charges, quickly appointed a special commission of investigation and empowered it to deal with all the aspects of the Soviet accusations. But the commission got nowhere when it asked for Moscow's cooperation in the investigation.¹⁶ Apparently, the men in Kremlin did not think much of their own charges. It is not surprising, therefore, that the final report of the commission absolved the local authorities of any responsibility in the disappearance and mistreatment of the Red Army soldiers.

On June 4, Molotov suddenly requested that Merkys, the Prime Minister of Lithuania, come to Moscow as soon as possible. This Soviet move meant that the Kremlin had something important in store for the Baltic state. The head of the government is not very often asked to go to another country on such a short notice and certainly not without specific reasons or explanations. But determined to use every possible means to improve the worsening relations with the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian cabinet decided that the Prime Minister should immediately leave for Moscow.

Merkys arrived in the Kremlin equipped with evidence regarding the investigation of the missing soldiers' cases. He was met by Molotov who started the talks by expressing the hope that this visit would help to clear up all misunderstandings between the two countries. The Prime Minister responded with similar pleasantries and then in chronological order began to refute Soviet charges. He was soon interrupted by the Russian's angry outburst that Merkys' explanations were irrelevant because the Soviet government knew that Lithuanian authorities had killed one of the missing soldiers; that the Lithuanian Minister of Interior and the Director of the Security Department were unfriendly to the Soviet Union; that Lithuania has begun to arm its national guard; that the Lithuanian police was harrasing laundresses employed by the Soviet military bases; and that, finally, the government-censored Lithuanian press was attacking the Soviet Union.

When Molotov finished his tirade, Merkys tried to resume the chronological presentation. But as the Prime Minister began to read the sworn testimony of one Miss Savickaite, the Russian again rudely stopped him by shouting: "Oh, why do you

read to me the testimony of your prostitutes!"¹⁷ After this comment there was nothing left for Merkys to do but leave.

The second meeting took place on June 9. Molotov greeted the Prime Minister by asking: "Have you anything new to report?" Merkys answered that he would ask the President of Lithuania to appoint a new cabinet which did not include the present Minister of Interior, General Skucas. However, this concession did not appease Molotov who now began to attack the Prime Minister personally. He accused Merkys of writing an anti-Soviet article in the first issue of **Revue Baltique**. According to the Russian, this article called for a Baltic military alliance against the Soviet Union and, therefore, constituted a clear violation of the mutual assistance treaty.¹⁸

It was true that Merkys had welcomed the appearance of the new journal by writing a short introductory article in which he suggested broader cultural relations among the three Baltic states. But the article contained nothing even remotely implying a military alliance. The Prime Minister knew that the charges against him, as against General Skucas, were completely groundless, yet Molotov was ready to draw grave consequences from them. He now realized that the Russians were not interested in any serious efforts to improve relations with Lithuania, but were determined to use any unfounded charge in order to prove that the Kaunas government was violating the mutual assistance treaty.

During the third meeting with Molotov (on June 11), Merkys was joined by Foreign Minister Urbšys who had been dispatched to Moscow with the latest instructions from the President of Lithuania and the cabinet. The Russian greeted them with a familiar: "Has the Foreign Minister anything new to report?" Urbšys assured him that no secret military alliance existed or was being planned; that the investigations of incidents involving Soviet soldiers would be continued and guilty parties punished; and that the President had already agreed to make changes in the cabinet along the lines suggested by the Soviet government. The meeting ended with Molotov's declaration that the measures so far taken by Lithuania were not enough to improve the relations between the two countries.¹⁹

The next day Merkys returned to Kaunas. He immediately dismissed General Skucas as the Minister of Interior and took on the duties himself. That same afternoon the Prime Minister convened the cabinet and reported on the talks in Moscow. Now the situation in Kaunas grew very tense. The government had no choice but to await the next Soviet move. There was no hope of help from outside: Germany was still interested in Kremlin's friendship, while the Western Allies were losing the war.²⁰ At this time the general public, which until now had only a very vague idea of what was going on in Moscow, also began to realize the seriousness of the situation. There were many rumors of imminent Soviet invasion. Other rumors claimed that the Kremlin merely wanted a pro-Soviet government. People in cafes and restaurants wondered whether a Nazi or a Communist occupation would be less cruel.

On June 14, the Russians made their expected move. Shortly before midnight, Urbšys, who remained in Moscow, was summoned to the Kremlin and handed an ultimatum. Its first part accused Lithuania of the following mutual assistance treaty violations: (1) mistreatment of the Red Army soldiers; (2) preparation of a military attack on the Soviet bases; and (3) secret military alliance with Estonia and Latvia. The "proof" of the first violation was based on old charges which the Kremlin did not want to see investigated by the Lithuanian government. The "proof" of the second violation was deduced from the first one. And, finally, the "proof" of third violation of the treaty listed in the ultimatum rested solely on Merkys' article in the *Revue Baltique*.²¹

The second part of the ultimatum demanded (1) the immediate prosecution of General Skucas and Director of Security Department, Povilaitis, as two Lithuanian officials directly responsible for anti-Soviet provocations; (2) a new cabinet which would abide by the terms of the mutual assistance treaty; and (3) the admission of unlimited numbers of Soviet troops to Lithuania. The ultimatum gave Kaunas ten hours to comply with its demands.²²

The following conversation reportedly took place between Urbšys and Molotov as soon as the former finished reading the Soviet ultimatum.²³

Urbšys: I am afraid the Lithuanian government will not have enough time to consider this ultimatum until 10 a. m. It makes me very concerned about Lithuania's fate.

Molotov: Do not be concerned about Lithuania's fate but about that of the provocateurs.

Urbšys: But it will be very difficult for my government to fulfill all your demands — with regard to General Skucas there are legal obstacles which will make his prosecution impossible.

Molotov: If the Lithuanian government encounters difficulties in this matter, our jurists will discover the pertinent sections in your statutes to facilitate the prosecution.

Urbšys: But wouldn't it be possible to prolong the deadline of the ultimatum?

Molotov: There is no need to inform Kaunas about the reasons for the ultimatum. You can send our demands by wire and receive an answer by 10 a. m. Anyway, no matter what the answer of the Lithuanian government, the Soviet troops will enter Lithuania.

Urbšys: Can you tell me the size of this force?

Molotov: Three, four army corps.

That same night the Lithuanian cabinet met in an emergency session to consider Soviet demands. The minority, including the President, wanted to reject the ultimatum and make a token military stand against the invading Red Army. They had no illusions about the outcome of such resistance, but felt that it was needed to put the Soviet Union clearly in the aggressor's role and to preserve the national unity in view of the difficult time ahead.²⁴ However, the majority, led by the Prime Minister, argued that even a token resistance would result in a considerable loss of life and in the end could not significantly change the course of events. This view was endorsed by the present and former commanders in chief who also pointed out that against the massed Soviet armies across the border and within the country, the Lithuanian armed forces were in no position to make even a symbolic stand. Moreover, the members of the majority thought that the acceptance of the ultimatum might preserve some national sovereignty, especially if the Soviets allowed Lithuanians themselves to carry out the terms of the ultimatum.²⁵

In the end the ultimatum was accepted. Former Commander in Chief, General Raštikis, was designated to head the new government and authorized to negotiate with the Soviets the implementation of their demands. After Raštikis was recently relieved of his duties as the Commander in Chief, Molotov, during the talks in the Kremlin, asked Merkys why this pro-Soviet general was deposed. This remark seemed to indicate, or so some cabinet members believed, that he would be acceptable to the Soviets as the new Prime Minister. The meeting concluded with President Smetona's announcement that in protest of the Kremlin's ultimatum, which clearly violated the Mutual Assistance Treaty, he would leave the country and ask Merkys to remain in office until a cabinet agreeable to the Russians could be formed.²⁶

The next day (June 15), Urbšys cabled from Moscow that Raštikis' candidacy was rejected by the Soviet leaders and that the new government would have to be appointed in consultation with the Deputy Foreign Minister Dekanozov who was already on the way to Kaunas. His second message informed of the Red Army's plans to enter Lithuania at 3 p. m. of the same day.²⁷ These latest Soviet moves seemed to dispel the notion that the Lithuanians would have anything to say about the formation of the new cabinet and the prosecution of Skučas and Povilaitis. (Although everyone knew that Soviet charges against Skucas and Povilaitis were completely groundless, many participants in the meeting thought that in order to appease Moscow the two officials should be tried in the Lithuanian courts and promptly acquitted of the alleged crimes.)

One day later, the Lithuanian tragedy was re-enacted in Latvia. On June 16, Molotov handed a similar ultimatum to the Latvian Minister in Moscow. It accused the Riga government of plotting a secret military alliance with Estonia and Lithuania (the latter was already occupied by the Red Army), and gave the Latvians about 8 hours (until 10 p. m.) to accept the familiar demands of additional troops and the formation of a pro-Soviet cabinet. Albert Tarulis wrote of Latvia's response:

As in the case of Lithuania, the Latvian government discussed rejection of the ultimatum on the ground that it lacked foundation in fact and constituted a breach of the Mutual Assistance Pact by the Soviet Union. First, the numerical strength of the defenders was very low and their armament inferior compared to the Red troops stationed in Latvia and massed just beyond the frontiers. . . Second, a nation of two million was physically unable to muster an army large enough to offer anything but token resistance. Third, it was manifestly impossible to effect general mobilization, as but a few hours remained until the vastly superior Red troops would begin to march in force in case of noncompliance with the terms set forth in the ultimatum. All things considered, resistance would have amounted to national suicide.²⁸

Consequently, the Latvian government had no choice but to accept the ultimatum. The invasion of the country began on June 17th.

In Estonia the story was very much the same. The Latvian Minister had barely left Molotov's office, when his Estonian colleague was summoned to the Kremlin and presented with an ultimatum based on similar unfounded charges and containing the same demands. This time the deadline was 11 p. m. The next day (June 17), Estonia was invaded and occupied by the Soviet troops.²⁹

The Incorporation

With the occupation of the Baltic states, Moscow successfully completed the first phase of its effort toward the annexation.³⁰ The next immediate task of the Kremlin's leaders was the formation of pro-Soviet governments which could be used to prepare the ground for "popular" demands to join the family of Soviet Socialist Republics. Again, what happened in Lithuania was with slight variations repeated in Latvia and Estonia.

According to the Lithuanian constitution, the President had the power to appoint the Council of Ministers, dissolve the Diet, and issue laws when it was not in session. The constitution also provided that should the President die or resign, the Prime Minister would become Acting President with full presidential powers until a new Head of State was elected. Thus, the Soviet government and its representatives in Lithuania could not invoke the constitution to legalize communist take-over until the departed President resigned from office. This complication was removed by a simple proclamation, announced on the Kaunas radio and published in the papers, which declared President Smetona to have resigned from office and informed that Prime Minister Merkys would be the Acting President.

The proclamation was issued in the name of the Lithuanian government but its legality was open to serious doubts. First of all, there is no proof that the Council of Ministers actually met, discussed this question, and decided to declare the Office of the President to be vacant. Secondly, under the constitution the Council of Ministers had no power to depose the President. Finally, President Smetona gave no indication that he resigned from the presidency and did not intend to return.

But constitutionally or unconstitutionally, once Merkys was proclaimed to be the Acting President, he could be forced into appointing a communist-dominated Council of Ministers. Or if he refused to be intimidated, his mere presence in Kaunas was sufficient to enable the representatives of the Soviet government to act and speak in his name. After all, no one, save a few top communists, knew who was responsible for the proclamation.

Under these circumstances, on June 17, only two days after the invasion of Lithuania by the Red Army, a communist-dominated Council of Ministers was announced to the nation. All candidates to the new council were dictated to Merkys by the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Dekanozov. Now it is known that when the Acting President wanted to replace one communist candidate proposed by Dekanozov with another communist, who in Merkys' opinion was more qualified to be Minister of Agriculture, the Russian categorically rejected the suggested change.³¹

In Latvia and Estonia the formation of the new governments was achieved in a similar fashion but under somewhat different circumstances. In Latvia Dekanozov's role was assumed by Stalin's prosecutor during the purge trials, Vyshinski; in Estonia — by Politbureau member Zhdanov. Here the Soviet task was less complicated because the Presidents remained in their respective capitals. By June 21, all Baltic states had communist-dominated councils of ministers which could be counted upon to serve as willing instruments of Kremlin's policy. At first communist ministers were in the minority in all Soviet-appointed governments of the Baltic states. However, they invariably held key posts such as ministries of interior and, what is perhaps even more important, many noncommunist ministers were of the fellow-traveler variety who proved to be willing tools of Moscow's policy. Subsequent changes and additions to these cabinets soon assured the communists overwhelming majorities. On the other hand, there is no doubt that some members of the new governments were honorable men who opposed forced incorporation into the Soviet Union. Many of these ministers were later arrested and deported. However, the importance of these hastily organized councils should not be overemphasized. Most communist members of the new cabinets were Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians and as such could not be completely trusted by Moscow. Moreover, the Communist parties of the Baltic states were so small that they simply lacked in competent, reliable, Soviet-trained personnel to staff various offices in the higher echelons of the executive apparatus. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there were other, more important sources of power than what was officially known as the governments. First, the commanders of the Red Army occupation forces played a major role in determining the course of events on the Baltic. Second, Soviet legations in Kaunas, Riga, and Tallinn dictated the formation of the new governments and subsequently their policy. Third, the units of the Soviet secret police, the dreaded NKVD, exercised its pervasive influence over all aspects of life in the occupied countries. The officials, virtually all of them citizens of the Soviet Union, who controlled these sources of power, were the real rulers of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The first meeting of the new Lithuanian Council of Ministers clearly indicated that this body was not a master of its own house. The meeting was presided by the new Prime Minister, Justas Paleckis, a pro-communist journalist. The agenda included three important proposals: the abolition of concordat with the Vatican, the defense of Lithuanian borders by the Red Army, and the introduction of Soviet currency into Lithuania. Most of the Council's members were against these proposals, and by a majority vote they were tabled without fixing a specific date for reconsideration. After the vote, the Minister of Public Health, who was in continuous contact with the Soviet legation, declared that the arguments and the vote against the proposals were irrelevant because Pozdniakov, Soviet Minister in Kaunas, had already made a decision in the matter. He was so right. That same night, at 4 a. m. Paleckis phoned the Council's secretariat and ordered preparation of official decrees enforcing the three proposals. When he was reminded that the majority refused to accept them, and that according to the constitution the concordat could be abrogated and Soviet currency introduced only on the basis of new laws to that effect, the Prime Minister merely said that these were Pozdniakov's orders and as such had to be quickly and unconditionally carried out.³² Needless to say, the new Estonian and Latvian cabinets exercised the same amount of independence.³³

After the creation of the pro-Soviet governments, Moscow began to move against all potential opposition in the Baltic states. Consequently, noncommunist parties and other mass organizations were outlawed; newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, and radio stations fell under the direct control of the communist parties; the police was transformed into a Soviet-type militia; the armed forces became integrated into the Red Army. Arrests and deportations of prominent national and community leaders started during the first weeks following the occupation. This was the fate of the Presidents of Estonia and Latvia and the former Lithuanian Prime Minister Merkys.

Having acquired control over the basic political and social institutions, the men in the Kremlin ordered Soviet-type elections to a novel legislative body in the Baltic states: the People's Diet. For this purpose new election laws were quickly adopted by the Councils of Ministers. (The constitutions of Estonia and Latvia, presumably still in effect, empowered only the legislatures to amend the existing or to pass new election laws.) These laws established Supreme Electoral Commissions which took charge of the election machinery. Thus, by appointing communists to the Commissions, Moscow could control the entire electoral process. Secondly, communist-dominated political organizations were hastily formed to make sure that only "people's" nominees were elected to the Diets. It is interesting to note that in the three countries they had virtually

identical names (Working People's Leagues or Unions) and programs. The candidates of the noncommunist parties were excluded from the ballot either by law, as in Lithuania, or by violence and intimidation, as in Latvia and Estonia.

The election campaigns were short and relatively uneventful. Communist party officials and candidates extolled the virtues of Comrade Stalin and elaborated on the standard communist slogans such as proletarian solidarity or the heroism of the Red Army. However, not a word was said publicly about the imminent incorporation into the Soviet Union. Apparently, at this stage Moscow was still more interested in an orderly election victory for the "people's" candidates, than in an early announcement of its true intentions in the Baltic states. A premature revelation of these intentions might have caused unpleasant incidents which would have marred the image of a happy people, freely deciding their future under the benevolent protection of the Soviet Union.

Although the Soviet government knew that its, or "people's", candidates, being the only ones on the ballot, were bound to be elected, it nevertheless was afraid that if only a small segment of the population participated in the voting this would amount to the rejection of the communist-sponsored slates. Moreover, nonvoting was the only form of disapproval possible under the circumstances. Thus, shortly before the elections, the local communists launched an intensive campaign to get out the vote. In all Baltic states prospective voters were warned that their failure to cast ballots would automatically make them the enemies of the people. In many instances various types of intimidation were used to force citizens to the polls. In Latvia and Lithuania, for example, the identification papers were stamped at the polling places in order to determine who had actually voted.³⁴ Everyone knew that inability to produce such stamp meant trouble with the police in the future.

The official election results were typically Soviet. They showed that in the three states more than 80 per cent of the eligible voters voted, and that 92.9 per cent in Estonia, 97.6 in Latvia, and 99.2 in Lithuania cast their ballots for the communist-endorsed candidates.³⁵ There was, of course, no way of determining the validity of these figures. The electoral machinery was controlled by persons appointed by the government, and decisions of the various election agencies could not be challenged or appealed to the courts. Also, there were no independent observers at the polls, and no one outside the electoral apparatus could participate in the ballot counting. Consequently, it was impossible to know how many persons actually voted, and what percentage of them cast their votes for the only candidates on the ballot. Two events directly connected with the elections cast considerable doubts as to the validity of the official results. On June 14, the London Tass agency jumped the gun and announced final results in the Baltic elections. Apparently, the main office in Moscow failed to inform London that the polls were to remain open until the end of the next day.³⁶ In Estonia official results were announced twice. On June 17 it was declared that 81.6 per cent of the eligible voters voted. The next day this figure was raised to 84.1 per cent.

The voting took place on July 14 and 15. During the next few days, the theme and the tone of the communist-controlled newspapers and radio radically changed. Suddenly, local communist speakers and writers began almost hysterically to demand that the Baltic states immediately join the happy family of the Soviet Socialist Republics. In private, many high-ranking Russian officials were now frankly predicting that incorporation would be the first order of business in the newly-elected Diets.

On July 21, less than a week after the elections, the three Diets met. The buildings in which the legislative sessions took place were surrounded by detachments of the Red Army soldiers. Inside, NKVD plain clothes men freely mixed with the delegates so that it was very difficult to tell who was representing the "people", and who the Soviet secret police. By prior arrangement, the galleries were packed with communists and their hirelings who, given an appropriate sign from the chair, were ready to applaud or to jeer.³⁷

Under such circumstances, the Diets predictably voted to ask Moscow for the admission of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. Since the vote on this crucial question was taken by a simple showing of hands, it is impossible to know how many delegates and secret police agents raised their hands in favor of incorporation. Not that this really mattered as far as the fate of the Baltic states was concerned. The early editions of some local communist newspapers announced the "unanimous" decision of the "people's" representatives to join the Soviet Union even before the debate on this question began in the Diets.³⁸

The final act of the farce was performed in Moscow. Early in August the Supreme Soviet formally abolished the independence of the Baltic republics by "granting the requests" of the People's Diets for immediate incorporation.

CONCLUSION

The incorporation of the Baltic states was achieved through broken treaties and pledges, threats, intimidation and, above all, use of military force and police terror.

The true intentions of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in the Baltic states were first officially stated in the secret protocols of the treaties dividing Northeastern Europe into Nazi and Soviet spheres. The letter and the spirit of these documents unquestionably violated the numerous agreements concluded between Moscow and its western neighbors during the 1920's and 1930's.

Viewed in this context, the subsequently imposed mutual assistance treaties were but a preliminary step toward future military occupation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. To achieve this end, the Kremlin had to break its own pacts. The June ultimatums represented only one more example of Soviet respect for the existing international agreements.

If the occupation of the Baltic states was accomplished through threats and illegal use of military force, the incorporation was brought about by defiance of the constitutions and laws of the three republics, false claims to popular support, and large-scale application of police terror.

Despite Soviet claims to the contrary, there was no popular enthusiasm for Moscow's expansionist policies in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The formation of the com-munist-dominated governments was dictated by the Kremlin, and in no sense represented the will of the Baltic peoples. Yet even the puppet regimes could not entirely be trusted by their Soviet masters as it was apparent that many members of the new cabinets desired some form of a satellite status and opposed incorporation.

The results of the rigged elections in which only communist-sponsored slates appeared on the ballot also cannot be regarded as manifestations of popular sentiment. But here again the Kremlin was compelled to take additional measures (such as infiltration of the Diet chambers by the NKVD) in order to prevent "surprises" from the rubber-stamp parliaments.

In 1939 and 1940 the Baltic states wanted to coexist with the Soviet Union. Their governments understood the realities of international politics and were reluctantly prepared to accommodate Moscow by relinquishing the right to pursue independent foreign policy and by allowing it to assume the responsibility for the security of the eastern Baltic. It was hoped that these concessions would satisfy Soviet interests and thereby protect the internal inviolability of the three countries. This hope in part explains the decision of the Baltic states not to make a symbolic stand in the face of Moscow's threats to use force if its demands were rejected. In retrospect it may be argued that this decision was a mistake. Even a token military stand against the invading Red Army would have created many new problems for the Soviet government in its efforts to produce "popular" demands for incorporation. But in the end the result most probably still would have been the same. After all, the Kremlin was determined to annex the Baltic states under any circumstances and knew that this could be accomplished only by the use of force.

The incorporation and continued occupation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is one of the prime examples of the Soviet Union's contempt for international agreements, national self-determination, and peaceful coexistence between different ideological systems. It is ironic that today the Kremlin frequently succeeds in presenting itself to the non-communist world as the traditional exponent and confirmed defender of these principles.

Notes:

1 The most extensively documented source on Soviet-Baltic relations and Soviet occupation and incorporation of the Baltic States is the record of US Congressional investigation of Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe. The so-called Kersten Committee in 1954 amassed volumes of documents and testimony on Soviet aggression. This article relies heavily on this documented story. The volumes relevant to this article are: U. S. House of Representatives, Select Committee on Communist Aggression, *Third Interim Report*, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1954) (hereafter cited as Select Committee, *Third Interim Report*); and U. S. House of Representatives, Select Committee to Investigate the Incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR, *Hearings*, Part I, 83rd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1954) (hereafter cited as Select Committee, *Hearings*).

2 Texts of the treaties referred in this article, unless otherwise indicated, will be found in Select Committee, *Hearings*, pp. 473-540.

3 E. H. Carr, *International Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939* (London, 1963), p. 118.

4 Albert N. Tarulis, *Soviet Policy Toward the Baltic States, 1918-1940* (Notre Dame, 1959), p. 78.

5 Select Committee, *Hearings*, pp. 480-488.

6 U. S. Department of State, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1940* (Washington, D. C., 1948), p. 38

7 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

10 B. Kalinauskas, "Nelaimių Dienose", *Sėja*, No. 9 (January, 1954), p. 9; Tarulis, p. 155.

11 Select Committee, *Third Interim Report*, pp. 220-226; Tarulis, *op cit.*, pp. 154-155; Kalinauskas, *op. cit.*, *Sėja*, No. 7 (November 1953), pp. 8-9; S. Raštikis, "Derybos Maskvoje", *Lietuva*, No. 5 (January-March, 1954), p. 55.

12 See the Minutes of the negotiations, published in this issue of *Lituanus*.

13 Texts of the treaties in Select Committee, *Hearings*, pp. 488-489, 506-507, 532-533.

14 *Izvestiia*, November 1, 1939.

15 J. Audriūnas and P. Svyrius, *Lietuva Tironų Pančiuose* (Cleveland, 1946), p. 36.

16 Tarulis, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-176.

17 *Mūsų Pranešimai*, No. 1 (June 25, 1947), pp. 10-12. 30

18 Audriūnas and Svyrius, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

19 *Mūsų Pranešimai*, No. 1 (February 25, 1948), pp. 7-9.

20 Tarulis, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-194.

21 Select Committee, *Third Interim Report*, pp. 332-333.

- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 333.
- 23 *Margutis*, No. 6 (June, 1954), p. 8.
- 24 Kalinauskas in *Sėja*, No. 4 (April, 1954), pp. 5-6.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Margutis*, No. 6 (June, 1954), p. 14.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Tarulis, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- 29 Select Committee, *Third Interim Report*, pp. 243-244, 249.
- 30 The story of incorporation is well documented, especially in the Select Committee's *Third Interim Report* and *Hearings*. In addition the following sources are useful: V. Raistas, "Kaikurie Liaudies Valdžios Sudarymo Aspektai", *Lietuva*, No. 4 (April, 1954); A. Trapans, *Sovietization of Latvia, 1939-1941*, Unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1961; The Baltic Review (publisher), *The Soviet Occupation and Incorporation of Latvia, June 17 to August 6, 1940* (New York, 1957); A. Kutt and L. Vahter, *Estonia* (New York, 1964).
- 31 Raistas, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 33 Select Committee, *Third Interim Report*, p. 259; Trapans *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- 34 *Foreign Relations of the U. S., 1940*, I, p. 306.
- 35 Select Committee, *Third Interim Report*, pp. 275, 306, 355.
- 36 B. Newman, *Baltic Background* (London, 1948), p. 163.
- 37 A. Kutt and L. Vahter, *op. cit.*, p. 20; Trapans, *op. cit.*, p. 83; *Current News on the Lithuanian Situation*, No. 3(March, 1944), p. 12.
- 38 See, for example, the data presented by Tarulis, *op. cit.*, p. 243.