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# THE DECISION OF THE LITHUANIAN GOVERNMENT TO ACCEPT THE SOVIET ULTIMATUM OF JUNE 14, 1940

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## I
## BACKGROUND

As the German armies were crushing the last French resistance, Stalin decided to implement the Nazi-Soviet agreements of August and September, 1939, by occupying and absorbing the Baltic States into the USSR.[1] Following manufactured diplomatic pressures, on June 14, 1940, the Soviet Government presented to Lithuania the following demands:[2]

*1. That the* Minister *of Internal Affairs, M. Skučas, and the Director of the Department of Security [secret* police], Povilaitis, be immediately *delivered to the judicial authorities and tried as directly guilty of* acts of provocation committed against the garrisons of the Soviet Union in Lithuania.[3]

2. That a *government be immediately* formed in Lithuania capable of *assuring and determined to assure the proper* fulfillment of the *Treaty* of Mutual Assistance *between the Soviet Union and Lithuania and to suppress firmly the enemies* of this *Treaty.*

*3. That a free entry into the territory of Lithuania be immediately assured for units of the army of the Soviet Union which will be stationed in the most important centers of Lithuania and which will be sufficiently numerous to assure the enforcement of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and Lithuania and to put an end to acts of provocation directed against the garrisons of the Soviet Union in Lithuania.*

The Lithuanian Government was given a few hours to respond to the ultimatum. A special meeting of the Council of Ministers with the President of the Republic Antanas Smetona was held during the night of June 14-15, 1940. The basic issue was whether to resist Soviet occupation by military means, even for symbolic and legal reasons. The decision, by a substantial majority of the participants, was to accept the Soviet demands unconditionally and not to resist occupation.

The position of this article is that the internal political situation had a decisive impact on the outcome of the deliberations on the Soviet ultimatum. The report of the deliberations by the principal decision-maker, the President of the Republic Antanas Smetona, is taken as a basis for analysis. Smetona's account is contrasted and compared with other accounts of the discussions and supplemented by additional documentary evidence.

A fairly complete record of the last meeting of the Lithuanian Government is available. Five participants have written their memoirs. General Vincas Vitkauskas, the Commander in Chief of the Army, has given a very distorted account, written from the point of view of current Soviet historiography and, one suspects, with a view to make his role more pro-Soviet than it actually was.[4] Gen. Vitkauskas replaced General Raštikis, after the latter was forced out by the Nationalists because of the potential rivalry of Gen. Raštikis to President Smetona. Gen. Vitkauskas was quite cooperative with the Soviets, possibly was a Communist, and later completely joined their ranks. Some apparently factual details' of Gen. Vitkauskas' memoirs are useful supplements to the record. Juozas Audėnas, the Minister of Agriculture and member of the opposition Peasant Populist Party, wrote his memoirs many years later (published in 1966), adding very little to other earlier accounts.[5] General Kazys Musteikis, the Minister of Defense, wrote a Pro Memoria about the events a month after the Soviet occupation while he was interned in East Prussia.[6] His is a rather straightforward and factual account, very

closely corresponding to President Smetona's version. General Raštikis was present during part of the meeting and has provided a well-reasoned and relatively detailed record of the last days in the Presidency.[7]

President Antanas Smetona, who left the country on June 15, 1940 (for a while he was interned in Germany, finally he was allowed to move on to the United States, where he died in Cleveland in 1944), wrote a Pro *Memoria* between July 1 and 25, 1940, while he was interned in East Prussia. His record is obviously in part an apologetic piece, which tends to blame the opposition parties, Gen. Raštikis, the military leadership, even his own Prime Minister Antanas Merkys for the failure to prepare for a drastic Soviet move. Nevertheless, it is perhaps the most significant record of the decision-making, for it reveals the thinking, the perception of the situation by the principal decision-maker, who must bear the heaviest responsibility for the outcome. Most of the Pro *Memoria* of President Smetona is published here, with omissions indicated in the notes.[8] In order to understand this document it is necessary to describe at least in an outline the nature of the Smetona regime and its internal politics.[9]

The regime or President Smetona came into being in December of 1926, when the Nationalist and Christian Democratic coalition, with the assistance of the army, overthrew the parliamentary government of President Kazys Grinius, a coalition of the Social Democratic and Peasant Populist parties. President Smetona, with the aid of the Nationalist Association and the army, gradually created an essentially personal, but moderate autocracy. Political parties, except the ruling Nationalists, were prohibited, but were permitted to function informally. All in all, it was a relatively moderate personal rule with a substantial amount of freedom permitted.

The all-Nationalist rule was significantly modified as a result of major defeats in foreign policy — the Polish ultimatum of 1938 and the loss of Klaipėda (Mėmei) to Germany in 1939. Under strong pressures from various sectors, including the popular Commander in Chief of the Army Gen. Stasys Raštikis, President Smetona was forced to admit into his government members of the opposition Christian Democratic and Peasant Populist parties. The cabinet of Gen. Jonas Černius, formed in March of 1939, included four opposition members.

President Smetona and the Nationalists sought to regain the monopoly of power. Gen. Černius' government resigned in November of 1939. President Smetona wanted to appoint an all-Nationalist cabinet, but a strong intervention by Gen. Raštikis again forced the appointment of a coalition government. The cabinet of Prime Miniters Antanas Merkys (Nationalist), appointed on November 21, 1939, included the following: Deputy Prime Minister Kazys Bizauskas (Christian Democrat); Minister of Foreign Affairs Juozas Urbšys (independent); Minister of Defense Gen. Kazimieras Musteikis (Nationalist); Minister of Justice Antanas Tamošaitis (Peasant Populist); Minister of Internal Affairs Gen. Kazimieras Skučas (Nationalist); Minister of Finance Ernestas Galvanauskas (independent); Minister of Education Kazimieras Jokantas (Christian Democrat); Minister of Agriculture Juozas Audėnas (Peasant Populist); Minister of Communications Jonas Masiliūnas (Christian Democrat).

The new cabinet represented gains to the Nationalists. Under pressure, the Commander in Chief Gen. Raštikis, who was viewed by the Nationalists and the public at large as the chief rival of President Smetona, resigned in early January of 1940. The Nationalists were gradually limiting $_t$ the influence of the opposition and a new government crisis was brewing when the tensions with the Soviet Union began about the middle of May, 1940. Meanwhile, Gen. Raštikis was replaced by Gen. Vincas Vitkauskas, who had a history of leftist associations. His brother was executed as a bolshevik during the struggles for Lithuania's independence. Gen. Vitkauskas was considered sympathetic to the Peasant Populist viewpoint. As it turned out, he was less than loyal to an independent Lithuania. Thus, as the final crisis approached, internal political instability was reaching a climax.

II

## *PRESIDENT SMETONA'S PRO MEMORIA ON THE LAST DAYS OF INDEPENDENT LITHUANIA*

### *Lithuania in mortal danger*

Already under Gen. Černius as Prime Minister, the Defense Council[10] deliberated on the question of what to do if the freedom of Lithuania were gravely endangered. The Council unanimously stated that in such an eventuality one ought to resist by all means, including force of arms, even in the absence of any hope of winning. The aggressor, reasoned the Council, would devastate the country to a greater extent if it were defended than if it were not; however, such an event would reverberate in the consciousness of Lithuanians, reminding them that the nation stood up for its honor as best it could. In other words, defending oneself would count for much in the future. Our leaders, military and civilian, made public declarations in the same spirit, while addressing the armed forces, organizations, and the people as a whole. In the event of armed confrontation with the aggressor, the country's government, opined the Council, should take care not to fall into the hands of the enemy.. . Furthermore, gold and currency reserves should be concealed. For this purpose it was intended to amend the by-laws of the Bank of Lithuania.

When A. Merkys became Prime Minister, that question surfaced again in the Council of Defense and in the Council of Ministers. And it was decided the same way as under Gen. Černius: not to allow anyone to subsume Lithuania's sovereignty, and to resist aggression with force of arms.

However, neither the Prime Ministers nor the Commanders in Chief presented a plan of defense; nor was the machinery of government readied to meet this need, even though I, as President of the Republic, frequently egged them on about it. Why was nothing being done? All sorts of everyday matters, very or not so important, pushed this fundamental national concern to the background. Thus it was always being postponed till tomorrow, since there was the constant impression that we still had time.[11]

The question of whether to resist or not to resist foreign invasion had in the last few days, so it is said, begun to be deliberated in coffeehouses and restaurants, but deliberated in a strange way, namely, by asking, Who would it be better to be conquered by? The Germans or the Russians? When we had no strong propaganda of our own, when our political movements became too willful, it was easy to fall dupe to foreign propaganda. Let us remember: the idea of a united government was damaged by the consolidation of political parties, called coalition by others.[12]

*On June 12* [13] at approximately 3:30 p.m. the Prime Minister returned from Moscow, arriving at the President's office between 4-5 p.m. He came back very tired and exhausted. Soon we were joined by Interior Minister Skučas. Briefly and straightforwardly the Prime Minister described his most unpleasant visit with Molotov. At approximately 7 o'clock in the evening members of the Home Guard and Scouts came to congratulate me on the eve of my name's day. At approximately 8 o'clock I had to ride to the theater, where the Young Lithuanians were holding a concert in my honor. At the theater there were, besides me, several ministers together with the Prime Minister and State Comptroller Šakenis. There was no gaiety, since Lithuania's sorrow was gnawing at everyone. Immediately after returning from the theater the Council of Ministers and the military commanders (Gen. Vitkauskas and Gen. Pundzevičius) met at 10 p.m. in the President's office to hear the Prime Minister's report. It went approximately as follows: Molotov accuses the Lithuanian government of engaging in acts of provocation against Red Army soldiers, of luring them into remote places and interrogating them by torture in order to obtain military secrets. This is demonstrated by the testimony of Butaiev, and some other soldier. The government of Lithuania is very well aware of this, but does not wish to acknowledge its guilt. In his excitement Molotov feigned surprise that Minister of the Interior Skučas and Director of the Security Department Povilaitis were still in their respective positions. For both were so guilty that they should have been tried and punished long ago. Molotov's speech was very uncivilized, bestially cruel. In speaking, he threw all sorts of threats at Lithuania. According to him, the Soviets were engaged in pro-Lithuanian politics, while Lithuania was engaged in anti-Soviet politics. It displayed no joy, no gratitude for the return of Vilnius. When the Soviets fought against Finland, the Lithuanians, especially their press, showed sympathy for the Finns. Gen. Raštikis was the only high official who was sincerely sympathetic to the Soviet Union, but because of this attitude he was relieved from his duties as Commander in Chief. Prime Minister Merkys was requested to meet Molotov several times, was castigated and berated, but did not receive any formal demands of Lithuania. Such demands, said Mr. Merkys in finishing his report, might be presented to Minister Urbšys, who still remained in Moscow. Furthermore, Molotov, was particularly angry because the Lithuanian press was creating a very unfavorable attitude to the Soviets on the part of the Lithuanian people. For at least half an hour he berated the Prime Minister for the XX *Amžius* cartoon making fun of Lithuanians who worship bolshevism.[14]
Having heard the Prime Minister's report, the participants at the meeting were practically all of the opinion that one should await word from Urbšys, even though it was clear to all that the anticipated demands would harbor very much evil, indeed, a terrible blow to Lithuania.[15]

*June 13th*[16]

Yesterday after the meeting, I had reminded Prime Minister Merkys that while resting he think out a plan for responding in this unexpectedly difficult situation.

Today I waited for him to come in the evening, but he didn't. Perhaps he, Antanas, wanted to stay home and rest, perhaps, still not quite recovered from the Moscow inferno, he wished to think things out. On the other hand, I sensed his inability, in a difficult hour, to look around himself and to initiate a planned course of action. It was as if he waited for someone else to do his own duty. Indecisive and wavering was he. Rumors reached me to the effect that Peasant Populist and Christian Democratic people similarly were taking up that coffeehouse problem of whom it would be better to give up to, the Russians or the Germans. Whose protection should we seek, as if there were no third alternative: To Resist! Who knows, perhaps the Axis position to bow down to the Russian Bolsheviks also influenced Prime Minister Merkys? Even this unholy thought oppressed me.[17]

*June 14th.*

Between 11 - 12 o'clock, I believe, State Comptroller K. Šakenis came to see me. He told me that he had just seen the lawyer Norgėlas, who had learned from a German ( whose name I know) that soon the Soviets would place guards near Lithuanian borders and survey them carefully. The Lithuanian armed forces would be taken apart, dispersed, and finally, disbanded. When I heard this, I asked K. Šakenis to inform Prime Minister Merkys as soon as possible. As I later found out, Šakenis was unable to locate him anywhere. Only at 10 o'clock in the evening did Mr. Merkys finally show up at the President's Office. He told me that he had spent the whole day relaxing on his farm at Lapiai. I repeated everything that I had heard from Mr. Šakenis. The Prime Minister was very sad, apathetic, and this information seemed to make no impression on him. When asked whether he had any news from Mr. Urbšys, he replied that he did not, but that he expected to get it soon. While we were talking, the Foreign Ministry, in the person of Mr. Turauskas, I believe, reported that a notice had just been received from Mr. Natkevičius or Mr. Urbšys, telling us to expect a coded telegram from Moscow.[18]

It would contain Molotov's demands. Thus already between 11 -12 p.m. Prime Minister Merkys asked my permission to call a meeting of the Council of Ministers for 3 o'clock at night in the President's Office. By that time the telegram from which we would gather what it is that the Soviets demand might already have been received and decoded. In that case the Government would have to discuss and decide what is to be done.

*June 15th.*

The Ministers convened in the President's Office as early *as 1-2* o'clock at night. Absent were Minister Gen. Skučas (on the advice of Prime Minister Merkys he had already resigned on June 12th), Mr. Urbšys (in Moscow), and for some reason or other Minister Galvanauskas. To the meeting came State Comptroller K. Šakenis, Commander in Chief Gen. Vitkauskas, Chief of Staff Gen. Pundzevičius and the Secretary of the Council of Ministers Mašalaitis. Even before finishing decoding the above-mentioned telegram, a telephone report was received from Mr. Natkevičius or Mr. Urbšys in Moscow. Molotov demanded: (1) to hand Gen. Skučas and Director Povilaitis over to the court to be punished; (2) to dismiss the present Council of Ministers and to form a new one such that it would be "acceptable" to the Soviets; (3) to admit more Red troops into Lithuania — as much as and in whatever location Moscow will indicate. Our government's reply should be received in Moscom no later than 9 a.m. of the same day. This was an ultimatum, for the deliberation of which roughly only 3 hours were left.

Everyone felt as if the ground had slipped from under him. No one had any inclination to say something. It seems that it was obvious to everyone that acceding to such demands would be tantamount to renouncing

Lithuania's sovereignty and becoming a bolshevik province of the Soviet Union. Yet Moscow had pledged by treaty to honor the independence of Lithuania, not to interfere in its internal order nor in its social system nor in its domestic policies whatever they might be. Now it shamelessly breaks its word and threatens aggression. Since the others did not find anything to say, it devolved on me as President of the Republic, to speak up and get others to do likewise.

I reminded them of the opinion of the Council of Ministers expressed just a week ago: If serious danger threatens Lithuanian sovereignty, we would have no choice except to resist this threat with arms, and the Government, while resisting, would retreat from the country together with the army, as was talked about before. I said that we should not give in to Moscow's treachery, except perhaps on one point: forming a new Council of Ministers which would be "acceptable" to the Soviets and Lithuania. But nothing more! Speaking up in a similar vein were Defense Minister Gen. Musteikis, Communication Minister Masiliūnas, Justice Minister Tamošaitis, Education Minister Jokantas, and State Comptroller Šakenis. The other participants of the meeting either remained silent or expressed doubt.

Meanwhile the telegram was decoded (at about 4 o' clock, I think). Its text corresponded approximately to that received over the phone. Deputy Prime Minister Bizauskas, who at first had left the meeting room, suddenly spoke up, urging to agree to all of Moscow's demands, since in the course of their implementation they might be weakened. He suggested to invite Gen. Raštikis at once and to authorize him, as a person with a good reputation in Moscow, as their "persona grata," to form a new Council of Ministers.**19** The other two demands would still have to be discussed and the question of the new Red Army garrisons negotiated with Moscow. This proposal of Minister Bizauskas was vigorously supported by Prime Minister Merkys and Minister Audėnas. The others were either silent or tended to agree. Gen. Raštikis arrived at, I believe, about 5 o'clock. After the situation was described to him, discussion flared up again on whether to accept or not to accept Moscow's demands. Ministers Musteikis and Jokantas and State Comptroller Šakenis held to their former opinion: Not to accept! Prime Minister Merkys, his deputy Bizauskas, Minister Audėnas, Commander in Chief Vitkauskas, and former Commander in Chief Gen. Raštikis categorically stated: to agree to all of the demands! Minister Masiliūnas and Minister Tamošaitis did not decide one way of another.**20** They wavered, it seems, after having been influenced by their two colleagues. As one can see, the opinions of Prime Minister Merkys and of the two Commanders in Chief, the present and the former one, Vitkauskas and Raštikis, had decisive significance.

The President of the Republic: Only one concession could be made: for the present government to resign and for Gen. Raštikis, as a man (in Molotov's words) trusted by the Soviets, to be charged with the creation of a new government. However, even this concession would not help in any way, since, if the other two demands were rejected, force would still be used against Lithuania. Hence, we must resist by all possible means whether we like it or not. Our act of resistance, even if it should not save Lithuania, would (as we were thinking earlier) prove to the Lithuanians and foreigners alike that this nation wants to live in freedom. Minister Bizauskas defended his own contrary view that our resistance would greatly anger Moscow and when enraged the U.S.S.R. would terribly devastate our country. Our valiant gesture would only provoke a brutal Soviet attack. Therefore, we should surrender and accept!

The President: To hand over Gen. Skučas and Director Povilaitis to be tried without any legal basis would amount to endorsing the fictitious charges of Molotov. While serving as Interior Minister, Gen. Skučas never violated the pledges we made to Moscow and executed his duty in accordance with the President's direction. How therefore could the President now consent to have him handed over to court for punishment? Whatever for? ... Bizauskas argued to the contrary, appealing to the example of Estonia. A soldier of the Red Army killed an Estonian soldier; nevertheless, under pressure from the Soviets, the Estonian government had to admit that the reverse occurred: the Estonian killed the Red Army soldier. Similarly, innocent as we are, we must take upon ourselves the guilt which Moscow throws at us, sacrificing Gen. Skučas and Director Povilaitis in order to save the nation. Although Mr. Bizauskas' reasoning was naive and cheap, it

received the support of Prime Minister Merkys, Minister Audėnas, and the present and former Commanders in Chief Gen. Vitkauskas and Gen. Raštikis. What would they have said if instead of Gen. Skučas they themselves would have to be sacrificed in ransom?.. Prime Minister Merkys consoled himself and others by remarking that giving up the Interior Minister and the Security Department Director was not such a terrible thing. After all, our prosecutor would draw up the charges, and our court would decide on them; hence they would be in a position to mete out light punishments or even acquit them entirely. By such thinking as this the other supporters of the sacrifice likewise consoled themselves. It did not occur to them that there were no justifiable grounds for the charges: either they would have to be fabricated or else one would have to agree with Moscow's lie.

How should the President of the Republic behave when Prime Minister Merkys, Gen. Raštikis, a candidate for Prime Minister, and the present Commander in Chief Gen. Vitkauskas bow down to Moscow's aggression on all three counts? Replace them with new people? There is no time left; the reply to the ultimatum is due very soon. And who should they be replaced with? Who is there to choose from? .. This being the situation, the President had to make a resolve: he had, as has already been said, to hold on to his own, different, opinion. He authorized Gen. Raštikis to form the new government and stated that he would not take part in the deliberations of Moscow's other two demands although he would remain present at the meeting, as he was permitted to do so by the Constitution, or he would resign, or he would delegate his duties temporarily to the Prime Minister. This position of his had to be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. All who were present at the meeting expressed the opinion that the President ought not to resign but only take a vacation for some time. It seems that this idea of the President's vacation appealed very much to Ministers Bizauskas and Audėnas.

Here a short digression might not be inappropriate. Among the Christian Democrats there were people, as I heard, who regarded the Nationalists as a greater danger to themselves than the bolsheviks. When in dismissing Gen. Černius' cabinet and in forming Mr. Merkys', prof. Jurgutis was being asked to serve as Minister of Finance, the professor refused: Merkys does not have a good reputation, therefore I wouldn't go into his cabinet. His cabinet would last only a week or two. It would be overthrown by an opposition of Peasant Populists, Christian Democrats and bolsheviks (Communists). A similar statement was made at that time by the Commander in Chief Gen. Raštikis. In his opinion (stated to the President), it was absolutely necessary to let the Populists and Christian Democrats into the cabinet, since otherwise the Christian Democrats would not refuse cooperation with the Communists against the government.[21] Whether this really would have been so, I do not presume to judge. One thing is known, however: the Chief of the Nationalist Association, the President of the Republic, was very unpopular among the Christian Democrats. So now that he had gone on a vacation, perhaps, the hope that their line might prevail in the government began shining for the Axis.

Why the President decided to retreat will be explained more fully later. Let us say something now about how the reply to Moscow's ultimatum was being discussed. There was little time left, one had to be quick, because it was already between 5-6 o'clock. Commander in Chief Vitkauskas became excited because between 8-9 o'clock he had to warn the general staff so that the armed forces would not begin operating automatically, i.e., resisting.[22] I don't recall exactly which Minister (perhaps it was the Minister of Defense Gen. Musteikis) suggested approximately the following answer: the Lithuanian government protests such Soviet demands as being totally incompatible with the agreements, but, failing to see an alternative, accedes to them. The supporters of giving in, frightened by such tough language, suggested to delete the protest. Thereupon someone else suggested a softer version: Although the Soviet demands are opposed to the treaty, the Lithuanian government, lacking an alternative, consents to them. Whether this answer, or some other, was transmitted to Moscow — who knows?[23]

The President, Prime Minister Merkys, and several ministers conferred with Gen. Raštikis, as the new Prime Minister, about the membership of the new, projected Council of Ministers. Later, after some discussion of the existing situation, the "President signed the act dismissing the present Prime Minister and appointing the new one. At 12 o'clock news arrived that Moscow would not consent to Gen. Raštikis, being Prime Minister. All the hopes of the optimists fell to the ground... The biggest unpleasant surprise came to Minister Bizauskas, who had expected a softening of Moscow's demands.

The tragic program had to be executed further. Who would take over the temporary duties of President: Merkys or Gen. Raštikis? Both patiently tried to shake this unpleasant burden on the grounds that they lacked Moscow's trust. Gen. Raštikis, moreover, argued that the bolsheviks will think him to be of German orientation since he had finished the High Military Academy in Germany. And, see, Moscow had already protested his candidacy for Prime Minister. At that point the President intervened in their dispute and explained that either one can assume the duties of President, since the Prime Minister, the old or the new one, needs in this case, according to the Constitution, only the confidence of our Republic's President. Gen. Raštikis did not give in. Thus Merkys had to fill in for the President. He was presented with the authorization in writing.

Did the President do the right or the wrong thing by not complying with Moscow's demands? Let us remember that he has sworn to uphold Lithuania's sovereignty. If, no matter what the conditions or circumstances, he agreed to transfer it to someone else, that would be tantamount to treason, to the destruction of his personal honor, and to bringing down shame on one's nation. If he had stayed in his job, as he was urged to do by his own, he could have hurt and transgressed against Lithuania more than anyone else. Having him in their power, the rulers of Moscow could have used him for all kinds of treachery after they broke him down. Knowing bolshevik morality, or immorality, it is easy to imagine what they might have done. The whole world knows how the rulers of Moscow are able to force their innocent people, even those placed in high positions for sensitive tasks, to declare publicly that they have been guilty from beginning to end. As we

remember, the President, convinced by the Prime Minister and other Ministers, wrote a letter to Kalinin — a letter expressing complete loyalty to the Treaty with the Soviets.[24] And, so, after such a letter [comes] a brutal, cynical ultimatum to our government, demanding it to renounce Lithuanian independence. You, Lithuania, express loyalty to your treaty with us, but we say to you: To hell with the treaty and your loyalty. Now isn't it clear that by no longer recognizing Lithuania's sovereignty, the bolsheviks likewise no longer recognized its President? Thus his retreat was necessary, his retreat was a small protest against Moscow's treachery, such protest as was possible within the existing circumstances. Everyone accepted this argumentation, even those who submitted to the Soviet demands.

Some might still think that the President, if he so desired, could have ordered the Commander in Chief to resist the Soviet forces with arms. Is he not the supreme commander of all armed forces? Yes, legally he is, but not in practice. The President's order must at the time of defense be signed by the Prime Minister.[25] Having gone on record as opposing resistance, neither Merkys nor Gen. Raštikis would have given their signatures. Of course, there would be the possibility of appointing Gen. Musteikis, who had supported resistance, as Prime Minister and obtaining the signature for the order from him. But then a new Commander in Chief would also be needed, since Gen. Vitkauskas could not be expected to go against his expressed opinion. As was mentioned before, there simply was no time for such changes, even if they had been possible. All this would have had to be done earlier, when we still could have reckoned in days rather than hours. Was the army being prepared for this resistance, and was it prepared? There was a lot of talk on this question, and it never ended. Prime Minister Merkys and the Commander in Chief had opinions both ways: perhaps it will be necessary to employ arms, or perhaps it will not. When asked, they were uncertain whether resistance could be effected in case Red Army tanks and aviation were close to Kaunas. Perhaps only one of our divisions could be prepared for a march on the Samogitian highway toward Raseiniai. This division would afford cover to our government and to as many public officials as possible in their retreat.

And how would the Kaunas garrison cross the Nemunas and the Neris rivers, if Red tanks and aviation blocked the bridges and surrounded them, they could not explain. How would the government carry out its retreat? Well, they say, it could fly out by airplanes. In general, the impression arose that our army was not prepared for resistance. The so-called Axis was also not favorable to resistance, as we already found out. Its influence was felt not only in the Council of Ministers, but also among the troops, especially their high command. Finally, the authority of the supreme commander of the armed forces, the President, was continuously being belittled by the Axis among the troops and among the people. That, of course, was a great detriment to the capability of armed power. The deeds of the military command did not match their words. While still Commander in Chief, Gen. Raštikis this winter declared in his last speech to the members of the Home Guard that we shall not cede one foot of our land to the enemy; but in his article in Kardas, when he had already handed in his resignation, he recommended to the army and to the government (God knows why) to stand most sincerely by the Soviets, while they, the Soviets, having introduced their garrisons into Lithuania, were, as we others felt, treacherously preparing to strike a blow against it. And now, when they demanded from us not one foot, not several feet, but our entire land, Gen. Raštikis tersely and boldly declared: Let us accept all of Moscow's demands! He commanded the troops for five years, therefore the influence of his direction could not have remained without traces.[26]

Thus, it seems that it would have been risky for the President to give the troops the order to resist. If it had not been followed, this would have been a considerable blow to the entire country. Troops must be begun to be prepared for resistance not during the last hour, but much earlier; preparation must be continuous, and it must be attuned to the supreme leadership of the country, not just to the Commander in Chief.[27]

## III

## CONCLUSION

In perspective, the decision to accept the Soviet ultimatum unconditionally may be viewed as in large measure a consequence of internal politics. As a result of internal political developments, even the option of symbolic resistance to Soviet encroachment was not realistically available. The available records of the last meeting of the Lithuanian Government reveal a rather pathetic leadership, divided by partisanship, unprepared for a military confrontation, without plans for a government in exile, in general without a clear understanding of the ultimate implication of the Soviet ultimatum.

Specifically, the decision to accept the Soviet demands stemmed from several considerations. First of all, it was obvious that the army was not prepared for even a symbolic defense of independence. Secondly, the opposition parties which participated in Smetona's government were unhappy with the ruling Nationalists, who were gradually restricting their political influence. On the eve of the ultimatum the opposition parties had decided to utilize the tensions with the Soviet Union and force a confrontation with Smetona by precipitating a government crisis (which never came off because of the ultimatum). Thirdly, some members of the Government obviously viewed the situation as an opportunity to change Smetona's regime. Finally, there was a belief that the Soviet ultimatum was not a beginning of the end for independence and that a new modus *vivendi* with the Soviet Union was possible. Such expectations persisted among many leaders of various political persuasions even after the Soviet occupation.

This article attempted to suggest some of the reasons for a particular decision. This has nothing to do with the fact that Lithuania's independence was destroyed by an aggressive act of the Soviet" Union. No matter what the response of the

Lithuanian Government might have been, forceful occupation and incorporation in the USSR was inevitable, given the superiority of Soviet arms. Resistance might have mattered in the sense that the aggression of the Soviet Union would have been underlined. In the long run, this could have been politically and psychologically a significant event for the Lithuanian people and the world, which quickly forgets injustices.

1 Texts of the Nazi-Soviet agreements in US Department of State, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941,* Washington, B.C., 1948, pp. 76-78, 105 - 107.
2 Text of the Soviet ultimatum in *Lietuvos Aidas,* June 16, 1940. The ultimatum was preceded by three weeks of diplomatic pressures, including negotiations in Moscow by a Lithuanian delegation headed by the Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys and later even the Prime Minister Antanas Merkys. Soviet accusations included charges of kidnappings of Soviet soldiers stationed in Lithuania and the formation of a Baltic anti-Soviet military pact. For extensive documentation of these events see Bronis Kasias, *The USSR - German Aggression Against Lithuania,* New York, 1973, chapter II; also US House of Representatives, *Third Interim Report of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression,* 83rd Cong., 2nd ses., Washington, D.C., 1954 (hereafter cited **as** *Third Interim Report),*
*3* Soviet garrisons were stationed in Lithuania according to the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between Lithuania and the Soviet Union, forced upon Lithuania on October 10, 1939, after the Soviet - German agreement to place Lithuania in the Soviet sphere of influence. Text of the treaty in *Vyriausybės Žinios,* October 17, 1939. Skučas and Povilaitis were accused by the Soviets as involved in provocations against the Soviet soldiers. No evidence was ever discovered or subsequently published by the Soviets to justify the accusations. It is clear that the accusations were fabrications, designed to justify later military action. See the documentation in Kasias, *op. cit.,* esp. doc. no. 70. Similarly, no convincing evidence of Baltic military conspiracy against the Soviet Union has been revealed. Latvia and Estonia had a long-standing military pact, but there was no formal or informal agreement involving Lithuanian military cooperation. In fact the defense plans of the Baltic states were not coordinated and even at odds with each other. *See* Edgar Anderson's article "Military Policies and Plans of the Baltic States on the Eve of World War Two", *Lituanus,* 1974, No. 2, pp. 15 - 34.
4 Published in *Švyturys,* 1958, nos. 1 and 6.
5 Juozas Audėnas, *Paskutinis Posėdis,* New York, 1966, pp. 198-220.
6 A copy of the *Pro Memoria,* found in the archives of Minister Stasys Lozoraitis, Rome, is used here. A somewhat stylistically embellished and edited version will be found in Kazys Musteikis, *Prisiminimu. Fragmentai,* London, 1970, pp. 89 - 118.
7 Stasys Raštikis, *Kovose dėl Lietuvos,* Los Angeles, 1957, vol. II, pp. 19-56.
8 A copy of the *Pro Memoria* found in the archives of Minister Stasys Lozoraitis is used here. A slightly edited version was published in *Margutis,* 1955, Nos. 7 and 8.
9 For a study of Lithuanian politics at that time see Leonas Sabaliūnas, *Lithuania in Crisis,* Bloomington, Ind./London, 1972.
10 The State Defense Council was the top defense strategy organ, headed by the President of the Republic and including the Minister of Defense, the Commander in Chief, the Chief of Staff, and others.
11 Here President Smetona is not completely right. Plans for defense did exist. Gen. Raštikis writes in his memoirs that when he was the Commander in Chief, he had prepared such plans and even modified them to take account of Soviet garrisons in Lithuania. He also claims that such plans were known to the President. See Raštikis, *op. cit.,* pp. 48 - 49. Even late in May of 1940 a plan of action to meet possible Soviet aggression was considered in the State Defense Council. The plan envisioned armed resistance to Soviet aggression and the evacuation of the government. See Musteikis, *op. cit.,* pp. 86 - 89. Evidently there was also a specific plan implementing the general policy of resistance. See note 22 below on plan "R". However, Smetona is right that the military was not prepared to implement these plans.
12 President Smetona considered his government as composed of individuals and not of representatives of political parties. To the last he refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of opposition and called the government "united government," as distinguished from a "coalition government." The opposition parties, however, viewed the government as a coalition, were informally involved in negotiations in its formation. Smetona here is referring to the informal role that the opposition parties came to play in governmental decisions and politics. Smetona viewed (political parties and their activities as destructive of national unity, their legal existence was prohibited by law (although informal activity of the parties was tolerated). For a discussion of Smetona's political views, see Sabaliūnas, *op. cit.,* ch. 3.
13 A paragraph briefly describing preceding Soviet diplomatic pressures and negotiations in Moscow is omitted here. For documentation, see Kasias, *op. cit.,*
14 Prime Minister Merkys met Molotov three times on June 7, 9, and 11, 1939. For the minutes of these meetings see *Third Interim Report,* pp. 322-329.
15 The record of the meeting of the Council of Ministers on the evening of June 12th (about 10 p.m.) is incomplete and contradictory. In reporting his conversations in Moscow, Merkys was possibly minimizing the significance of Soviet charges. General Musteikis has written: "The President asked again whether Molotov had stated any concrete demands. Prime Minister Merkys answered no. After this report no decision was taken, only a, stronger alert in the army was instituted. (Cited from, Musteikis' *Pro Memoria, op. cit.,)* In a later and somewhat revised version Gen. Musteikis added that Merkys concluded his report as follows: "The impression is that everything will turn out all right." (Musteikis, *Prisiminimų Fragmentai,* p. 95). There was no move to reorganize the cabinet and Prime Minister Merkys and President Smetona possibly believed that the earlier resignation of the Minister of Internal Affairs Skučas and the dismissal of the Director of Security Department would be sufficient to meet Soviet desires.
However, according to the Soviet historian K. Navickas, on June 12th, Foreign Minister Urbšys sent an urgent telegram from Moscow, which was presented in the meeting. Navickas cited the telegram in part as follows: "We must... take heroic steps with lightning speed to liquidate the tension. Today it would not be sufficient for Skučas alone to leave the cabinet, therefore, a general restructuring of the Government is in order... Resignation of the Government must take place immediately and a new one must be formed within twenty-four hours". (Cited in K. Navickas, *TSRS Vaidmuo Ginant Lietuvą nuo Imperialistinės Agresijos 1920-1940 Metais,* Vilnius, 1966, pp. 310-311). The presentation of this telegram is not mentioned by Smetona, Audėnas or Musteikis. In fact, the latter has flatly denied that it was at all presented (Interview with Gen. Musteikis on Oct. 12, 1971). However, the presentation of Urbšys, telegram is confirmed by another *Pro Memoria,* written by J. Karvelis, who was not a member of the Government, but an active leader of the Christian Democratic Party. Karvelis claims that in a meeting of opposition leaders, attended by Deputy Prime Minister Bizauskas, who was in charge of the Foreign Ministry when the Foreign Minister was abroad, Bizauskas told the opposition leaders that he read Urbšys' telegram in the meeting of the Council of Ministers and demanded a reorganization of the cabinet. His proposal was rejected. (Copy of Karvelis' *Pro Memoria* from the personal archives of Kazys Škirpa, former Minister in Berlin and now resident of Washington, D.C.) President Smetona and Prime Minister Merkys were resisting major reorganization of the Government, while the opposition was pressing for it. According to Karvelis, on June 13th the opposition leaders decided to bring forth a cabinet crisis, which, however, was not implemented because of the Soviet ultimatum. It is obvious, that the opposition sought cabinet reorganization not just to please the Soviets, but also as a means of reasserting their role in the Government, which was being gradually eliminated. The international crisis thus coincided with a serious internal political conflict, which fundamentally affected the deliberations on the Soviet ultimatum.
Evidently there was very little discussion of military preparedness during the June 12th meeting. There is some uncertainty concerning the allegedly increased alert of the army following the meeting, as mentioned in the *Pro Memoria* of Gen. Musteikis. Gen. Vitkauskas maintains that after the session in the Presidency, the President called him in and re-mainded him of the previous committments of the Government to resist aggression, if necessary even by military means. Gen. Vitkauskas allegedly listened and answered: "We shall see how events develop." However, on leaving the President he allegedly gave an order to various units to send their heavy weapons to proving grounds for shooting practice. (Vitkauskas, *op. cit.)* Although Gen. Vitkauskas must have given such an order, it was not his sole responsibility. According to Gen. Musteikis most machine-guns, anti-tank, and mortar units were deployed for regular annual training exercises already for some time. (Interview with Gen. Musteikis, Oct. 10, 1971.) In effect the various units were without significant fire power. A military response to the Soviets was thus practically excluded.

16 A brief paragraph on Smetona's personal concerns is ommitted.
17 By *Axis* A. Smetona here means the Christian Democratic -Peasant Populist opposition, which was to a great extent acting in coalition. Smetona's suspicions about opposition thinking are to some extent confirmed in the *Pro Memoria* of J. Karvelis, cited in note 15.
18 ,E. Turauskas was in charge of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, L. Natkevičius was the Lithuanian Minister in Moscow.
19 The candidacy of Gen. Raštikis arose as a result of several favorable Soviet comments about him during the Moscow negotiations. Gen. Raštikis was called in in the middle of the debate on the Soviet demands. According to Gen. Raštikis, when he arrived at the meeting, the Government had already decided to accept the second Soviet demand unconditionally and to attempt to negotiate with Moscow on the introduction of additional Soviet troops into Lithuania. (Raštikis, II, pp. 22. - 23.)
20 Gen. Raštikis has summarized the arguments of the participants as follows: "Merkys strongly argued that there was no sense in resisting, that we would gain nothing with resistance because Moscow was acting with the blessing of Berlin; Germany was not opposing the action, while other states, which could effectively help Lithuania, did not exist; therefore, it was necessary to operate with possible concession and with them to maneuver and defend ourselves. Commander in Chief Gen. Vitkauskas came out strongly against resistance. They were supported by Bizauskas, Audėnas, Masiliūnas, Tamošaitis. Their most important argument was that military resistance would not achieve our goal, while in its results it would be catastrophic not only for our army, bet also for the entire nation. Minister of Agriculture Audėnas argued that such a resistance would require not only many human sacrifices, but would also destroy our national economy; at the same time nothing would be gained. Minister of Defense Gen. Musteikis, softly and carefully as always, pointed out that we should not give up after all, somehow we should resist, however he did not say how he imagined the organization of such a resistance when only two hours remained until the deadline of the ultimatum. A similar opinion was expressed by Minister of Education Jokantas. Chairman of the Seimas Šakenis, as always, mostly was silent or supportive of the President. Silent was also the Chief of Staff Gen. Pundzevičius". (Raštikis II, pp. 23-24.
Gen. Raštikis explains his objection to armed resistance as follows: "Division Gen. Pundzevičiui sat near me and I asked him whether the army is in readiness for resistance or whether it was at least notified. He answered no, that the army had not received any kind of order for preparedness, that the army is conducting the normal peace-time training program, that on order of tlhe Commander in Chief of the Army machine-gun units of regiments and anti-tank guns are not with the regiments, but are carrying out shooting practice in training grounds, although not all of them.. Besides, several days earlier, I have heard from the same General Pundzevičius that beyond Vilnius along the Lithuanian border there is a concentration of a large number of Russian troops, armored and motorized units. Whether the President of the Republic was informed, I do not know. And what is the opinion of general Raštikis, asked the President of the Republic. I answered that in view of the fact that we have strong Russian military bases inside the country, that the army is not prepared for resistance, that only a couple of hours remain, and that to organize the defense is now too late, I am of the opinion that now already is not the time to talk about resistance and we cannot resist with arms". (Raštikis, II, p. 24.)
21 It is true that when the Černius' cabinet resigned, Gen. Raštikis was instrumental in forcing President Smetona to include opposition members in the new government. However, there is no evidence that Gen. Raštikis was implying Christian Democratic cooperation with the Communists in case an all-Nationalist cabinet was appointed again. Gen. Raštikis' version of his role in the formation of Merkys' cabinet is found in Raštikis, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p.p. 631 - 35.
Smetona's belief that the opposition Christian Democratic and Peasant Populist parties would cooperate even with the Communists against his regime has some basis. Certainly the left wing of the Peasant Populists cooperated with the Soviets and there was at least an initial willingness to cooperate with the Soviet-dictated People's Government among some Christian Democrats. It is conceivable that some members of the opposition parties viewed the Soviet ultimatum as an opportunity to get rid of Smetona. General Musteikis, for example, writes that during an intermission of the meeting, when Gen. Raštikis was being called in, the Deputy Prime Minister and Christian Democrat Bizauskas allegedly had vulgarly said: "Sh— Lithuanian generals, they do not now how to utilize the situation and to get rid of Smetona's regime." (Musteikis, *op. cit.,* p. 105). Minister Škirpa is also of the same opinion, although he was not a member of the Nationalist Association and had served in the Government of Dr. Grinius, whom Smetona overthrew in 1926. In his memoirs Škirpa writes: "I can only comment that the information which then used to reach me as a diplomatic post from the center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, vividly pointed out that the opposition groups then did not prove to be able to stand above party objectives or to comprehend objectively the situation. For example, the Christian Democrats already earlier strove to rule and systematically raised the authority of General Raštikis in order to popularize him and thereby to prepare their candidate for a new prime minister. Viewing those plans of Kaunas from afar, it seemed as if the party workers there did not want to understand how great a danger to Lithuanian independence was hiding behind Moscow's angry reproaches and completely unfounded demands, at first to change only the Minister of Internal Affairs with the Director of the Security Department and later to replace the entire Merkys Government. Demanding replacement of A. Merkys at such a moment, the cited party directors made more difficult the already difficult situation of the Government." (Kazys Škirpa, "Lietuvos Nepriklausomybės Praradimas", *Margutis,* December, 1954, p. 6) To impute purely political motives on the basis of limited data is a risky business. While there is no question of the tension between the Nationalists and the opposition parties, in all fairness at least the possibility must be granted that some of those who favored a complete acceptance of Soviet terms believed that thereby the state still could be saved.
22 Evidently President Smetona here is referring to a so-called directive "R" •— a plan for disarming Soviet garrisons in Lithuania, especially those near Kaunas. This directive is mentioned in Gen. Musteikis' *Pro Memoria,* but for some reason it is omitted from his later memoirs. The directive was secret and no copies of it are available, while the few military men who knew about it have been rather vague about its specifics. At the same time it is not clear how this directive could have been implemented in view of the fact that most regiments were virtually without firepower.
23 The text of the Lithuanian response is not available. TASS communiqué, published in *Pravda* on June 16, 1940, states: "On 15 June at 9 a.m. Mr. Urbšys handed Comrade Molotov the Lithuanian Government's reply agreeing to the conditions proposed by the Soviet Government."
24 Text of the letter to Kalinin in Kasias, *op. cit.,* No. 64.
25 Gen. Raštikis maintains that according to the existing laws, the President, as Chief of the armed forces, could order military action without the approval of the Government or the counter-signature of the Prime Minister. (Raštikis, II, p. 52.)
26 Gen. Raštikis was viewed by President Smetona and the ruling nationalists as the chief alternative to Smetona's regime. These comments of the President clearly reflect his resentment against Gen. Raštikis, blaming him unfairly for military unpreparedness. Gen. Raštikis was forced out of command at the beginning of 1940. The responsibility for military preparedness rests with the Minister of Defense Gen. Musteikis and the Commander in Chief Gen. Vitkauskas. Gen. Musteikis has not provided an answer why the armed forces were practically disarmed during the crisis, while Gen. Vitkauskas has claimed it was a pro-Soviet move. See their memoirs, cited above.
27 The rest of the *Pro Memoria,* about 5 typewritten (single-spaced) pages, is omitted here. It deals with President Smetona's experiences between his departure from Kaunas and the internment in Germany. The following are the more important facts of his account.
According to the decision taken earlier in the day, President Smetona and his immediate family, together with the Minister of Defense Gen. Musteikis and his family and the Minister of Justice and his family, left Kaunas between 4 and 5 p.m. on June 15th, after hearing that the Deputy Commissar of the Soviet Foreign Ministry Dekanozov was flying to Kaunas to oversee the occupation and that Soviet armored units were already at the outskirts of Kaunas. Within a few hours the party reached Kybartai, a town next to the German border. While in Kybartai, Prime Minister Menkys (now acting for the President) called twice, asking Smetona to return to Kaunas, but the request was rejected. After another telephone call from Kaunas reporting that a delegation was on the way to Kybartai to bring back the President, it was decided immediately to cross the border to Eidkūnai. This was done toward midnight of June 15. Next day, by noon, Ribbentrop issued orders to intern the President and his party in East Prussia. Evidently this order was given with some reluctance because the Germans were afraid of Soviet reaction. (See Škirpa's account in *Margutis,* February 1955, pp. 3-4.)
The efforts to bring the President back to Kaunas deserve a special comment. A delegation from Kaunas, headed by the Minister of Finance Galvanauskas, did see the President in Eidkūnai. Why the effort to bring the President back? There is no substantial proof that the efforts of Prime Minister Merkys and others remaining in Kaunas were pressed by the Soviets. At least in part the effort was B result of the belief that it was still possible to find a *modus vivendi* with the Soviets and the presence of the President was necessary to facilitate that. Minister Škirpa in Berlin was asked repeatedly to persuade the President to return. Dr. Mačiulis, who was on call at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the night of June 15 -16, writes in his recollections that around midnight he was instructed to send Škirpa the following communication: "To aks K. Škirpa to get in touch with Eidkūnai and in the name of the Government to try to persuade the President of the Republic to return to Kaunas while the representative of the Soviet Union Dekanozov,

specially sent from Moscow, was unaware of the President's departure abroad. Just now during a visit (with Deputy Premier Bizauskas) Dekanozov had said that his mission in Lithuania is to agree on the formation of a new Lithuanian government. To obtain better results, the Government is of the opinion that the President's participation in the consultations at this moment would be useful to Lithuania and that in the contrary case the situation could become more difficult." (See Dr. Petras Mačiulis, *Trys Ultimatumai,* Brooklyn, N.Y., 1962, p. 106.) If Dr. Mačiulis' quote is correct, it would indicate that at least until midnight of June 15 -16 Dekanozov was not aware of Smetona's departure and that the efforts to bring him back emanated from the Lithuanian authorities in Kaunas. Actually, from a historical perspective, it is clear that the return of the President would only helped legitimize Soviet occupation.