

The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty (August 23, 1939)

Abstract

After the liquidation of “rump Czechoslovakia” in March 1939, the western powers harbored no more illusions about Hitler’s aggressive ambitions. It was now obvious that any further territorial or diplomatic concessions would merely lead to additional, larger demands. Back in late October 1938, Hitler had already begun to pressure Poland into handing over the Free City of Danzig and setting up an extraterritorial roadway through the Polish corridor—demands that the Polish government categorically rejected. In the face of Hitler’s growing impatience with the fruitless negotiations, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain guaranteed Poland’s national sovereignty on March 31, 1939, thus signaling the unmistakable end of his appeasement policy. Thus, Lithuania’s forced surrender of the Memel region to the German Reich during that same month would stand as Hitler’s last peaceful conquest.

On April 3, 1939, Hitler issued the Führer directive “Operation White,” which envisaged the military defeat of Poland in a surprise attack at some point after September 1, 1939. While assuring the world of Germany’s peaceful intentions, he then undertook two crucial diplomatic maneuvers for the purpose of preparing the Reich for war in military and strategic terms. First, on May 22, 1939, Hitler and Mussolini entered into the so-called Pact of Steel, which guaranteed military cooperation between the two dictators and mutual support in case of war. Second, he set about to woo Stalin into a military alliance in order to avoid a possible war on two fronts against England and France in the West and the Soviet Union in the East.

On August 23, 1939, Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893–1946) and Soviet Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov (1890–1986) signed the following treaty in Moscow. The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty—which, in addition to the standard non-aggression and neutrality clauses, also included a secret protocol on the territorial division of Eastern Europe—sealed Hitler’s decision to invade Poland a week later. With the Soviet Union on his side, Hitler hoped for either of the following contingencies: that England and France would not come to Poland’s defense, or, if they did, that they could be held at the Western Front until the quick defeat of Poland allowed Germany to continue the war in the West.

Source

Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Treaty of Neutrality, which was concluded between Germany and the U.S.S.R. in April 1926, have reached the following agreement:

Article 1. The two Contracting Parties undertake to refrain from any act of violence, any aggressive action, or any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other powers.

Article 2. Should one of the Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third power, the other Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third power.

Article 3. The Governments of the two Contracting Parties will in future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

Article 4. Neither of the two Contracting Parties will join any grouping of powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

Article 5. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties will settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively by means of a friendly exchange of views or, if necessary, by the appointment of arbitration commissions.

Article 6. The present Treaty shall be concluded for a period of ten years with the proviso that, in so far as one of the Contracting Parties does not denounce it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this Treaty shall be deemed automatically extended for another five years.

Article 7. The present Treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications will be exchanged in Berlin. The treaty shall enter into force immediately upon signature.

Done in duplicate in the German and Russian languages.

MOSCOW, August 23, 1939.

For the Government of the German Reich: v. RIBBENTROP
With full power of the Government of the U.S.S.R.: V. MOLOTOV

Secret Additional Protocol

On the occasion of the signature of the Non-Aggression Treaty between the German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the undersigned plenipotentiaries of the two parties discussed in strictly confidential conversations the question of the delimitation of their respective spheres of interest in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following result:

1. In the event of a territorial and political transformation in the territories belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern frontier of Lithuania shall represent the frontier of the spheres of interest of Germany and the U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna territory is recognized by both parties.
2. In the event of a territorial and political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of interest of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make the maintenance of an independent Polish state desirable and how the frontiers of this state should be drawn can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any case both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly understanding.

3. With regard to South-Eastern Europe, the Soviet side emphasizes its interests in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political *désintéressement* in these territories.
4. This Protocol will be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

MOSCOW, August 23, 1939.

For the Government of the German Reich: v. RIBBENTROP
With full power of the Government of the U.S.S.R.: V. MOLOTOV

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