THE PACT MOLOTOV - RIBBENTROP AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Demetrius Dvoichenko-Marko
History and Geography Department
Monmouth College
West Long Branch, New Jersey 07764

ABSTRACT: Adolf Hitler stunned the world by announcing the conclusion of a nonaggression pact with his arch-enemy, Communist Soviet Union, on August 23, 1939, with Stalin (Dzugashvili) himself in attendance. Thus Hitler violated the spirit and letter of the Anti-Communist ideology. Stalin had abandoned hope that collective security could ever be used effectively to contain Nazi aggression and this was one of the reasons he kept British and French missions cooling their heels in Moscow. The purpose of Stalin was to divide the enemies of international communism by promoting a war between Germany and the West. In fact:

Stalin's main interest was to make sure that these various powers did not unite against the Soviet Union. An agreement with Nazi Germany had the advantage that the Nazis were willing to hand over to Russia the Baltic states and parts of Poland, which Britain and France refused to do. Stalin may also have found the single-minded, ruthless Hitler more attractive than the vacillating western statesmen, who until recently had embraced appeasement. Everything points to the conclusion that Stalin favored an agreement with Hitler.

The western statesmen forgot the lesson of Rapallo and their efforts to negotiate an alliance with the Soviet Union failed. Ribbentrop went to Moscow, signed a pact which included a secret clause defining German and Soviet spheres of influence and dividing Poland between them. The pact meant the neutrality of the Soviet Union, an end to any threat of a British-French-Soviet agreement to block German designs of conquest, the isolation of Poland, and a Soviet-German economic cooperation.

This was a clear example of power politics dividing Europe into two spheres between two great powers just like after the Peace Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 which divided Europe between Emperor Napoleon of France and Emperor Alexander I of the Russian Empire. Later:

When Napoleon and Alexander I met at Erfurt in 1808, Napoleon agreed that Finland, Moldavia, and Wallachia should be incorporated into Russia, which in return would recognize as King of Spain the brother of Napoleon.

In certain ways history tends to repeat itself because Ribbentrop, Molotov, and Stalin agreed to a pact of friendship and established their respective spheres of interest in Eastern Europe. Earlier on March 21, 1939, Nazi Germany gained control of Memel (Klaipeda) from Lithuania. The rest:

Finland, Estonia Latvia, and Bessarabia were granted to the Soviet Union. Lithuania was reserved for Germany - although in a subsequent secret agreement of September 28, after the fall of Poland, Germany transferred this...
claim to Russia in return for a larger share of Poland.4

A Romanian diplomat agrees that as the result of article 2 of the secret protocol an era of Soviet expansion has begun -

the Soviet Union has acquired, first from Hitler’s hands, also the “rights” to incorporate the Baltic States, the territory of Vilna and Bessarabia, and present them to the world as being sacred Soviet territories.5

Hitler allowed Soviet Union to move westward and in exchange he received Soviet food, raw materials, and petroleum. This process of horse trading allowed Hitler a free hand in the West and the Soviet Union

got half of Poland, the Baltic states, Bessarabia. And few military men will disagree that Soviet possessions of these buffer areas saved Moscow, Stalingrad, and possibly the whole East Front for the Allies.4

The delimitation and establishment of the German and Soviet spheres was settled in Moscow on September 28, 1939, and it was called the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty. For strategic reasons in order to provide a better defense for Leningrad the Soviet Union invaded Finland on November 30, 1939, and promptly was expelled from the League of Nations. Nazi Germany occupied Denmark and proceeded to conquer Norway. Encouraged by his victories in Scandinavia, Hitler invaded Netherlands, Belgium, and France in May of 1940. The Balkan Entente was shaky after the shift in the balance of power after the fall of France. No help could have been expected from the West particularly France which for a long time was the keystone of Romania’s alliances. On June 26, 1940, a Soviet ultimatum demanded Bessarabia and a part of Bukovina from the Kingdom of Romania. According to the secret protocol under article 3 agreed upon by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939 the Soviet claims on Bessarabia were acknowledged as well as the lack of interest on the part of Germany for that area. However Hitler was annoyed because the Soviet demand included a part of Bukovina in addition to Bessarabia. The Romanian Crown Council was called and with one opposing vote of the well known scholar Professor Iorga send the following telegram to Moscow:

The Romanian government, in order to avoid the grave consequences of a recourse to force, and opening of hostilities in this part of Europe, is constrained to accept the evacuation conditions specified in the note of the Soviet government... Because the Red Army marched into the newly acquired regions without regard to the timetable spelled out by Moscow, it turned the retreat of the officials and the army units into a rout.7

The annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina by the Soviet Union in June of 1940 caused the transfer from the Kingdom of Romania to the Soviet Union an area of land amounting 19,446 square miles with 3,700,000 inhabitants. Out of these Bessarabia alone covered 17,146 square miles and included a population of 3,200,000. Northern Bukovina was only an area of 2,300 square miles and a population of only half a million. Refugees that managed to cross into the Kingdom of Romania amounted to 300,000 and 150,000 people crossed into the areas occupied by the Soviet Union. According to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact 80,000 Germans were allowed to depart from Bessarabia and 30,000 were evacuated from Northern Bukovina.8 George Cioranescu adds to these facts that

Bessarabia was an integral part of the principality of Moldavia and at the Peace Treaty of Bucharest on May 16, 1812, just thirty-seven days before the invasion of the Russian Empire by Napoleon and his European satellites6, the Turkish Ottoman Empire disregarding the integrity of Moldavia and previous agreements of suzerainty carried out the first division if Moldavia.

The eastern part of Moldavia between the River Prut and Daneser (Nistru) was turned over to the Russian Empire under the name of Bessarabia. The former Vilayets and Turkish fortresses of Khotin (Hotin), Bendery (Tighina), Ackerman (Moncastro, Cetates Alba, Belgorod Dnestrovsky), Kilia (Chilia), and Izmail were returned to their former owners of Moldavia. The Turks promised to stop the taxation of Wallachia and the other part of Moldavia between the river Prut and the Carpathian mountains for a period of two years.11 After the Peace Treaty of Bucharest, Bessarabia remained as part of the Russian Empire until the "Statul Taril" ("The Country’s Council") in Kishinev decided to reunite the Moldavian Democratic Republic of Bessarabia with the rest of Moldavia in the Kingdom of Romania in 1918. In response to this event the Soviet Union created the Moldavian Autonomous Republic 1924-1940 in Transnistria with the capital in Balta. It is a well known fact that outside of Bessarabia along the left bank of the Dniester south of Mogilev are located villages which bear typical Moldavian names such as Botusani, Dubosari, Butur, Slobodza, etc. Also Mogilev, Ovidiopol, and Ananiev had originally a Romanian majority of population.12 As the result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet ultimatum of June 26, 1940, the Moldavian Soviet Autonomous Republic was abolished and only the southeast region on Tiraspol was incorporated in the new Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldavia. Moldavia was fragmented into several parts. Moldavia between the Prut River and the Carpathian Mountains with Jassy (Iasi) and Sucava remained in Romania while Northern Bukovina-Herzta with Chernovita (Cernautai) and the southern Bucovae with Iamail, chilia, and Belgorod Dnestrovsky (Cetates Alba, Ackerman) were incorporated into the Soviet Socialist Republic of the Ukraine. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was reduced to the northern region of Bucovae (Balți), the central region of Kishinev (Chisinau), the southeastern region of Tiraspol, and the southern region of Kaguil (Cahul). This fragmentation of Moldavia was later sanctioned by the Peace Treaty of Paris on February 10, 1947.

FOOTNOTES


