"The Road to Worldwide Conflagration":
Interwar Military Cooperation and the Collapse of the International Order

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Introduction

On August 23, 1939, the world learned that Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop had arrived in Moscow to finalize a non-aggression pact with Stalin's Soviet Union. The French paper *Le Jour* declared "There is no word for the duplicity of both Berlin and Moscow."[1] Their surprise agreement would lead a week later to the German invasion of Poland. The Soviets would join the war by invading Poland from the east sixteen days later. Over the next two years, the Germans and Soviets would conquer thirteen other sovereign states across Europe. The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, and with it, the destruction of the international order that had been founded some two decades earlier, were in significant part a product of this Soviet-German partnership - and their earlier period of collaboration between 1920 and 1933.

There is today renewed interest in that history, as well as the interwar period in general. As the last great period of multipolarity, it has become a major source of analogies for policymakers and others seeking guidance from the experience of the past. However, the history of that period – particularly subjects like the Treaty of Versailles, the Munich Conference, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – have often been misapplied or misunderstood.[2] One of the most critical and poorly understood facets of that multipolar world is the history of military cooperation between the major powers. Specifically, to explore why the international order created at the Paris Peace Conferences after the First World War failed to maintain peace and security, this paper compares the failure of military cooperation between the major victors of the First World War with the success of cooperation between two major antagonists to that new order, Germany and the Soviet Union. Understanding the origins, nature, and consequences of military cooperation does much to explain not just the outbreak of war, but also the nature of military cooperation – and may offer lessons relevant for today.

After four horrific years of war, on November 11, 1918, the guns on the Western Front finally fell silent as a general armistice went into effect. Starting two months later, the victorious powers met in Paris to craft a series of treaties intended to create and preserve a postwar peace.[3] Underlining the debates was one fundamental belief: the war just waged had been horrific. The industrialization of war had produced death on a scale that made the elimination of war from the international system not just desired but essential. This was fundamentally a different view than that of the peacemakers at Westphalia in 1648, Utrecht in 1715, or Vienna in 1815, where diplomats and statesmen had sought to temporarily manage the problem of war, not solve it in perpetuity.[4]

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[1] P.J. Philip, "France Prepares To Stop Germany: Will Fight To Protect Poland If That Ally Resists Attack, Spokesman Declares France Prepares To Stop Germany Eyed By British And French Military Men," *The New York Times*, 23 August 1939, p. 1.

[2] Munich, in particular, has been widely abused by those seeking historical rationale for their own policy preferences. As Geoffrey Roberts suggested, the Munich Analogy is essentially an argument for always taking a hard line and avoiding negotiations with any rival – an analogy that has become more common over time. "It's a kind of misinterpretation, misuse and abuse of history," he concluded. Geoffrey Roberts, "On the Use and Abuse of the 'Munich Analogy' in International Politics," 9 September 2018, Sputnik Radio.

[3] See Sally Marks, "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918–1921," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (September 2013) for an assessment of the major debates over the peace conferences.

[4] This great ambition was given further impetus by the growing democratization of foreign policy: the US, UK, Japan and Italy would all expand suffrage after the war. For much of the public -- now with a direct role in selecting their representatives – the lives of those lost needed to be given meaning by radical changes to the international system.

In late May 1919, the negotiators at Paris completed the Treaty of Versailles, intended to formally end the war between the Allies and Germany. Its terms centered on the disarmament and punishment of Germany, the only major member of Central Powers surviving the war. Germany, now a republic under the soon-to-be completed Weimar Constitution, was assessed an open-ended sum of reparations under the new treaty. Further, the Allies stripped Germany of ten percent of its territory, most of which was either lost to France in the west or to the new state of Poland to the east. To prevent a revanchist Germany from seeking to regain these territories, Germany's vaunted military was stripped of most of the modern technologies of war, including the ability to produce aircraft, heavy artillery, armored vehicles, submarines, or chemical weapons. The Allies further reduced the postwar German military to just 100,000 men from a total of more than 5 million. These terms were to be enforced by a new Inter-Allied Control Commission, whose inspectors would oversee the dismantling of German military industry, the destruction of weapons stockpiles and the conversion of German industry towards civilian production.[5]

If the Treaty of Versailles was intended to prevent Germany from possessing the capacity for a new war, the Covenant of a new international organization, the League of Nations, was intended to redress both the causes and capacity for war itself on a global scale. American President Woodrow Wilson, who initially shaped its structure, described his policy as "the program of the world's peace."[6] The fact that Versailles and the League were viewed as linked was made explicit when the Allies incorporated the League of Nations Covenant in the text of the Treaty of Versailles, as well as all subsequent treaties made with the defeated powers.[7] Thus the new international order was directly connected to Germany's defeat and disarmament.

The League of Nations Covenant and the Treaty of Versailles would become the core of the immediate postwar order, intended to banish war and create the conditions for a stable peace. Collectively, the new order depended upon four basic pillars. The first, which was considered foundational for all the rest, was collective security. That is, the League of Nations was to be an association of states committing all members to renounce the use of force, except in response to aggression, in which case all members will fight the aggressor together. It was hoped that it would continue the wartime partnership of the major powers, institutionalized by the creation of the League of Nations' Council, which was initially to consist of the five major victorious powers: France, Italy, Japan, the US, and the UK. Although its tasks were left somewhat vague, public expectations were that it would play a leading part in the enforcement of international peace and security.[8]

To make war less likely in the first place, the second pillar of the postwar order was global disarmament. The simple premise was that armaments had caused the war. Germany's disarmament was viewed as a first step to be followed by the other major powers once the global order had been firmly established. Not long after the war, multilateral conventions like the Washington Naval Conference system placed limits on warship tonnage among the major powers.

However, by 1923, the League's efforts at promoting disarmament had stalled because of the

[5] R. Shuster, *German Disarmament After World War I: The Diplomacy of International Arms Inspection, 1920-1931* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 27.
[6] Woodrow Wilson, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress," 8 January 1918, *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-joint-session-congress-the-conditions-peace-the-fourteen-points
[7] "The Covenant of the League of Nations," 28 June 1919, UN Geneva - Archives, https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/league-of-nations/covenant.
[8] David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant* (London: Putnam, 1928), p. 255.

general conclusion that basic preconditions of security must be met before the major powers reduced their armaments below a certain level. This reality delayed a long-planned World Disarmament Conference until 1932, by which point a radically different international landscape precluded any real prospect of success.[9]

The third pillar of the international order, at least as Wilson envisioned it, was free trade - the idea that global trade with limited barriers would benefit all states. At first, this ought to be limited to those states in the League of Nations, in his view. As Colonel Edward House, Wilson's closest aide, explained, "It means the destruction of all special commercial agreements, each putting the trade of every other nation in the League on the same basis."[10] The assumption was that competition for markets and resources had been another factor in the origins of the war, and that open, free and fair trade would prevent future conflict, while further cementing ties between those states committed to the new international order. From the start, however, this proposal was applied selectively, as the European empires continued to protect trade within their own imperial dominions.

The fourth and perhaps most important pillar of the postwar order was the concept of self-determination. This had emerged from pledges made during the war itself as both sides had promised ethnic groups within their rivals' empires future sovereignty. Wilson gave further animus to growing nationalisms in dependent territories, declaring before Congress some ten months after American entry into the war that "National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of actions which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril."[11] This call for self-determination proved enormously popular, both inside and outside of Europe.[12] The war itself would lead to the creation of ten new states from the ruins of the empires of Eastern Europe even as the Treaty of Versailles was being negotiated. As with disarmament and free trade, the concept of self-determination would be applied selectively; neither Wilson nor his European allies wanted to extend self-determination to colonial populations across the world.[13] But unleashed beyond Paris in 1919, this concept would soon be invoked consistently by both the new international order's defenders and its antagonists.[14]

These four pillars – enshrined through the League of Nations and the Treaty of Versailles – were the first "liberal international order." That order had been crafted primarily with American ideals, then

[9] Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 769-781.

[10] Colonel Edward House, File No. 763.72119/8979, "The Special Representative (House) to the Secretary of State," 29 October 1918, in *Papers Relating To The Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1918, Supplement 1, The World War, Volume* I (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 405-413.

[11] Woodrow Wilson, "Address to Congress," 11 February 1918, Records of 56th Congress, Volume 56, Part 2, p. 1937, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1918-pt2-v56/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1918-pt2-v56-19-1.pdf

[12] See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[13] Trygve Throntveit, "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination," *Diplomatic History,* June 2011, Vol. 35, No. 3 (JUNE 2011), pp. 445-481, 445. The Treaty of Versailles watered down the concept of self-determination by creating the mandate system to efficiently administer the movement towards independence of all people groups, declaring that the "tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations…until such time as they are able to stand alone." The victors finally also inserted a clause in the Treaty of Versailles guaranteeing the "territorial integrity" of all states joining the League of Nations to try and put the "genie" of self-determination back in the bottle. See Article X, Article XXII, The Treaty of Versailles, 28 June 1919, Avalon Project, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/versailles_menu.asp

[14] For an example of the popular discourse of self-determination common by 1924, see Herbert Adams Gibbons, "World Remade Since Outbreak of War," 27 July 1924, *New York Times*, XX5.

reshaped by its European allies, and applied - if incompletely - across the globe. Embedded within the new order were the seeds of its own destruction, however. None of the four pillars of the new system – collective security, disarmament, free trade and self-determination – were embraced in their entirety by the victorious powers after the war.[15] Its key elements, particularly the emphasis on collective security and disarmament, would also make even more difficult the prospect of security collaboration between its supporters.

At its heart, maintaining the new order was always dependent on continued support by and postwar military cooperation among the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles. By most measures, at the end of the war, there were eight "great powers" in the international system: China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, US, and what, from the ashes of the Imperial Russian state, would soon become the Soviet Union. Of those eight, five had helped to negotiate the Treaty of Versailles, and were thus identified with the new order: the US, UK, France, Japan, and Italy. The war-torn Republic of China had declined to sign the Treaty over the Shandong Question. Russia was then in the throes of civil war, the victor still uncertain – no delegates were invited as a result. Germany, of course, was the subject of the treaty itself.[16]

The first victorious power to abandon the international order was the state that had played a decisive role in Germany's military defeat in 1918, as well as the postwar order that followed: the United States. Despite Wilson's leading role in crafting the new "international community of nations," among the American public, there was a strong reluctance to shoulder the long-term costs and the expansion of government that would be required to police the world order.[17] The US Senate had rejected the Treaty of Versailles and participation in the League of Nations following contentious debate, fuelled in part by Wilson's own intransigence. Although no public polling exists, there is a great deal of evidence that the League's rejection was popular across America. Senator Warren G. Harding, who helped to defeat Wilson's program in Congress, would run on an anti-League of Nations platform in 1920, and then win the Presidential election later that year by the widest margin in US history.[18] Though the United States would maintain an active foreign policy, driven largely by its economic interests, American participation in the League would prove stillborn. With American withdrawal from the League, military cooperation with its wartime allies, too, would come to an end.

The second state to abandon the new order was Italy. Italy, despite being a victor, did not receive the territory promised to Rome by secret agreement in 1915. Its unstable government, following its unpopular participation in the First World War, would be toppled by a former socialist named Benito Mussolini, who would establish the first Fascist government in Europe in 1922. He was, in the words of historian John Gooch, "unsympathetic to the League of Nations from its inauguration," as well as its principles of collective security, disarmament, and self-determination. As a result, Italy became a fickle and unreliable supporter of the international order by the mid 1920s.[19]

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[15] Arguably, even the one state that would prove most committed to defending the postwar order - France - was fully committed to only one pillar, that of collective security, which would be the first to collapse. See, for instance, Arnold Wolfers, *Britain and France between Two World Wars: Conflicting Strategies of Peace Since Versailles* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1940), p. 153.

[16] Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 341

[17] Benjamin D. Rhodes, *United States Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1941: The Golden Age of American Diplomatic and Military Complacency* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), pp. 29-31.

[18] See his first major speech for the place of foreign policy in Harding's campaign: Warren G. Harding, "Speech Accepting the Republican Nomination," 12 June 1920, *The Miller Center*, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/june-12-1920-speech-accepting-republican-nomination.

[19] John Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge,

Japan's shift from supporter to antagonist of the new order was slower. In the aftermath of the war, Japan had sought to press its territorial gains in the Pacific, and also sought to insert a racial equality clause into the treaties negotiated in Paris at the end of the War. Resistance to these Japanese aims by Great Britain, France, and the United States – coupled with the passage of an anti-Japanese immigration law in the US in 1924 – damaged Japanese support for the postwar order.[20] Its unequal treatment during debates over disarmament and free trade, too, most notably in the Washington Naval Treaty system, further sparked tensions with its wartime allies.[21] In 1931, army officers in Manchuria – without the consent of their own government – occupied the region, setting up a puppet regime under their close control. A few months later, these actions triggered a full-scale battle between Chinese and Japanese forces in the city of Shanghai. When the government of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi attempted to bring the military back under civilian control, he was assassinated.[22] A few months later, the League of Nations' Lytton Commission refused to accept Japanese control over Manchuria, and the Japanese government withdrew from the League of Nations, formally ending its support of the post-war system.

As a result of the lack of support from the US, Italy, and Japan, as the interwar period progressed, the League of Nations increasingly relied on just two of its members: Great Britain and France. There was an assumption among much of the public and the international community that the close Anglo-French partnership forged during the war would be the cornerstone of the new order. Arthur Henderson, the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, had openly suggested that there was a "special relationship" between Britain and France, while some in America had complained about "a Franco-British bloc…[that] looked at international questions from the angle of pre-war conceptions of balance of power."[23] But their inability to cooperate militarily, strategically, or diplomatically proved catastrophic for the preservation of the order conceived in 1919. In reality, the notion of a natural Anglo-French alliance was not historically accurate, and certainly did not reflect the experience of coalition warfare in the First World War. France had only stopped contingency planning for a war against Great Britain in 1908.[24] During the war itself, it took until late 1917 to develop even the first hints of machinery for coordinating Allied strategy, planning and logistics, the Supreme War Council. Even then, until late in the war, it was "a talking shop with no powers to act."[25] Both states rejected major efforts to coordinate industrial production or technological development even through the end of the war.[26] The Anglo-French alliance during the war, in other words, was riven by mistrust and misunderstanding. Only American entry into the war made victory possible.

UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 7-9.

[20] Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 170-176. One contemporary account argued that the Washington Naval Conference System, the failure of the racial equality provision, and the American immigration law of 1924 in combination "Japan turned her back on the collective system of diplomacy, and, as a natural corollary of her distrust of foreigners, the campaign of 'Asia for the Asiatics' was vigorously revived among the traditional continentalists in Japan." Masamichi Royama, *Foreign Policy of Japan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1941), p. 36

[21] Akira Iriye, *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East*, *1921-1931* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, pp. 17-20.

[22] Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 2002), pp.77-83.

[23] Raymond Leslie Bluell, "A New Alignment For Peace In Europe," 8 September 1929, *The New York Times,* p. XX1.

[24] J. F. V. Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?' French perceptions of Britain as an ally after the First World War," Intelligence and National Security, 13:1, pp. 37-52, 38.

[25] Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 169-173.

[26] See Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "Technology Development in Coalition: The Case of the First World War Tank," *The International History Review,* 22:4 (December 2000): pp. 806-836, 834.

With the end of the First World War, Britain and France were no longer technically allied.[27] For nearly two decades, they would try and fail to build a peacetime alliance. The first effort came almost immediately after the war: on March 14, 1919, British Prime Minister Lloyd George and American President Woodrow Wilson offered the French government an oral security guarantee. French skepticism about what it entailed became irrelevant when the US Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles, and the offer evaporated.[28] Separate talks between the British and French on alliance and military cooperation repeatedly foundered on French demands that Britain commit to the defense of Poland, too.[29] A fresh alliance draft prepared by French Prime Minister Aristide Briand and Lloyd George and "virtually ready for signing" fell apart in 1922 when Briand resigned from office.[30] Briand's successor, Raymond Poincare, demanded a full-scale military alliance, including joint planning, intelligence and much else besides; Lloyd George rejected it. By the end of that year, the French and British had resumed their competition overseas when the Chanak Crisis brought into stark relief their lack of shared strategy outside of Western Europe.[31] Soon British military planners were drawing up contingencies – albeit reluctantly – for war against France, as France was now considered, in their words, the "greatest menace to this country."[32]

The new international order made their possible military collaboration even more difficult. Disarmament was enormously popular in both states; between vast pacifist movements and their own pledges to reduce armaments, the British and French governments found it difficult to maintain military forces commensurate with their security needs. One of the architects of the League of Nations Lord Robert Cecil would warn as the shadows of a global crisis began to lengthen, "Aspirations for peace and good-will have been done so much that I feel they have lost their reality."[33] Driven by public pressures and private desires for economy, the British government would institute the infamous 'Ten Year Rule" that declared war was at least ten years away for planning purposes. The result would be a military maintained at the barest levels needed for imperial policing.[34] The French, for their part, tried to maintain a much larger military force but found political and economic pressures too much, too.

In addition, the language of collective security and their roles at the League discouraged the two states from working directly together. When the French proposed greater military collaboration, British leaders instead suggested they use the forum of the League of Nations. The French government responded by attempting to arm the League with an international air force to give it the muscle needed to enforce its mandates. But here, too, they were blocked: first by the American and British governments in 1919, then by the British government during their second attempt in 1932.[35] Despite

[27] Keiger, "Perfidious Albion?", pp. 37-52, p. 40.
[28] Ibid, p. 42.
[29] Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?' p. 43-44. Ultimately that would prove a policy that Chamberlain would accept only in March 1939 - one that would lead Great Britain into the Second World War.
[30] Ibid, p. 48.
[31] Ibid, p. 48.
[32] Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?' French perceptions of Britain as an ally after the First World War," Intelligence and National Security, 13:1, pp. 37-52, 48-50.
[33] Richard Overy, *The Twilight Years: The Paradox of Britain Between the Wars* (New York: Viking, 2008), p. 228.
[34] Brian Bond and Williamson Murray, "The British Armed Forces, 1918-1939," pp. 98-130 in Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, ed., *Military Effectiveness, Volume II: The Interwar Period* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 101.
[35] "League of Nations: International Army Not Approved," 14 February 1919, *The Irish Times*, 3. ; "League of Nations Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Proposal of the French Delegation," 5 February 1932, League of Nations Archives, United Nations Library and Archives, Geneva, Switzerland (hereafter UNLA), Reference 0000676624, D0057.

these failures, France remained legally committed to a collective security organization that ultimately provided few security guarantees in and of itself. The gap between rhetoric and reality became particularly dangerous when French diplomats inserted collective security provisions in defensive pacts reached with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia later in the 1930s. This made French security reliant on the increasingly moribund institution of the League as the world sank deeper and deeper into crisis.[36]

By contrast, the powers outside the new international order's leadership were not constrained diplomatically or militarily by the terms of the new order - except insofar as the British and French chose to enforce them. Indeed, as the British and French war-time alliance disintegrated, states on the outside of the international order soon began to collaborate, seeking to achieve their own security goals, often in clear opposition to the order proclaimed in Paris. For instance, Germany helped develop China's army and simultaneously pursued aviation cooperation with Japan beginning in the 1920s.[37] At the same time, Fascist Italy and the Soviet Union assisted each other's navies and shipbuilding industries.[38] But the most important partnership would prove to be between Germany and the Soviet Union.

On November 6, 1917, the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party had overthrown the Russian Provisional Government. The new Soviet regime, initially confident in worldwide revolution, had no interest in engaging in traditional diplomacy; as the Commissar of Foreign Affairs Leon Trotsky had explained his task was simply to "print a few pamphlets and close up shop."[39] From its inception, the new Bolshevik regime was hostile on both ideological and strategic grounds to all of the elements of the treaties being crafted in Paris, not least because they were actively waging war against all five of the major powers then responsible for constructing that order. But events would force the Soviets to reconsider its diplomatic strategy.

Even before Germany's military defeat in November 1918, the country's government collapsed as the German Revolution began. Two days before the armistice and immediately following the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Social Democratic politician Philipp Scheidemann had declared Germany a republic. With the war's end, though, the country teetered on the brink of civil war. The army disintegrated almost immediately; on November 17, General Wilhelm Groener wrote to his wife, "How sad things appear in our Fatherland! This collapse [of the army] is a much larger misfortune than the whole war."[40] As it did so, tens of thousands of soldiers took their weapons with them. Soon, street fighting broke out between left and right in Germany's major cities. Seeking to maintain control, the center-left German government of Friedrich Ebert struck a deal with the German Army to help maintain law and order – an agreement that the army would exploit to pursue its own ends with limited oversight from the civilian government.[41]

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[36] Ian Ona Johnson, *Faustian Bargain: The Soviet-German Partnership and the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 177.

[37] Jurgen Melzer, *Wings for the Rising Sun: A Transnational History of Japanese Aviation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), pp. 71-76, 94, 146-148; see also Robyn Rodriguez, Journey to the East: The German Military Mission in China, 1927-1938 (The Ohio State University: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2011).

[38] Tony Demchak, Reform, Foreign Technology, and Leadership in the Russian Imperial And Soviet Navies, 1881–1941 (Kansas State University: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2016), p. 335.

[39] Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia, From Nicholas II to Putin* (London: Penguin Publishing, 2003), p. 67.

[40] Wilhelm Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen: Jugend, Generalstab, Weltkrieg* [Memoirs: Youth, General Staff, World War], ed. Friedrich Frhr. Hiller von Gaertringen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), p. 471.

[41] F.L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics, The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 11-12.

On January 5, 1919, leftwing groups recently reorganized into the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) attempted to overthrow the German Republic; the center-left Social Democratic government partnered with the remnants of the German general staff to defend the capital. The latter drew together a few thousands *Freikorps* soldiers– mostly right-wing veterans who volunteered to fight under their favorite former officers. On January 8, this small army of roughly three thousand began to reconquer Berlin, eventually reasserting control over the German capital.[42] This proved just the beginning of bloodletting across the country as army units from the Freikorps were reorganized into a new provisional army, the Reichswehr, and proceeded to suppress a series of revolts across the country on behalf of the new SPD government.[43]

In the midst of this paroxysm of violence, Germany and the Bolsheviks first established communications. Two channels developed over the next year and a half. The first were POW exchanges. Over the course of 1919 and 1920, the German Foreign Ministry and the Soviets opened two offices – one in Moscow, one in Berlin – to oversee efforts to exchange prisoners remaining from the First World War; this was also used to keep a diplomatic channel open in the absence of formal embassies.[44]

The second means of communication came in the form of Karl Radek. Radek, a senior Bolshevik and then Vice-Commissar of Foreign Affairs, had illegally entered the country to assist Communists trying to overthrow the German government, but had instead been caught and arrested in January 1919. He was initially held in Moabit Prison in Berlin (though, it should be noted, in comfortable conditions) before being moved to "house arrest" in the home of a senior German staff officer, a sign that the German military in particular prized his presence.[45] Here, he encountered General Hans von Seeckt, soon to become head of the Reichswehr. Seeckt sought a partnership with Moscow for his own reasons - shared antagonism to their mutual neighbor Poland and its ally France. Over the course of that spring, Radek and Seeckt both agreed to dispatch an unofficial envoy to Moscow. After several dangerous attempts to reach the Bolshevik government – the trip required traveling through several warzones – he eventually reached Trotsky to open talks about economic and military cooperation between Moscow and Berlin in August 1920.[46]

At that juncture, Soviet Russia was engaged in a major war against Poland.[47] As that conflict exploded from minor border clashes to full-fledged regional war, the common interests of Germany

[42] Harold J. Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 26-29.

[43] To be clear: the Provisional Reichswehr was the name initially adopted for the postwar German Army; it formally became the Reichswehr in 1919 following a law passed through the Reichstag, the German legislature. But then in 1921, a new bill technically changed the name of the German Army to the Reichsheer, with the Reichswehr become the term for the entire German military establishment - army and navy both. Despite all this confusion, most German sources at the time and most English-language sources since have used Reichswehr to refer to the German army between 1919 and 1935.

[44] Robert C. Williams, "Russian War Prisoners and Soviet-German Relations, 1918 to 1921," *Canadian Slavonic Papers,* 9:2 (Autumn 1967), pp. 270-271

[45] Gustav Hilger, Alfred G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations, 1918-1941* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1971), p. 73; Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, *Making Common Cause: German-Soviet Secret Relations, 1919-1922* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 60.

[46] The envoy in question was the former Turkish Minister of Defense Enver Pasha, who was then in hiding in Germany because he was accused of war crimes during the First World War. He had been brought to Germany by submarine at the war's end. As Seeckt had served with the Pasha during the war, he was involved in his covert asylum in Germany. See Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "Fellow travellers: Enver Pasha and the Bolshevik government 1918–1920," *Asian Affairs,* 13:3 (1982) for more.

[47] Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), p. 105.

and the Soviets seemed to align. Poland had been carved in part from German territory by the Treaty of Versailles, and in part from the former Russian Empire by events on the ground. Leaders in both Moscow and Berlin saw the destruction of Poland as the destruction of the new order they so reviled. In August 1920, as the Soviet-Polish war reached its climax in the Battle of Warsaw, Seeckt would secretly write to his senior officers that "Poland must and will be wiped off the map, with our help, through internal weakness and Russian action. Poland's fall will be that of one of the key columns supporting the Treaty of Versailles."[48] He also ordered that all Reichswehr officers maintain a pro-Soviet attitude and do nothing of any kind that might help Poland or its Allies, Britain or France.[49] The Reichswehr would soon go further, passing along intelligence and helping sell equipment to the Red Army for use against Poland, opening the door to further cooperation.[50]

Soviet ambitions during the conflict had skyrocketed: as General Mikhail Tukhachevsky, commanding the Red Army against Poland in 1920, wrote in orders of the day that August, "To the West! Over the corpse of White Poland lies the road to worldwide conflagration."[51] Both states were ambitious to achieve their own strategic aims through conflict – for Germany, to overturn the results of World War I, and for Soviet Russia, to spread worldwide revolution. Neither were strong enough to do so, however, in 1920. After the Soviets were driven back from Warsaw, they signed an unfavorable armistice with Poland the following year. Instead, between 1918 and 1923, both governments adopted more modest foreign policies based on demonstrations of their own weaknesses.[52] Nevertheless, the immediate aftermath of the First World War had made clear that many of the aims of the German military and the Soviet state were complementary.

In 1921, the two sides began tentative negotiations on broader cooperation.[53] In broad terms, Germany and the USSR had much to offer each other: they had been each other's most important trading partners before the war, largely exchanging Russian raw materials for German finished goods. With German firms in the process of being demilitarized by Allied inspection teams, Seeckt and other Reichswehr leaders sought to relocate industrial production of aircraft, armored vehicles, and chemical weapons to the safety of Soviet Russia. There, Germany could maintain production of important weapons systems in the event of a future war while keeping specialists employed and working on new technologies of war. For Trotsky, now heading the Red Army, partnership with Germany was a natural way to attract vitally needed capital, specialists and expertise to modernize the country's military

[48] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 49, citing Gottfried Schramm, "Basic Features of German Ostpolitik, 1918-1939," in *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia, and the World, 1939-1941*, ed. Bernd Wegner (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997), p. 23.

[49] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, pp. 38-39.

[50] "Report, Polish Military Mission to the Supreme Allied Command," 7 July 1920, Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego w Ameryce, New York, Box 3, Folder 2, 10-18, pp. 1-8; "Top Secret: To Comrade Lejava," 20 August 1920, Russian State Military Archive (Hereafter RGVA), f. 33987, op. 3, d. 52, l 430, reprinted in Yuri Dyakov and Tatyana Bushuyeva, eds., *The Red Army and the Wehrmacht: How the Soviets Militarized Germany and Paved the Way for Fascism, from the Secret Archives of the Former Soviet Union (*Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 32.

[51] Conan Fischer, *Europe between Democracy and Dictatorship: 1900 – 1945* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons Publishing, 2011), p. 124.

[52] In the Soviet case, this policy was known as "Socialism in One Country." Though the Soviet state continued to make efforts to export revolution abroad, it increasingly adopted a simultaneous policy of pursuing basic accommodation and trade with its capitalist adversaries; this was driven in no small measure by Soviet defeat in Poland, which some have seen as a "blessing in disguise" for the Soviet regime, as victory likely would have triggered a full-fledged European war. Thomas Fiddick, *Russia's Retreat from Poland: From Permanent Revolution to Peaceful Coexistence* (London: Macmillan Press, 1990), pp. 270-272.

[53] It should be noted that the Reichswehr pursued these talks with only sporadic oversight from the German government. Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann: Weimar's Greatest Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 386-387.

industry, which had been devastated by the Russian Civil War.[54]

The mechanism for this exchange would be the concessionary agreement: a contract whereby a foreign company leased and managed Soviet mines, farms, or factories under a profit-sharing arrangement with the Soviet state.[55] Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin signed the first such concessionary agreement with a German firm on July 21, 1921.[56] Over the course of the next twelve years, the Red Army's negotiators would work on 255 such concessionary or technical aid agreements with German firms to modernize factories, produce weapons systems, and even manage vast industrial farms on the Soviet behalf.[57] In a single year, one Soviet representative operating in Germany, for instance, signed agreements with Rheinmetall, Krupp, Mafai, Daimler-Benz and Linke-Hoffman for technical assistance or license contracts for the production of tanks, artillery, armored cars, aircraft, and rifles in Soviet factories, as well as the temporary hiring of German engineers and the training of Soviet engineers in German plants.[58] Nearly every major German industrial firm received contracts via Soviet representatives between 1921 and 1933.

The German military played a major role in these negotiations. Seeckt, as noted, intended to use the Soviet Union as a source of strategic depth and a home for military industries banned under the terms of Versailles. In 1921, the Reichswehr established a secret office, *Sondergruppe Russland* (Special Group Russia) to serve as a liaison office between the German Army and the Soviet state. In particular, their early task was to help find German firms willing to work in the Soviet Union, and help them through the negotiating process. Beginning in March 1922, the Reichswehr began directly investing in some of these projects, most notably a massive aircraft production complex outside of Moscow called Fili, and a complex of chemical weapons laboratories and factories near Samara known as Bersol.[59]

Though not all of these projects would meet the expectations of their architects (largely due to the logistical difficulties of operating in the chaos and poverty of post-civil war Russia) German capital investment did play a major role in the modernization of Soviet military industry. As Soviet military outlays rose dramatically in the late 1920s, German corporations benefited as the USSR's major source of machine tools and technical expertise. From 1928 to 1932 alone, Soviet tank production had risen from 26 vehicles a year to 3,121 in 1932.[60] Chemical weapons and aircraft witnessed similar staggering increases, too. This was, in part, a product of Soviet-German military cooperation. By the eve of the Second World War, a majority of the USSR's chemical weapons and tank production and a substantial percent of its aviation production depended on factories built, managed, or equipped by German firms during the first period of Soviet-German collaboration between 1921 and 1933.[61]

These corporate projects were sped along by changing international circumstances. In April 1922, Germany and the USSR normalized their relations in the Treaty of Rapallo – the first time the Soviet Union had normalized relations with any capitalist state.[62] This enabled the exchange of ambassadors

[54] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, pp. 43-46.
[55] Ibid, pp. 44-45.
[56] M.V. Klinova, Gos*udarstvo i Chastnyy Kapital v Poiskakh Pragmatichnogo Vzaimodeistviya* [The State and Private Capital Searching for Pragmatic Cooperation] (Moscow: Imemo Ran, 2009), p. 236.
[57] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain,* p. 46.
[58] I. Khalepsky, "Pismo, Tov. Voroshilovy [Letter to Comrade Voroshilov]," January 8, 1930, 33987-3c-350, l. 17, Russian State Military Archive, Moscow (Hereafter RGVA), p. 103.
[59] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 59.
[60] Ibid, p. 148.
[61] Ibid, p. 239.
[62] See Carol Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921–1922* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

and strengthened the economic partnership by provisions of capital from the German government.[63] Shortly thereafter, the Red Army and the Reichswehr began expanding direct military-to-military cooperation. Their aims were different, but once again, complimentary. Seeckt hoped to train officers on new technologies of war, develop weapon prototypes to maintain pace with rival states, and create doctrine to account for the rapid improvement of such technologies. Trotsky, then heading the Red Army, sought German assistance in professionalizing the Red Army's officer corps, as well as developing both doctrine and new technologies, particularly in the fields of aviation and chemical weapons, where the Germans were considered the world leaders.

The first element of this cooperation began in 1924 with the Fiebig Mission. Seeckt dispatched a small team of former German air force officers under Martin Fiebig to assist in the reorganization of the Red Army's new flight schools, as well as aid Soviet engineers and aircraft designers.[64] At the same time, the first of what would eventually total 156 Soviet senior officers arrived in Germany to participate in German maneuvers and training courses.[65] As trust grew, later that year, the Soviets also offered to establish a joint flight school near the southern Russian city of Lipetsk. There, German World War One aces might be able to retain their skills, while helping train the next generation of Soviet pilots.[66]

In 1925, the Germans agreed to lease the airbase at Lipetsk. Over the next three years, hundreds of pilots, mechanics, and observers arrived at this airbase, marking the rebirth of German air power inside the Soviet Union. Initially flying Fokker D-XIII biplanes, the Germans soon began signing contracts with six of the seven aircraft manufacturing firms still extant in Germany to develop a new generation of prototypes for testing at this airbase.[67] In exchange for allowing the Germans to carry out training, technical testing, and research and development, the Soviet Air Force received access to all of the technology present there, as well as the chance to train their own men alongside the Germans.

The Reichswehr and Red Army pursued similar collaboration on chemical warfare. In August 1926, the two sides signed a contract to establish a joint program in poison gas research and development. Initially established at Podosinki on the edge of Moscow, this facility soon hosted a team of German chemists and scientists who traveled to Russia under the cover of working for the Gesellschaft für landwirtschaftliche Artikel (the Society for Agricultural Products, or GELA).[68] Over the course of the fall, they experimented with the possibility of carpet bombing cities with poison gas, testing different methods of spraying chemical weapons from aircraft.[69] But as the proximity to Moscow soon became a problem, given the inaccuracy of some of the test runs, plans soon developed to move to a much

Press, 1993).

[63] Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee, 1920-1933: Wege Und Stationen einer ungewöhnlichen Zusammenarbeit* [The Reichswehr and the Red Army, 1920-1933: Paths and Facilities of an Unusual Collaboration] (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 1994), p. 76.

[64] Ibid, p. 110.

[65] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 71, citing "List of Commanders of the Red Army who were assigned to visit Germany between 1924 to 1936," June 1938, RGVA, f. 33987, op. 2, d. 218, l. 37-60 (available through the Yale-Russian Archives Project as no. 260), p. 45.

[66] Ibid, p. 127.

[67] Ibid, p. 80, citing "15 sego Iunia Ya predstavitelya Nemskoi Gruppi Lip." [On the 15th of June I took a Group of Russian Representatives to Lipetsk], 17 June 1925, RGVA, f. 4, op. 2, d. 14(1), p. 1

[68] Colonel Hermann von Der Lieth-Thomsen, "Erfahrungen und Eindrücke bei den Arbeiten der Gruppe Amberg" [Experiences and impressions on the work of the group Amberg], 17 December 1926, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau (Hereafter BA-MA), RH/2/2297/610-612, pp. 1-4.

[69] Hans Hackmack, "Schlussbericht 1926" [Final Report 1926], 21 December 1926, BA-MA, RH/2/2304/32-40, 1.

larger purpose built facility in Saratov Oblast code-named "Tomka."[70] There, the two sides attempted to develop new chemical weapons deployment techniques and tactics together, with a particular focus on strategic bombing.

The following year, another facility would be opened dedicated to armored warfare. Known as Kama, this facility would teach more than 200 Soviet and German students how to drive, command, and maintain armored vehicles over a series of summer courses.[71] It also played host to large delegations from the main German corporations working on armored warfare, notably Krupp, Rheinmetall, and Daimler.[72] They would work on developing the next generation of armored warfare prototypes, working in some instances alongside Soviet engineers, with whom there was technological exchange on a large scale. Giving some indication of the significance of the work conducted jointly, the head of mechanization within the Red Army, M.I. Gryaznov, wrote a report to the Politburo noting tersely that the following developments had been gained from the camp at Kama: "T-28: the use of a Krupp running suspension; in T-28 and T-35: the internal deployment of a team at the bow; in T-26, BT, T-28: welded chassis of German tanks, optical monitoring devices, gun sights, and the idea of combining electronic components with the machine gun."[73] This represented major changes to Soviet tank manufacture, and helped shape the design of the famed T-34, the main Soviet battle tank of World War II. The Germans, for their part, also borrowed from the Soviets. The most famous example was that of the three-man turret from the Soviet T-28, resulting in a major increase in the rate of fire and a drastic improvement of command-and-control.[74] As at Lipetsk, Podosinki and Tomka, the German aim was to develop officer expertise, update doctrine, and develop new technologies; the Soviet aim was to gain access to German technology and train large numbers of officers in its use.

By 1927, both Germany and the USSR had made progress towards their respective rearmament goals. That all of this work was explicitly aimed at undermining the extant international order was amply clear, especially as it applied to Poland. Poland had become the locus of French diplomacy to create a "cordon sanitaire" in Eastern Europe, intended to both contain German power and block the advance of Communism.[75] The Soviets had even raised the possibility of a joint war against Poland, with the aim of partitioning the country.[76] While the Germans demurred for the time being, Soviet and German students at the joint facilities did begin dressing up the dummies on their shooting ranges in Polish uniforms in a sign of their shared hostility to their mutual rival.[77]

Even as their partnership grew, leaders in both states remained fearful of public revelations. The German army both sought to conceal their activities from their own government while also fearing that the Allies might use their violations of Versailles as an excuse to occupy the entire country. For the Soviets, their role as vanguard of the world revolution would be tarnished by revelations of their

[70] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain,* p. 105.
[71] Ibid, p. 240.
[72] Ibid, p. 111.
[73] Bulat Sultanbekov, "Kama on the Volga."Bulat Sultanbekov and Sirena Khafizova, reprinted in "Kama na Volge" [Kama on the Volga], Gazirlar Avazi: Nauchno-Dokumentalniy Zhurnal ["Echo of the Centuries": Scientific-Documentary Journal], Issue 2, 2005, p. 37.
[74] Walter J. Spielberger, Die Motorisierung der deutschen Reichswehr 1920– 1935 [The Motorization of the German Reichswehr] (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1995), p. 282.
[75] For more, see Piotr Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
[76] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 40, citing Friedrich von Rabenau, *Hans von Seeckt: Aus Seinem Leben (1918-1936)* [Hans von Seeckt: From His Life] (Hass und Koehler, Leipzig, 1940), p. 307
[77] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 117, citing Klaus Müller, *So lebten und arbeiteten wir 1929 bis 1933 in Kama* [So we lived and worked at Kama, 1929-1933*]* (Unpublished Memoir, 1972), p. 29.

work alongside aristocratic German officers who had not long before suppressed revolutionaries with great violence.[78] But despite their best efforts, a series of public scandals between 1926 and 1928 revealed to the world significant elements of this work. The first proved the most damaging. On December 3, 1926, the Manchester Guardian published an expose under the headline: 'Cargoes of Munitions from Russia to Germany! Secret Plan between Reichswehr Officers and Soviets…"[79] The shocking news of weapons shipments from German-funded plants in Russia to the German military brought down the sitting German government and received extensive international coverage.

Here, then, was an opportunity for British and French statesmen to enforce the terms of Versailles together. But instead, the response of the international community was, in effect, nothing. In January 1927, just as the first revelations about the Junkers Scandal were becoming public, the Inter-Allied Control Commission was withdrawn from Germany at British request, its task rather obviously incomplete. Its final report declared that their mission had failed: Germany had never been fully disarmed, and had done all in its power to avoid fulfilling its obligations under the Treaty of Versailles.[80] Once again, any Anglo-French effort to cooperate in the enforcement of Versailles had failed. Underlining their failure to cooperate was the fact that the two sides perceived Germany entirely differently by 1927: the British as a potential partner, the French as a future enemy.

After a brief "political pause" caused by this scandal and a subsequent set of revelations in early 1928, cooperation resumed, and soon expanded even further, greenlit by Stalin in Moscow and Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann (a Nobel Peace Prize laureate) in Berlin.[81] By 1931, the peak of Soviet-German cooperation, there were hundreds of personnel at the three main bases and thousands more German engineers and scientists working at factories, laboratories, and construction sites across the USSR, helping to modernize Soviet military industry. By this juncture, the strategic consequences of more than a decade of military cooperation had become increasingly clear: Germany had now developed dozens of aircraft prototypes, new tanks and armored vehicles, and new military doctrine in numerous fields. It also had trained a new generation of officers prepared to oversee the dramatic expansion of the German Army when the day should come: by 1932, the German Army had in place plans to rapidly expand to 21 divisions and was increasingly prepared for national military industrial mobilization in the event of war.[82] Germany was rapidly approaching the military effectiveness of its rivals, particularly France and Poland. If the international order had been tied in significant measure to German disarmament as stated in the Treaty of Versailles, then it faced a serious challenge even before Adolf Hitler had come to power.

Hitler became chancellor in January 1933, helped, in many ways, by the work conducted in Russia. General Wernher von Blomberg, who assisted Hitler in coming to power and then served as the first Nazi Minister of Defense, declared that "I have seen in Russia what can be got out of the masses. My

[78] Josef Unschlikht, "Unschlikht to Stalin: 'Both We and They were Interested in Strict Secrecy," 31 December 1926, RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 151, l. 18-23 in Dyakov and Bushuyeva, *The Red Army and Wehrmacht,* pp. 57-62.

[79] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 93, citing "Cargoes of Munitions from Russia to Germany, Manchester Guardian," 3 December 1926, *Manchester Guardian*, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 31493 K096972, p. 1.

[80] See Barton Whaley, *Covert German Rearmament, 1919-1939: Deception and Misperception* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America), pp. 32-33.

[81] Sergey Gorlov, *Sovershenno Sekretno: Alianz Moskva-Berlin, 1920-1933* [Top Secret: Alliance Moscow-Berlin, 1920-1933] (Moscow: Olma Press, 2001), p. 224 ; Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee, 1920-1933: Wege Und Stationen einer ungewöhnlichen Zusammenarbeit* [The Reichswehr and the Red Army, 1920-1933: Paths and Facilities of an Unusual Collaboration] (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag GmbH, 1994), p. 153.

[82] Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007), p. 26.

time in the USSR, in 1929, turned me into a Nazi."[83] Seeckt, who had left the army for politics, also saw Hitler as the natural culmination of his own strategic efforts, telling Hitler that "our paths were different, but our aims were the same."[84] In any case, now in power, Hitler did not immediately end military cooperation with the USSR, despite his own hatred of communism. Most of the bases were closed after one more season of training work, once Hitler felt confident enough to restart training and technological testing in Germany. This marked the beginnings of the rapid deterioration of Soviet-German relations that would lead Stalin to pursue a new policy of 'collective security' aimed at constraining Germany -- though, it should be noted, Soviet envoys repeatedly extended offers of renewed military partnership to their German counterparts between 1934 and 1938, keeping their options open.[85]

Hitler, for his part, was entirely focused on his own preparations for a future war. As he told his cabinet days after becoming Chancellor, "The future of Germany depends exclusively and only upon the reconstruction of our military power. All other tasks must cede precedence to the task of rearmament."[86] As noted, the Reichswehr's work in the USSR meant that the German army already had the prototypes, tactics, and trained officers and engineers necessary to start a new arms race. Within two years, Hitler had tripled the size of the German army, re-established German air power in the form of the Luftwaffe, and reintroduced a program of national conscription.[87] There was broad awareness in Paris and London of the pace of German rearmament. But the French Third Republic continued to emphasize collective security and disarmament; it responded to the growing German threat by reducing the size of its army by 10 percent in 1933, and only embarked on serious defense measures in 1936.[88] In Great Britain, Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain ordered significant reduction in already-low defense spending, which was only gradually reversed as the prospects of war grew.[89]

The costs of those policies soon became clear. In 1936, when Hitler marched into the previously demilitarized Rhineland along France's borders in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, the chief of the French General Staff informed his government that if the government provided proper investment, the French military might be able to respond to German action in roughly a year. Instead, he pushed his government to seek a non-military solution, as he argued that the German Army was already the strongest in Europe.[90] The assessment of the British government was much the same. It was part of the reason behind its 1935 Naval Agreement with Hitler, and the more infamous Munich agreement three years later -- the perception that Hitler was now ahead in an arms race, and that he had to either be bought off, redirected or delayed until British and French rearmament measures caught up.[91] This

[83] Hermann Rauschning, *Makers of Destruction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1942), 25.
[84] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 236, citing John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power* (London, UK: MacMillan Press, 1967), fn. 118.
[85] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 178.
[86] Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007), p. 38.
[87] See Joe Maiolo, *Cry Havoc, The Arms Race and the Second World War, 1931-1941* (London: John Murray, 2011).
[88] M. Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27:4 (Oct., 1992), p. 660.
[89] Brian Bond and Williamson Murray, "The British Armed Forces, 1918-1939," pp. 98-130 in Alan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness, Volume II: The Interwar Period* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 103.
[90] Stephen A Schuker, "France and the Remilitarization of the Rhineland, 1936," *French Historical Studies*, 14 (1986), p. 322.
[91] Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the

was in large measure a product of the foundation laid by over a decade of secret rearmament work by the German military in the USSR.

Even as Soviet-German military collaboration completely reshaped the strategic landscape of Europe, British and French security cooperation remained minimal, largely limited to observing each other's maneuvers and occasional officer exchanges.[92] While there were some goodwill visits by the respective Chiefs of Staff in the 1930s, official staff-to-staff conversations started only in December 1935 following the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.[93] As late as April 1938, British Navy leadership had declared of military coordination with the French that "it seemed desirable that the conversations should be kept on as low a level as possible." Amazingly, it was even decided to keep from the French basic technical information on the German navy on the grounds that to do so would be to break faith with the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement.[94] Nor was it just the British navy who retreated from any firm commitments: new Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made clear to the French government of Edouard Daladier that Great Britain "could not be under any definite commitment to send even two divisions to France on the outbreak of war."[95] There was no real Anglo-French alliance to counter Hitler's increasingly aggressive foreign policy.

Only following the Munich Crisis of September 1938 did British and French leaders conclude war was becoming unavoidable; with that mutual recognition, Anglo-French military cooperation began to grow, albeit slowly. But if the war scare of September 1938 and the subsequent Munich Conference started Great Britain and France down the path towards coordination and cooperation, it did much the same for Germany and the Soviet Union. While some scholars have argued that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a hasty improvisation of August 1939, it now seems much more likely that mutual Soviet and German dissatisfaction after the Munich Conference had begun to draw them together almost a year earlier. Hitler had been denied a short, victorious war, while Stalin was irked by his exclusion from the conference, particularly as the Soviet Union had a defensive pact with Czechoslovakia. In December 1938, German and Soviet diplomats began a new round of trade talks that included the possibility of renewed military collaboration.[96]

Those talks, driven by the Soviets, stalled until March 1939, largely because Hitler still hoped for a pact with neighboring Poland against the USSR. When Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, Neville Chamberlain responded two weeks later by offering a military alliance to Poland as a guarantee of Polish independence and sovereignty. The French government of Eduard Daladier agreed to endorse the British proposal. The Polish government accepted the offer with alacrity, clearly bringing to the end of any prospect of a German-Polish pact as Hitler had hoped. Three days later, Hitler ordered plans for a full-scale invasion of Poland, with the attack to begin no later than October 1.[97] Soviet neutrality - or even cooperation - would be critical to the success of the invasion of Poland. In his mind, a pact with Moscow might even deter Britain and France from honoring their commitment to Poland. As such, later that month, Hitler had diplomats inform the Soviet government

1930s," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Fall, 2008), pp. 148-181, p. 150.

[92] Martin S. Alexander and William J. Philpott, "The entente cordiale and the next war: Anglo-French views on future military cooperation, 1928–1939," Intelligence and National Security, 13:1, 53-84, pp. 58-59.

[93] Ibid, p. 60.

[94] Committee of Imperial Defence, "Minutes of the 238th Meeting," 13 May 1938, The National Archives (UK), CAB-53-9-4, 98, pp. 5-6.

[95] Ibid, pp. 5-6.

[96] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 202.

[97] Esmonde M. Robertson, *Hitler's Pre-war Policy and Military Plans, 1933-1939* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1963), p. 165.

that he believed "a new Rapallo stage should be achieved in Soviet-German relations."[98] Negotiations for an economic agreement resumed in May.

From March 1939, the British and French finally began to cooperate on a significant scale. They began sharing intelligence, planning, and some military technology.[99] By July 1939 there was 'agreement with the French on the broad lines of policy for the conduct of a war," the British Committee of Imperial Defence recorded.[100] But there were still limits: French politicians had been excluded from all strategic discussions because "the attitude of the French General Staff was to withhold from their politicians all strategical plans and policy against the possibility of leakage," in the British view.[101] On one point there was general if reluctant agreement: both London and Paris wanted to prevent a new Soviet-German alignment. In part with this end in mind, the British and French governments reluctantly began their own approaches to Moscow in the summer of 1939. But by this juncture, Stalin told his closest advisers, he was "manifestly dissatisfied with England."[102] He believed the British and French intended to embroil the USSR in a war in the Soviet Union and let the Germans and Soviets bleed each other white. He preferred for the fighting to take place in Western Europe with the USSR neutral, and possibly able to intervene if and when it chose to do so. That would likely require some sort of agreement with Germany, however, turning Hitler westward.

On August 12, 1939, a long-awaited British and French delegation arrived in Moscow to open talks on military cooperation. Stalin was not pleased with the low rank of the negotiators or the possible terms they brought. He was already inclined to seek partnership with Berlin in any case, though even in that scenario, the British and French delegates would have the useful role of driving up the bargaining price that Hitler might be willing to pay for an agreement with the USSR. That very night, Stalin informed the Politburo he intended to open political negotiations with Germany.[103]

Less than two weeks later, German Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop would arrive in Berlin to finalize a political and military agreement with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. The "Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the USSR," better known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, partitioned Eastern Europe between Berlin and Moscow. It opened the door to vast economic exchange.[104] And it also renewed elements of earlier military cooperation, including technological and intelligence collaboration, and even the opening of a German naval base on Soviet soil near Murmansk.[105]

This new partnership with Stalin in hand, Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland to begin on September 1, 1939. To his surprise, despite his agreement with Stalin, Great Britain and France

[98] Ivan Maisky, *The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St. James, 1932-1932,* ed. Gabriel Gorodetsky, trans. Tatiana Sorokina and Oliver Ready (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 203.

[99] Alexander and Philpott, "The entente cordiale and the next war," p. 62.

[100] Committee of Imperial Defence, "Minutes of the 309th Meeting," 19 July 1939, The National Archives (UK), CAB-53-11-7, 165, 9-10.

[101] Committee of Imperial Defence, "Minutes of the 309th Meeting," 19 July 1939, The National Archives (UK), CAB-53-11-7, 165, 9-10. Both sides eventually agreed to establish a "Supreme War Council," upon which would sit the Prime Ministers and one other minister, but this was hardly the sort of institutional cooperation that would be developed between the US and UK in the form of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in early 1942. Committee of Imperial Defence, "Minutes of the 309th Meeting," 19 July 1939, The National Archives (UK), CAB-53-11-7, 165, pp. 20-21.

[102] Ibid, p. 179.

[103] Steven Kotkin, *Stalin, Volume II: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), p. 657.

[104] See Edward E. Ericson III, *Feeding the German Eagle: Soviet Economic Aid to Nazi Germany, 1933-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999) for the economic consequences of the Soviet-German agreement and subsequent negotiations.

[105] Tobias Philbin, *The Lure of Neptune: German-Soviet Naval Collaboration and Ambitions, 1919-1941* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), p. 99.

honored their pledges to Poland and declared war – though they would provide little help as German forces rapidly conquered the western half of the country. On September 17, Soviet forces commenced their own invasion from the east, waiting just long enough to avoid a Anglo-French declaration of war against them.

For most of the next two years, the Soviet Union and Germany resumed their earlier military cooperation. It came in several forms. First, there was economic assistance; by early 1940, the two states – increasingly cut off from world trade by the war they had unleashed – had become increasingly interdependent. By 1940, the Germans had pledged to dispatch huge quantities of industrial goods, machine tools, weapons systems, and entire warships to Moscow in exchange for similarly gargantuan totals of desperately-needed raw materials. Stalin pledged to deliver a million tons of grain, nearly a million tons of oil, and 800,000 tons of iron, along with strategically significant quantities of chrome, copper, cobalt, molybdenum, nickel, tin, phosphates and wolfram.[106] With such large scale economic exchange came intelligence, information, and operational assistance between the two powers. The Soviets assisted in the German bombing campaign against Polish cities, coordinated arrest lists in conquered territories, and aided each other's ships at sea. The Germans were even permitted to reopen a military base on Soviet soil -- a naval facility, located near Murmansk, which was established in November 1939.[107]

But following the defeat of Poland, and the subsequent shock collapse of France in June 1940, the partnership began to unravel. Long dependent on mutual antipathy to the international order and its architects, victory eliminated the main motivation that had lain behind Soviet-German interwar cooperation. Efforts were made to find a new basis for cooperation: in November 1940, Hitler held a summit in Berlin where he attempted to convince Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov to join an anti-British alliance and enter the war in the west as a full German ally. The Soviet price for such an alliance proved too high for Hitler, however, and a month later, he ordered preparations begun for an invasion of the Soviet Union.[108] On 22 June, Germany would shatter two decades of on-again, off-again military partnership as it invaded the USSR. More than thirty million soldiers and civilians would die between Berlin and Moscow over the next four years.

What role did the Anglo-French and Soviet-German partnerships play in the ultimate outbreak of the Second World War in Europe? In its simplest form, the Soviet-German partnership had been more successful in undermining the international order than British and French military cooperation had been at maintaining it.

The interwar period witnessed many types of military cooperation: information sharing, technology exchange, joint training, joint operations, and in its most intimate form – the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff – joint strategic planning and execution on a global scale. But by and large, until the war began, such cooperation was carried out more effectively by opponents of the existing order than by its proponents. In particular, Germany and the USSR developed a close partnership twice: between 1921 and 1933, then again from 1939 and 1941. Both were driven almost entirely by their shared animus against the existing order, its rules, and its leading powers.

Why was military cooperation between two groups as ideologically opposed as Bolshevik revolutionaries and the Reichswehr's aristocratic officer corps so much more effective than

[106] *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office,* Raymond James Sontag & James Stuart Beddie (eds.) (Washington DC: Department of State, 1948), pp. 260-264.
[107] Philbin, *The Lure of Neptune*, p. 99.
[108] Johnson, *Faustian Bargain*, p. 131.

cooperation between democratic leaders who shared far more in terms of experience and worldview? Simply put, the primary driver of cooperation throughout the interwar period was a shared antagonist. The British Foreign Office viewed the world primarily from the view of their empire, while the French were more inclined to look westward towards the Rhine. For Britain, there was a dangerous constellation of possible adversaries, including but not limited to Japan, Italy, and Germany. Efforts to buy off, delay, or deter one or more of these adversaries were at the heart of British plans. By contrast, the French went back and forth on possible cooperation with the Italians, seeing Germany as the true existential threat. Differences of view between London and Paris was exacerbated by fundamental differences in governance and historical mistrust.

By contrast, Reichswehr and Red Army personnel rarely wavered on their mutual antipathy to Poland. They proved capable of working quite closely in the 1920s and early 1930s. Cooperation was not often discussed at the strategic level, in part because Germany lacked the means to wage even a limited war until 1932. But at the local level – the bases in the USSR – the two sides achieved many of their respective aims together, despite the vast ideological and cultural gulf that separated their officers and men. The reason for it was simple: they both saw advantage in the destruction of Poland, and beyond Poland, the defeat of the dominance of the victors of the First World War.

The first period of partnership provided the tools to accomplish the first end - the joint partition of Poland - while the second period of collaboration played a major role in the defeat of France and near-defeat of Britain in 1940. Indeed, the greatest danger to world security was that the Soviets and Germans would remain allied. In the words of American planners in 1940, their continuing partnership alongside existing ties with Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan "presents us with perhaps the worst situation which might arise within any reasonable bounds of probability."[109] But as the last remnants of the old order were destroyed, the mutual antipathies that had fuelled two decades of on-again, off-again cooperation turned to ever-growing mutual distrust. Ultimately, the two erstwhile partners would turn on each other. The flames of the worldwide conflagration they had together sparked would eventually engulf much of Europe.

[109] "Memorandum for the Chief of Plans Section," 12 December 1939, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA, Matthew Ridgway Collection, 57-6, 1-5, p. 1.