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**The Meaning
of the
Soviet-German
Non-Aggression
Pact**

By V. M. MOLOTOV

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This pamphlet is the full text of the speech of V. M. Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, before the August 31, 1939, meeting of the fourth special session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.



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The Meaning of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact

By V. M. MOLOTOV

COMRADES: Since the third session of the Supreme Soviet the international situation has shown no change for the better. On the contrary, it has become even more tense. The steps taken by various governments to put an end to this state of tension have obviously proved inadequate. They met with no success. This is true of Europe.

Nor has there been any change for the better in East Asia. Japanese troops continue to occupy the principal cities and a considerable part of the territory of China. Nor is Japan refraining from hostile acts against the U.S.S.R. Here, too, the situation has changed in the direction of further aggravation.

In view of this state of affairs, the conclusion of a pact of non-aggression between the U.S.S.R. and Germany is of tremendous positive value, eliminating the danger of war between Germany and the Soviet Union. In order more fully to define the significance of this pact, I must first dwell on the negotiations which have taken place in recent months in Moscow with representatives of Great Britain and France. As you know, Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations for conclusion of a pact of mutual assistance against aggression in Europe began as far back as April.

True, the initial proposals of the British Government were, as you know, entirely unacceptable. They ignored the prime requisites for such negotiations—they ignored the principle of reciprocity and equality of obligations. In spite of this, the

Soviet Government did not reject the negotiations and in turn put forward its own proposals. We were mindful of the fact that it was difficult for the Governments of Great Britain and France to make an abrupt change in their policy from an unfriendly attitude towards the Soviet Union which had existed quite recently to serious negotiations with the U.S.S.R. based on the condition of equality of obligations.

However, the subsequent negotiations were not justified by their results. The Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations lasted four months. They helped to elucidate a number of questions. At the same time they made it clear to the representatives of Great Britain and France that the Soviet Union has to be seriously reckoned with in international affairs. But these negotiations encountered insuperable obstacles. The trouble, of course, did not lie in individual "formulations" or in particular clauses in the draft of the pact. No, the trouble was much more serious.

The conclusion of a pact of mutual assistance against aggression would have been of value only if Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union had arrived at agreement as to definite military measures against the attack of an aggressor. Accordingly, for a certain period not only political but also military negotiations were conducted in Moscow with representatives of the British and French armies. However, nothing came of the military negotiations.

They encountered the difficulty that Poland, which was to be jointly guaranteed by Great Britain, France and the U.S.S.R., rejected military assistance on the part of the Soviet Union. Attempts to overcome the objections of Poland met with no success. More, the negotiations showed that Great Britain was not anxious to overcome these objections of Poland, but on the contrary encouraged them. It is clear that, such being the attitude of the Polish Government and its principal ally towards military assistance on the part of the Soviet Union in the event of aggression, the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations could not bear fruit. After this it became

clear to us that the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations were doomed to failure.

What have the negotiations with Great Britain and France shown? The Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations have shown that the position of Great Britain and France is marked by howling contradictions throughout. Judge for yourselves. On the one hand, Great Britain and France demanded that the U.S.S.R. should give military assistance to Poland in case of aggression. The U.S.S.R., as you know, was willing to meet this demand, provided that the U.S.S.R. itself received like assistance from Great Britain and France. On the other hand, precisely Great Britain and France brought Poland on the scene, who resolutely declined military assistance on the part of the U.S.S.R. Just try under such circumstances to reach an agreement regarding mutual assistance, when assistance on the part of the U.S.S.R. is declared beforehand to be unnecessary and intrusive.

Further, on the one hand, Great Britain and France offered to guarantee the Soviet Union military assistance against aggression in return for like assistance on the part of the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, they hedged round their assistance with such reservations regarding indirect aggression as could convert this assistance into a myth and provide them with formal legal excuse to evade giving assistance and place the U.S.S.R. in a position of isolation in the face of the aggressor. Just try to distinguish between such a "pact of mutual assistance" and a pact of more or less camouflaged chicanery.

Further, on the one hand Great Britain and France stressed the importance and gravity of negotiations for a pact of mutual assistance and demanded that the U.S.S.R. should treat the matter most seriously and settle very rapidly all questions relating to the pact. On the other hand, they themselves displayed extreme dilatoriness and an absolutely light-minded attitude towards the negotiations, entrusting them to individuals of secondary importance who were not invested with adequate powers.

It is enough to mention that the British and French military missions came to Moscow without any definite powers and without the right to conclude any military convention.

More, the British military mission arrived in Moscow without any mandate at all (*general laughter*), and it was only on the demand of our military mission that on the very eve of the breakdown of the negotiations they presented written credentials. But even these credentials were of the vaguest kind, that is, credentials without proper weight. Just try to distinguish between this light-minded attitude towards the negotiations on the part of Great Britain and France and frivolous make-believe at negotiations designed to discredit the whole business of negotiations.

Such are the intrinsic contradictions in the attitude of Great Britain and France towards the negotiations with the U.S.S.R. which led to their breakdown.

What is the root of these contradictions in the position of Great Britain and France? In a few words, it can be put as follows: On the one hand, the British and French Governments fear aggression, and for that reason they would like to have a pact of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union provided it helped strengthen them, Great Britain and France.

But, on the other hand, the British and French Governments are afraid that the conclusion of a real pact of mutual assistance with the U.S.S.R. may strengthen our country, the Soviet Union, which, it appears, does not answer their purpose. It must be admitted that these fears of theirs outweighed other considerations. Only in this way can we understand the position of Poland, who acts on the instructions of Great Britain and France.

I shall now pass to the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact.

The decision to conclude a non-aggression pact between the U.S.S.R. and Germany was adopted after military negotiations with France and Great Britain had reached an impasse owing to the insuperable differences I have mentioned. As the negotiations had shown that the conclusion of a pact of mu-

tual assistance could not be expected, we could not but explore other possibilities of ensuring peace and eliminating the danger of war between Germany and the U.S.S.R. If the British and French governments refused to reckon with this, that is their affair. It is our duty to think of the interests of the Soviet people, the interests of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. (*Prolonged applause.*) All the more since we are firmly convinced that the interests of the U.S.S.R. coincide with the fundamental interests of the peoples of other countries. (*Applause.*) But that is only one side of the matter.

Another circumstance was required before the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact could come into existence. It was necessary that in her foreign policy Germany should make a turn towards good-neighborly relations with the Soviet Union.

Only when this second condition was fulfilled, only when it became clear to us that the German government desired to change its foreign policy so as to secure an improvement of relations with the U.S.S.R., was the basis found for the conclusion of a Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. Everybody knows that during the last six years, ever since the National-Socialists [Nazis] came into power, political relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R. have been strained. Everybody also knows that despite the differences of outlook and political systems, the Soviet Government endeavored to maintain normal business and political relations with Germany. There is no need now to revert to individual incidents of these relations during recent years, which are well known to you.

I must, however, recall the explanation of our foreign policy given several months ago at the Eighteenth Party Congress. Speaking of our tasks in the realm of foreign policy, Stalin defined our attitude to other countries as follows:

"1. To continue the policy of peace and of strengthening business relations with all countries;

"2. To be cautious and not to allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed

to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them." *

As you see, Stalin declared in conclusion that the Soviet Union stands for strengthening business relations with all countries. But at the same time Stalin warned us against warmongers who are anxious in their own interests to involve our country in conflicts with other countries.

Exposing the hullabaloo raised in the British, French and American press about Germany's "plans" for the seizure of the Soviet Ukraine, Stalin said:

"It looks as if the object of this suspicious hullabaloo was to incense the Soviet Union against Germany, to poison the atmosphere and to provoke a conflict with Germany without any visible grounds." *

As you see, Stalin hit the nail on the head when he exposed the machinations of the Western European politicians who were trying to set Germany and the Soviet Union at loggerheads.

It must be confessed that there were some short-sighted people even in our own country who, carried away by over-simplified anti-fascist propaganda, forgot about this provocative work of our enemies. Mindful of this, Stalin even then suggested the possibility of other, unhostile, good-neighborly relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R. It can now be seen that on the whole Germany correctly understood these statements of Stalin and drew practical conclusions from them. (*Laughter.*) The conclusion of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact shows that Stalin's historic prevision has been brilliantly confirmed. (*Loud applause.*)

In the spring of this year the German Government made a proposal to resume commercial and credit negotiations. Soon after, the negotiations were resumed. By making mutual concessions, we succeeded in reaching an agreement. As you know,

* Joseph Stalin, *From Socialism to Communism in the Soviet Union*, International Publishers, New York.

this agreement was signed on August 19. This was not the first commercial and credit agreement concluded with Germany under her present government.

But this agreement differs favorably not only from the 1935 agreement but from all previous agreements, not to mention the fact that we had no economic agreement equally advantageous with Great Britain, France or any other country. The agreement is advantageous to us because its credit conditions (a seven-year credit) enables us to order a considerable additional quantity of such equipment as we need. By this agreement, the U.S.S.R. undertakes to sell to Germany a definite quantity of our surplus raw materials for her industry, which fully answers the interests of the U.S.S.R.

Why should we reject such an advantageous economic agreement? Surely not to please those who are generally averse to the Soviet Union having advantageous economic agreements with other countries? And it is clear that the commercial and credit agreement with Germany is fully in accord with the economic interests and defense needs of the Soviet Union. This agreement is fully in accord with the decision of the Eighteenth Congress of our Party, which approved Stalin's statement as to the need for "strengthening business relations with all countries."

When, however, the German government expressed the desire to improve political relations as well, the Soviet government had no grounds for refusing. This gave rise to the question of concluding a non-aggression pact.

Voices are now being heard testifying to the lack of understanding of the most simple reasons for the improvement of political relations between the Soviet Union and Germany which has begun. For example, people ask with an air of innocence how the Soviet Union could consent to improve political relations with a state of a fascist type. "Is that possible?" they ask. But they forget that this not a question of our attitude towards the internal regime of another country but of the foreign relations between the two states. They forget that we hold the position of not interfering in the internal

affairs of other countries and, correspondingly, of not tolerating interference in our own internal affairs. Furthermore, they forget the important principle of our foreign policy which was formulated by Stalin at the Eighteenth Party Congress as follows:

"We stand for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries. That is our position; and we shall adhere to this position as long as these countries maintain like relations with the Soviet Union, and as long as they make no attempt to trespass on the interests of our country." *

The meaning of these words is quite clear: the Soviet Union strives to maintain good-neighborly relations with all non-Soviet countries provided that these countries maintain a like attitude towards the Soviet Union. In our foreign policy towards non-Soviet countries, we have always been guided by Lenin's well-known principle of the peaceful co-existence of the Soviet state and of capitalist countries. A large number of examples might be cited to show how this principle has been carried out in practice. But I will confine myself to only a few.

We have, for instance, a non-aggression and neutrality treaty with fascist Italy ever since 1933. It has never occurred to anybody as yet to object to this treaty. And that is natural. Inasmuch as this pact meets the interests of the U.S.S.R., it is in accord with our principle of the peaceful co-existence of the U.S.S.R. and the capitalist countries. We have non-aggression pacts also with Poland and certain other countries whose semi-fascist system is known to all. These pacts have not given rise to any misgivings either. Perhaps it would not be superfluous to mention the fact that we have not even treaties of this kind with certain other non-fascist bourgeois-democratic countries, with Great Britain herself, for instance. But that is not our fault.

* Joseph Stalin, *From Socialism to Communism in the Soviet Union*. International Publishers, New York.

Since 1926, the political basis of our relations with Germany has been the treaty of neutrality which was already extended by the present German government in 1933. This treaty of neutrality remains in force to this day. The Soviet government considered it desirable even before this to take a further step towards improving political relations with Germany, but the circumstances have been such that this has become possible only now.

It is true that it is not a pact of mutual assistance that is in question, as in the case of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, but only of a non-aggression pact. Nevertheless, conditions being what they are, it is difficult to overestimate the international importance of the Soviet-German pact. That is why we favored the visit of Von Ribbentrop, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Moscow.

August 23, 1939, the day the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact was signed, is to be regarded as a date of great historical importance. The Non-Aggression Pact between the U.S.S.R. and Germany marks a turning point in the history of Europe, and not only of Europe. Only yesterday the German fascists were pursuing a foreign policy hostile to us. Yes, only yesterday we were enemies in the sphere of foreign relations. Today, however, the situation has changed and we are enemies no longer.

The art of politics in the sphere of foreign relations does not consist in increasing the number of enemies for one's country. On the contrary, the art of politics in this sphere is to reduce the number of such enemies and to make the enemies of yesterday good neighbors, maintaining peaceable relations with one another. (*Applause.*)

History has shown that enmity and wars between our country and Germany have been to the detriment of our countries, not to their benefit. Russia and Germany suffered most of all countries in the war of 1914-1918. Therefore the interests of the peoples of the Soviet Union and Germany stand in need of peaceable relations. The Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact

puts an end to enmity between Germany and the U.S.S.R. and this is in the interests of both countries. The fact that our outlooks and political systems differ must not and cannot be obstacles to the establishment of good political relations between both states. Just as like differences are not impediments to good political relations which the U.S.S.R. maintains with other non-Soviet capitalist countries. Only enemies of Germany and the U.S.S.R. can strive to create and foment enmity between the peoples of these countries. We have always stood for amity between the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and Germany, for the growth and development of friendship between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the German people. (*Loud and prolonged applause.*)

The chief importance of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact lies in the fact that the two largest states of Europe have agreed to put an end to the enmity between them, to eliminate the menace of war and live at peace one with the other, making narrower thereby the zone of possible military conflicts in Europe. Even if military conflicts in Europe should prove unavoidable, the scope of hostilities will now be restricted. Only the instigators of a general European war can be displeased by this state of affairs, those who under the mask of pacifism would like to ignite a general conflagration in Europe.

The Soviet-German Pact has been the object of numerous attacks in the English, French and American press. Conspicuous in these efforts are certain "Socialist" newspapers, diligent servitors of "their" national capitalism, servitors of gentlemen who pay them decently. (*Laughter.*) It is clear that the real truth cannot be expected from gentry of this calibre. Attempts are being made to spread the fiction that the signing of the Soviet-German Pact disrupted the negotiations with England and France on a mutual assistance pact. This lie has already been nailed in the interview given by Voroshilov.

In reality, as you know, the very reverse is true. The Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany, for one

thing, in view of the fact that the negotiations with France and England had run into insuperable differences and ended in failure through the fault of the ruling classes of England and France.

Further, they go so far as to blame us because the pact, if you please, contains no clause providing for its denunciation in case one of the signatories is drawn into war under conditions which might give someone an external pretext to qualify this particular country as an aggressor. But they forget for some reason that such a clause and such a reservation is not to be found either in the Polish-German non-aggression pact signed in 1934 and annulled by Germany in 1939 against the wishes of Poland, or in the Anglo-German declaration on non-aggression signed only a few months ago. The question arises: Why cannot the U.S.S.R. allow itself the same privilege as Poland and England allowed themselves long ago?

Finally there are wiseacres who construe from the pact more than is written in it. (*Laughter.*) For this purpose, all kinds of conjectures and hints are mooted in order to cast doubt on the pact in one or another country. But all this merely speaks for the hopeless impotence of the enemies of the pact who are exposing themselves more and more as enemies of both the Soviet Union and Germany, striving to provoke war between these countries.

In all this, we find fresh corroboration of Stalin's warning that we must be particularly cautious with warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them. We must be on guard against those who see an advantage to themselves in bad relations between the U.S.S.R. and Germany, in enmity between them, and who do not want peace and good neighborly relations between Germany and the Soviet Union.

We can understand why this policy is being pursued by out-and-out imperialists. But we cannot ignore such facts as the especial zeal with which some leaders of the Socialist Parties of Great Britain and France have recently distinguished them-

selves in this matter. And these gentlemen have really gone the whole hog, and no mistake. (*Laughter.*) These people positively demand that the U.S.S.R. get itself involved in war against Germany on the side of Great Britain. Have not these rabid warmongers taken leave of their senses? (*Laughter.*) Is it really difficult for these gentlemen to understand the purpose of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, on the strength of which the U.S.S.R. is not obliged to involve itself in war either on the side of Great Britain against Germany or on the side of Germany against Great Britain? Is it really difficult to understand that the U.S.S.R. is pursuing and will continue to pursue its own independent policy, based on the interests of the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and only their interests? (*Prolonged applause.*)

If these gentlemen have such an uncontrollable desire to fight, let them do their own fighting without the Soviet Union. We would see what fighting stuff they are made of.

In our eyes, in the eyes of the entire Soviet people, these are just as much enemies of peace as all other instigators of war in Europe. Only those who desire a grand new slaughter, a new holocaust of nations, only they want to set the Soviet Union and Germany at loggerheads, they are the only people who want to destroy the incipient restoration of good-neighborly relations between the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and Germany.

The Soviet Union signed a pact with Germany, fully assured that peace between the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and Germany is in the interests of all peoples, in the interests of universal peace. Every sincere supporter of peace will realize the truth of this. This pact corresponds to the fundamental interests of the working people of the Soviet Union and cannot weaken our vigilance in defense of these interests. This pact is backed by firm confidence in our real forces, in their complete preparedness to meet any aggression against the U.S.S.R. (*Loud applause.*)

This pact, like the unsuccessful Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, proves that no important questions of international

relations, and questions of Eastern Europe even less, can be settled without the active participation of the Soviet Union, that any attempts to shut out the Soviet Union and decide such questions behind its back are doomed to failure. (*Applause.*)

The Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact spells a new turn in the development of Europe, a turn towards improvement of relations between the two largest states of Europe. This pact not only eliminates the menace of war with Germany, narrows down the zone of possible hostilities in Europe, and serves thereby the cause of universal peace: it must open to us new possibilities of increasing our strength, of further consolidation of our positions, of further growth of the influence of the Soviet Union on international developments.

There is no need to dwell here on the separate clauses of the pact. The Council of People's Commissars has reason to hope that the pact will meet with your approval as a document of cardinal importance to the U.S.S.R. (*Applause.*)

The Council of People's Commissars submits the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact to the Supreme Soviet and proposes that it be ratified. (*Loud and prolonged applause. All rise.*)

* * *

On the conclusion of Molotov's statement, the joint sitting of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., on a motion of Deputy Shcherbakov, unanimously adopted the following resolution:

"Having heard the statement of Comrade V. M. Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, on the ratification of the Non-Aggression Pact between the U.S.S.R. and Germany, the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. resolves:

- "1. To approve the foreign policy of the Government.
- "2. To ratify the Non-Aggression Pact between the U.S.S.R. and Germany, concluded in Moscow, August 23, 1929."