

THE ANNEXATION OF LITHUANIA BY SOVIET UNION

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To its great territorial disadvantage, Lithuania is a country situated geographically between two giants: Germany and Russia. From the thirteenth century on, when the Lithuanian state came into being, up to the present her political status has depended upon the strength of these two states. In the fourteenth century Lithuania emerged as the strongest political entity in Northeastern Europe. This was possible largely because at that time Russia was still two centuries away from achieving political unity. Consequently, Germany's early Drang nach Osten, advanced by the Teutonic knights, was successfully checked at the battle of Tannenberg. During the eighteenth century Russia and Germany became strong and unified states. Their combined action, coupled with the internal disorders of the so-called Lithuanian-Polish kingdom, resulted in the Russian occupation of a large part of Lithuanian territory.

When in 1918, Russia and Germany were two states completely exhausted by the long and devastating world war, the circumstances were again favorable for Lithuanian independence. On February 16, of the same year, the Lithuanian National Council, in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, issued a Declaration of Independence, which fired the whole nation to take up arms to assert its claims to freedom. Its efforts were not in vain. On July 12, 1920, Lithuania and Soviet Russia signed a treaty of peace which unconditionally recognized Lithuanian sovereignty and independence. Six years later, wishing to strengthen the effect of that treaty, both countries signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression which re-asserted the absolute sovereignty and territorial integrity of the contracting parties.

In the late 1930's, however, just as at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, Germany and Russia greatly increased their military potential, and both were looking for an easy prey for a major showdown, a fact that everybody realized as inevitable. This, of course, as the experience in the past indicated, meant trouble for Lithuania.

On August 23, 1939, Messers, Ribbentrop and Mo-lotov signed in Moscow a Treaty of Non-Agression, which contained a secret additional protocol whereby Lithuania was assigned to the German sphere of influence. One month later, upon the Soviet request, Lithuania was transferred to the Soviet sphere. This was done in the form of another secret protocol attached to the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty which finally settled the partition of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. From the German Foreign Office archives, captured by the American military authorities during the war, it is evident that Hitler agreed to give Lithuania to Stalin as a bargain in return for the additional territory in Poland which was formerly agreed to be within the Soviet jurisdiction.

Thus, the modern dictators followed the example of their earlier counterparts, the Czars and kings, in dividing the spoils. The fate of Lithuania was decided without her participation in, or knowledge of, the decision. But even had she known about this secret deal at the time it was made, there was no chance that she could have escaped what had become, in view of the then existing political situation in Europe, inevitable.

The logical outcome of the German-Soviet agreements was the Soviet-Lithuanian Treaty of Mutual Assistance, by which the Lithuanian government was forced by the Kremlin to permit the Soviets to establish military bases (garrisoned 20,000 soldiers) in Lithuania. The treaty also provided for the return of the city of Vilnius with its adjoining area to Lithuania,* and an agreement that "The two contracting parties undertake not to conclude any alliances nor to participate in coalitions directed against either of the contracting parties". The Lithuanian government tried every means to avoid the signing of this treaty. Realizing, however, that there was no help from the outside and that the Soviets, if their demands were rejected, would undoubtedly invade the country, the Lithuanian Council of Ministers reluctantly accepted its unfavorable terms.

* The city of Vilnius is the historical capital of Lithuania. In 1920, according to the terms of the Treaty of Peace with the Soviet Union, Vilnius and the adjoining regions were to be a part of the territory of the Lithuanian state. Several

months later, on October 7, 1920, Poland and Lithuania signed a treaty whereby Poland recognized Vilnius and its adjoining regions as an integral part of the Lithuanian territory. One day later, however, armed Polish forces occupied Vilnius and most of the so-called Vilnius region. Afterwards, the Vilnius dispute was marked by a long battle between Poland and Lithuania in the League of Nations. When the League finally decided that a plebiscite should be held in the disputed area in order to decide to whom it should belong, Poland refused to abide by the League's decision..

The period following the Mutual Assistance Treaty was marked by repeated official Soviet declarations that Russia had no intentions of infringing upon Lithuanian sovereignty and independence and that the only purpose of the Soviet troops in Lithuania was to guarantee her security. But this did not last very long. With the beginning of the new year, the Kremlin's tone changed considerably. The Lithuanian government was soon accused of kidnapping and murdering Soviet soldiers, and all proposals on the part of the Lithuanian government to investigate the charges by impartial commissions were rejected by Moscow. Molotov made the charges but refused to give any evidence concerning the allegedly kidnapped or missing soldiers. As a consequence of the charges in early June of 1940, Lithuanian Prime Minister Merkys was asked to come to Moscow to discuss Soviet-Lithuanian relations which were growing worse every day. While the Lithuanian authorities were carefully gathering evidence which proved that all the Soviet charges were completely groundless, Molotov accused Mr. Merkys of personally instigating a military alliance among the three Baltic states against the Soviet Union. The grounds for the new charge were based on an introductory article which the Prime Minister had written for the first issue of the *Revue Baltique*.*)

Ū In his article Mr. Merkys welcomed the appearance of the new magazine suggesting closer cultural relations among the three Baltic countries: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Not a single word, however, was said about a military alliance or anything that might have implied such as alliance.

This last charge clearly indicated that the Soviet leaders were ready for more drastic steps with regard to their western neighbor and were looking for alibies in order to 'justify' or 'legalize' their actions in the near future.

On June 14, at approximately 11 P. M.; the Soviets issued an ultimatum to the Lithuanian government. The ultimatum contained three demands: (1) the prosecution of Skucas, the former Minister of Interior, and Povilaitis, the Director of the Security Department — two men who the Kremlin charged to be most responsible for the alleged kidnappings of the Soviet soldiers in Lithuania; (2) the formation of a new, friendly-to-the Soviets Council of Ministers, and (3) the admission of an unlimited number of Soviet troops to Lithuania. The reason given for the ultimatum was alleged breaches of the Mutual Assistance Treaty by the Lithuanian government: that it was plotting a military alliance against the Soviet Union, and the kidnapping and murder of Soviet soldiers.

It is interesting to note that when the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Urbsys, to whom the ultimatum was delivered in Moscow, asked Molotov for more time to consider its terms, the latter bluntly replied that there was no need for more time because the Red Army in about twelve hours was to cross the Lithuanian frontier in force whatever the decision of the Lithuanian government. The next day ten Red Army divisions marched into Lithuania. President A. Smetona left the country; Molotov's Deputy Foreign Commissar Dekanozov arrived in Kaunas the same evening in order to form the new Council of Ministers. The new cabinet was formed by him two days later. It included dyed-in-the-wool Communists, some pro-Communists and a few truly patriotic citizens. This new Council, however, was only the rubberstamp of the Soviet Military authorities in Lithuania, the Soviet Legation in Kaunas, and the Central Executive Committee of the Lithuanian Communist party, an organization that had less than 1500 members before the ultimatum. These three sources of political power, helped by the ever and everywhere present NKVD, constituted the real government of Lithuania.

In July, the leaders in Kremlin decided that the situation was ripe for the formal incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union. The old National Assembly was dissolved by a simple executive decree and elections to the Peoples' Diet were immediately announced. There was only one list of candidates presented to the voters. Most of the candidates on this list were either Communists or Communist sympathizers, hand-picked by Dekanozov. As everybody knew very well in advance this list, being the only list on the ballot, could not lose in an election. Immediately after the election the Soviets announced the already familiar figures of their political coup: 95.51 per cent of all eligible voters had voted, 99.19 per cent casting their ballots for the Soviet imposed list of candidates.

The next Communist step towards final incorporation was the convening of the newly elected Peoples' diet. During its very first session, the Diet, amidst tremendous shouting stimulated by the NKVD, whose members were sitting among the delegates, and the Soviet armed guards who were patrolling in the Diet's chambers, adopted a resolution asking the Soviet Union to admit Lithuania to the family of Soviet republics. The resolution itself was adopted in a truly Soviet fashion. As the President of the Diet, after having read the text, asked how many members were in favor of the resolution, the hall, which besides the delegates included also the carefully selected spectators, the professional Communist noise-makers, and the NKVD, burst into tremendous clamor which was enough to convince the President that the delegates were unanimously for the resolution.

After the adoption of the resolution, the Diet elected a special commission which on August 3, 1940, in Moscow, formally petitioned the annual session of the Supreme Soviet, to admit Lithuania to the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics. The

Supreme Soviet, of course, agreed to honor the wish, and immediately announced Lithuania the Fourteenth Soviet Socialist Republic.

In annexing Lithuania the Soviets violently defied the will of the Lithuanian people, international law, and all principles of the basic human rights. Nevertheless, they were successful because power was on their side. And power was the only element that counted in the relations between small and large nations.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that in executing the annexation of Lithuania, Stalin and Molotov committed an act of violence according to the definition of their teacher Lenin who once wrote that, "Any incorporation of a small or weak nation into a large or strong state without the definite, clear and voluntary desire to that effect of that nation" and especially "if this nation is not accorded the right to decide the problem of the form of its political existence by a free vote — implying the complete withdrawal of the troops of the incorporating or merely strong nation — then the incorporation is an annexation, i. e., an arbitrary appropriation of a foreign country, an act of violence."

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FROM THE STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN FOSTER DULLES, SECRETARY OF STATE*

"The Baltic peoples, in the face of every imposition, retain their will to be free and maintain their steadfast opposition to Soviet despotism. Terrorism has been prolonged, now, for 13 years. Many of their courageous and noble representatives have been executed, deported, or driven into exile. But their martyrdom keeps patriotism alive ...

Some may say that it is unrealistic and impractical not to recognize the enforced incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. We believe, however, that a despotism of the Soviet type cannot indefinitely perpetuate its rule over hundreds of millions of people who love God, who love country, and who have a sense of personal dignity.

The Soviet system which seeks to expunge the distinctive characteristics of nations, creed, and individuality must itself change or be doomed ultimately to collapse. The time of collapse depends largely on whether the peoples who remain free produce spiritual, intellectual, and material richness, and whether we have a faith which can penetrate any Iron Curtain; and we must be sure that the captive peoples know that they are not forgotten, that we are not reconciled to their fate, and, above all, that we are not prepared to seek illusory safety for ourselves by a bargain with their masters which would confirm their captivity.

These, Mr. Chairman, I can say to you, are our purposes. We have not forgotten the Atlantic Charter and its proclamation of 'the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.' We still share the wish expressed in that charter, 'to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have forcibly been deprived of them.'

This is an hour when it is particularly important that our Nation's dedication to these principles should be made manifest..."

*) "Baltic States Investigation" — U. S. Eighty-Third Congress.

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FROM THE STATEMENT OF HON. POVILAS ŽADEIKIS,*
ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND MINISTER PLENIPONTENTIARY OF LITHUANIA

"Nevertheless, in 1939 when the Soviet Union began a reorientation of its policy, relations between Lithuania and the Soviet Union became strained... That same year a map appeared, published by the Russian general staff, showing Lithuanian territory as a component part of the territory of the Soviet Union. In addition to its military significance, this map shows that the attack on Lithuania by the Soviet Union was premeditated ..

In view of the developing international conflict, Moscow anticipated the idea of eventual victory of the Communist revolution by means of a Second World War. Naturally with such prospects in mind, the Soviet Union was not interested in maintaining the status quo in the Baltic; quite to the contrary, it was interested in conducting matters so that such a conflict should take place in order that it would be possible to carry out Stalin's oath given at the grave of Lenin: 'We swear to you Comrade Lenin, that we will not spare our lives in the strengthening and the extension of the union of the toilers of the earth, the Communist International.' (History of the Communist Party in the U. S. S. R., 1928.)

To further these ends, Moscow opened the gates for aggression in Europe by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on August 23, 1939. According to Molotov, the actual initiator of the pact "had been Stalin who — through his speech of March of this year (1939) which had been well understood in Germany — had brought about the reversal in political relations." (Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939—41, p. 76.) By this pact the Soviet Union received eastern Poland, Latvia, and Estonia, while Lithuania was assigned to Germany, and only later, on September 28, ~~1949~~1939, through an additional protocol, did Lithuania fall to the Soviet Union.

At this point it is necessary to note that neither in its negotiations with England and France on the forming of a mutual-assistance agreement nor in its parallel negotiations with Germany did the Soviet Union consider Lithuanian territory in its sphere of vital interests..."

*) "Baltic States Investigation" — U. S. Eighty-Third Congress.