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THE BALTIC STATES IN U.S. — SOVIET RELATIONS, 1939 - 1942

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[See also subsequent articles by the author: "[The Baltic States in US-Soviet Relations: The Years of Doubt, 1943-1946](#)" In *Lituanus* Winter 1966 issue; and "[The Baltic States in US - Soviet Relations, From Truman to Johnson](#)" in the *Lituanus* Fall 1968 issue]

Background

On July 28, 1922, the United States simultaneously recognized the three Baltic States. It was the first major state to recognize Lithuania but the last to recognize Estonia and Latvia. Uncertain of the political future of Russia, the United States withheld recognition until the situation in eastern Europe began to stabilize.

In 1939, when Soviet foreign policy toward the Baltic States became more aggressive, the United States was not directly involved. Although Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania lost considerable freedom of action as a result of the mutual assistance pacts with the Soviet Union, they continued to function as sovereign states. However, the position of the three small republics became very delicate when Soviet garrisons were established. Late in 1939, the Latvian Minister in Washington told the Assistant Chief of the European Division in the State Department, Loy W. Henderson, that Latvia was struggling with all its resources against being swallowed up by its great neighbors.¹

Prior to the absorption, Great Britain had a more vital role in the destiny of the Baltic States than did the United States. Late in 1939, Britain and the Soviet Union discussed the right of Soviet troops to enter Poland and the Baltic States. The three Baltic States had no desire to become guaranteed states in an agreement between any great powers and were not pleased with Molotov's suggestion that Britain guarantee the boundaries of those states on the Baltic bordering the Soviet Union. Right of entry of Soviet troops, associated with the British guarantee, was anathema to both Poland and the Baltic States. Great Britain was so advised and declined to concede rights to the Russians. As the Earl of Halifax late in 1939 stated, "... the judgment and the instinct of His Majesty's Government in refusing agreements with the Soviet Government on the terms of the formulae covering cases of indirect aggression on the Baltic States were right".²

Invasion and Occupation

After delivering short-term ultimatums, the Soviet Union invaded the Baltic States in June, 1940. While international attention was focused on the German capture of Paris, Soviet soldiers trooped into Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius.

Other governments closely watched developments in the Baltic States before announcing official positions. From Tallinn, the American Legation reported on June 21 that a Red putsch was in progress.³

The Baltic diplomats in Washington were deeply concerned about what was happening. On June 25, the Lithuanian Minister forwarded a note to the Secretary of State in which he reported that a new government which had solemnly declared to uphold the Constitution had been formed in his homeland.⁴

The note went no further with respect to commenting on the state of affairs in Lithuania. It could not since the diplomatic representatives of the Baltic States were virtually isolated from events at home and uncertain about actual developments.

For example, almost a month passed before conclusive statements were issued by the Legations. In a press release on July 13, 1940, the Latvian Minister, Dr. Bilmanis, reserved the right not to recognize the results of the forthcoming elections and stated:

The Latvian Minister wishes to observe that in spite of his cabinet inquiries to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for authentic information as to the nature of the elections to be held, no reply has been received other than a confirmation to the receipt of the telegrams.⁵

On July 17, Johannes Kaiv of Estonia also reserved the right not to recognize the results of the elections which had been held in Estonia.⁶ In his note, Kaiv expressed his appreciation to the United States for the initiative of taking measures against the falling of Estonian property in the United States into illegal possession.⁷ Although this freezing action pleased the Baltic diplomats, it irritated the Soviet Union and most of the members of the new Baltic Governments. An interesting and courageous exception was the Provisional Foreign Minister of Lithuania. After delivering a formal protest to the American Minister, Mr. Norem, the Minister quietly added:

Please disregard all of our protests. We do not act independently any more. We appreciate what Washington is doing more than we dare tell. People are listening and I cannot say any more.⁸

The United States announced its position on July 23, 1940. In a statement, which still represents U.S. position the U.S. condemned Soviet seizure of the Baltic States.⁹ The United States stand was a strong one, based on high moral standards, and was strongly resented by the Soviet Union. The entire text follows:

During these past few days the devious processes whereunder the political independence and territorial integrity of the three small Baltic republics — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — were to be deliberately annihilated by one of their more powerful neighbors, have been rapidly drawing to their conclusion.

From the day when the peoples of these republics first gained their independence and democratic form of government the people of the United States have watched their admirable progress in self-government with deep and sympathetic interest.

The policy of this Government is universally known. The people of the United States are opposed to predatory activities no matter whether they are carried on by the use of force or by the threat of force. They are likewise opposed to any form of intervention on the part of one state, however powerful, in the democratic concerns of any other sovereign state, however weak.

These principles constitute the very foundation upon which the existing relationship between the 21 sovereign republics of the New World rests.

The United States will continue to stand by these principles, because of the conviction of the American people that unless the doctrine in which these principles are inherent once again governs the relations between nations, the rule of reason, of justice, and of law — in other words, the basis of modern civilization itself — cannot be preserved.

The American position was not formed in response to Baltic pleas. It is doubtful whether the Baltic diplomats alone could have caused the United States to refer to the proceedings in the Baltic States as "devious processes." Even with the backing of a much larger ethnic group, the Polish Ambassador in 1945 was not able to convince the United States to maintain recognition of the legitimate Polish Government in London.

American diplomats in the Baltic States correctly had gaged the nature of the elections and had advised Washington of the enormity of the moral wrong perpetrated by the Soviet Union.

An additional factor is that Soviet-American relations at the time were cool. Stalin had yet to earn the endearing title of "Uncle Joe." His pact with Fascist Germany was generally recognized as tacit approval for the start of World War II. Moreover, his forces had assaulted the European state closest to American emotions: Finland.¹⁰

It has been reported that in the Russo-Finnish war 88 per cent of the American public supported Finland while only 1 per cent sympathized with the Soviet Union.¹¹ Pro-Finnish and anti-Soviet demonstrations were held throughout the United States. Through public collections, Americans gave a million dollars to Finland. In Congress, Representative John W. McCormack proposed an amendment to the State Department Supply Bill to eliminate the salary of the U. S. Ambassador to Moscow. This amendment, which probably would have had the effect of withdrawing the Ambassador, lost by only three votes.¹²

Even members of Roosevelt's Cabinet vilified the Soviets. Harold Ickes wrote in December of 1939 that:

Stalin is more than out-Hitlering Hitler. I came to the conclusion during Stalin's purge of active or suspected pro-Germans in his army and navy and official family that he was a ruthless and brutal man, and what he is doing now

fully confirms this feeling." [13](#)

The United States responded to the Soviet attack with an embargo of shipment of certain goods to the Soviet Union.

This, then, was the atmosphere in which the Soviets invaded the Baltic States. The American response was solidly based on moral grounds and was in accord with a prevailing general policy of disapproval of the predatory actions of the Soviet Union.

Yet, even to the day on which the United States announced its position, the Baltic diplomats pressed their cases. In a telegram to Cordell Hull on July 23, 1940, Johannes Kaiv stated: "I consider elections of Estonian Chamber Deputies unconstitutional STOP Resolution of joining USSR as other acts passed by that body void STOP Details by mail." [14](#) On the same day, the Estonian Consul General wrote to Hull requesting that the United States withhold recognition of the Estonian union with the U.S.S.R. and that the United States allow him to continue his duties in the U. S. [15](#) The other Baltic diplomats were also busily engaged in making their views known to the State Department and the American public. On July 21, the Latvian Minister issued a statement which concluded: "The Latvian nation was compelled to bow before the force of arms, but every Latvian patriot hopes that justice and democracy will finally prevail and that Latvia will regain her independence and liberty. God bless Latvia." [16](#)

Stung by Welles' denouncement of occurrences in the Baltic States, the Soviet Union tried to justify the events. Ambassador Oumansky stated that "...sovietization had made it possible for the suffering peoples of these three nations to come under the sheltering protection of the Soviet government, as a result of which they would obtain the blessings of liberal and social government." [17](#)

The Soviet explanation did not change American policy. John C. Wiley, Owen Nor em and Walter Leonard had described life in the Baltic States too accurately for the State Department to give credence to Soviet claims about "suffering peoples" and "sheltering protection." American policymakers knew that devious processes had indeed ended Baltic independence.

On August 13, the U S indicated its intention to close its missions and consular offices in the three Baltic States. This move, of course, was not a matter of recognizing the Soviet absorption, but was rather a recognition that the Soviet Union controlled the Baltic area; and, furthermore, it was taken in response to a Soviet demand.

Within two days President Roosevelt asked the State Department for advice concerning the advisability of closing certain Soviet consulates and imposing restrictions on those which remained. Sumner Welles was both humanitarian and diplomat when he responded:

... I am inclined to believe that no useful purpose would be served at the present time by requesting the Soviet Government to close certain of its consular offices ... The closing of these offices would be of no aid to the nationals or property interests of the Baltic States [and] might well lead to a series of retaliatory meas-sures. [18](#)

Roosevelt accepted Welles' advice. No retaliatory action was taken. The United States withdrew all official representatives from the Baltic area. However, the Soviet Union's triumph was localized. More significant than the closing of American legations in the three states was the continued operation of the Baltic diplomats in the United States.

Baltic Assets Woo Soviets

America's failure to close the Baltic Legations and its freezing of Baltic credits were double obstacles to Russian plans to remove all traces of the Baltic States from the international scene. Less than a month after the United States announced that it refused to recognize the absorption, Soviet Ambassador Oumansky approached Sumner Welles, who was acting as Secretary of State, with a request for American assistance in protecting the "interests and property of the nationals of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and of taking possession of the archives and consulates of these states."

Calling the issue of the frozen assets "a stick of dynamite," Oumansky added that unless the nature of communications were improved, it would not be easy to improve Soviet-American relations. [19](#) Oumansky also stated that the Baltic countries historically had been part of Russia and asserted that the U. S. in recognizing the Baltic States in 1922 reserved the right to amend its position in the future. Loy Henderson flatly told Oumansky that he had misintepreted the U.S. announcement. [20](#)

This rebuff did not deter the Soviets from further efforts to obtain the Baltic assets in the United States and obtain title to all legations and archives. However, the next pressure on America's policy came in the fall of 1940 from a non-Communicistic state.

In desperate straits in its battle with Germany, Great Britain sought to pull the Soviet Union from its alliance with Germany and to induce it to line up with the Allies. Planning to use the Baltic funds and diplomatic recognition as a **quid pro quo** with the Soviet Union, Britain was anxious as well not to alienate the United States. Accordingly, on September 5, Messrs.

Millar and Stopford of the British Embassy in Washington paid an informal visit to the Department of State where Ray Atherton and Loy Henderson received them.

The British wanted to determine whether British de facto recognition of the Baltic annexation and an attempt to settle the question of foreign credits would embarrass the United States. The American reply considered the seriousness of Great Britain's position which "might be compelled to make certain concessions of principle which the United States Government was not prepared to yield at the present time."²¹

Cordell Hull wrote that in September of 1940 Neville Butler, Counselor of the British Embassy, relayed a suggestion from Sir Stafford Cripps that the credits of the three Baltic States be released to Russia as principal inducement to move Russia closer to the Allies. Hull told James C. Dunn, Political Advisor on European Affairs, to inform Butler that "Britain was free to act as she chose. As for ourselves, we had refused to recognize Russia's absorption.. .and we therefore could not release the credits to Russia."²²

Neither of these replies caused Britain to change its course of action. In Moscow, Sir Stafford Cripps was faced with a Soviet ultimatum: either the frozen Baltic gold and ships would be released to the Soviet Union or negotiations for a trade agreement would be broken off. The harried Cripps told U. S. Ambassador Steinhardt that the British Foreign Office had informed him that Britain's position had been taken "at instance of the American Government."²³

Steinhardt reported that he had the impression that Cripps was trying to obtain his intercession with the State Department to reconsider its position on the Baltic assets.

The Department of State replied to Steinhardt that the British Foreign Office had not correctly informed the British Ambassador to Moscow. The reply absolutely denied that the United States had suggested to Great Britain that it refuse to release the assets of the Baltic States. Finally, the Department advised Ambassador Steinhardt that members of the British Embassy had often heard explanations of the U. S. policy and concluded with a statement of what must be the prime rule of international relations: "each country must feel free... to adopt such policies as it may deem most likely to serve its interest."²⁴

Great Britain continued to press. On October 14, Ambassador Lothian and his Counsellor visited Secretary of State Hull. Lothian again explained that Britain was interested in the Russian situation as it pertained to Baltic ships and assets frozen by the United States and Great Britain. Hull's comments at this meeting show a sharp tempering of the high moral position of non-recognition by the harsh practices of international politics. His memorandum of conversation stated in part:

... that, of course, we have a definite non-recognition policy, which we pursue steadfastly; that I had suggested to my associates, "however, that if Russia should show a real disposition to move in our common direction with respect to the axis countries, then I would be disposed to deal with the Baltic assets and ships on a sort of quit pro quo basis rather than to adhere inflexibly to our non-recognition in this case."²⁵

British activity had been noticed outside of the diplomatic world. Rumors were rampant that Britain planned to recognize the Soviet Union's gains in Poland and the Baltic States and that the United States was to be a party to the deal. Representative William B. Barry of New York wrote to the Secretary of State that if the rumors were true, he was registering a vigorous protest. Barry added: "I can't justify on any more grounds, this nation "appeasing" the treacherous Dictator and aggressor in Moscow and at the same time insulting the Dictators in Rome and Berlin."²⁶

The Department of State placated the Congressman by reaffirming the policy which had been announced three months earlier. Beyond doubt, the policy did stand as announced. Yet, Hull's reply to Lord Lothian made it clear that, depending on the circumstances, the policy could be changed.

Britain made its offer to the Soviet Union, but the clever Russians were not swayed by the sacrifice of principle. With both Axis and Allied powers vying for friendship, Russia was determined to make the most favorable bargain.

By the beginning of 1941, the Soviet Union was threatening to use the matter of recognition of the absorption as a sine qua non for improvement of relations with the United States. In January, and again in February, Soviet Ambassador Oumansky pressed the issue. In a vigorous exchange, Oumansky and Sumner Welles stated the positions of their Governments on February 27, 1941. Oumansky cited a memorandum from Vyacheslav Molotov, one which had been delivered to Welles on January 8 and which decried the American position on Baltic property and its recognition of the Ministers and Consuls of the Baltic States.

Welles called Oumansky's attention to the fact that for many years both the Soviet Union and the United States had recognized the sovereignty of the Baltic States. He added that he hoped that the U. S. and the Soviet Union would once again agree on a policy which would strengthen and protect the rights of small countries to independence. He curtly told Oumansky that the United States did not recognize conquest by force.

At the start of the conversation, Welles had made reference to a previous statement that it would be preferable to recognize that there were unsolvable problems between the United States and the Soviet Union and that the problems should be avoided. He then told Oumansky that he felt that problems relating to the Baltic States should be considered in the class of unsolvable problems.

The Soviet Ambassador did not accept the rationale of Welles' statement. In concluding the conversation, Oumansky told Welles that unless there were * solution to the Baltic problems, any possibility of improvement in Russo-American relations would be reduced.²⁷

Even as the Lithuanian President Antanas Smetona was arriving in the United States, the Soviet Union sought to administer a **coup de grace** to Lithuanian independence by forcing a change in American policy. By the summer of 1941, the Soviets were exploring many avenues to convince the American Government to alter its position. In a conversation marked by a tirade against the Baltic diplomats, Ambassador Oumansky told Loy Henderson on July 2, 1941, that he could not understand why the United States would not settle the question of the Baltic ships. In response to the Ambassador's gross conduct, Henderson declined to discuss the issue.²⁸

Shortly before the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany, President Roosevelt reiterated the American-Baltic position to General Sikorski, Premier of the Polish Government-in-exile, while they were speaking of Sikorski's plan for a federated Europe.

Regarding the Baltic States, Roosevelt said: "You may be faced with some difficulties on the part of your eastern neighbor who has already declared these small democracies to be a part of the Soviet Union."

When Sikorski questioned whether this was the final disposition of the Baltic States, Roosevelt concluded:

I see no reason why you should (think it is final). I refer you to our strong official declaration on the Baltic States made last year by Sumner Welles, which you probably remember. As far as the United States is concerned, we stand by it.... It is one of our basic policies not to recognize unilateral changes brought about by force or threat of force.²⁹

Germany Invades the Soviet Union

In June, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, thereby also invading Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. This striking change in the international scene presented both the United States and the Baltic diplomats with dilemmas.

Popular revolutions swept through all three Baltic lands in June and July as superior German forces drove the Russians eastward. Hasty attempts were made by Baltic peoples to re-establish independent states, but the German invaders soon made it clear that they considered the Baltic area to be captured Soviet territory.

Johannes Kaiv quickly sought to take advantage of the Soviet misfortune when he requested on June 24, 1941, that the United States use its good offices to have the Soviet Union withdraw its forces from Estonia, free all political prisoners and restore the last legally elected government.³⁰ At almost the same time, however, he publicly stated that he realized that the German invasion would not bring freedom to the Estonian people.³¹ The Department of State confirmed Kaiv's realistic opinion when it responded to him that "no useful purpose" could be served by U. S. intervention in the Russo-Estonian controversy.³²

None of the Baltic diplomats sided with Germany. For example, Latvia's press release of June 25 stated, in substance, that no matter who was occupying Latvia, freedom was the only consideration of the Latvians.³³ However, the Baltic diplomats must have at least hoped that the German invasion would improve the lot of their countrymen. There is no doubt that the Baltic people themselves welcomed lifting of the Soviet oppression. As reported by S. Walter Washington, the impressions of a Latvian provide an insight into the true feeling of the Baltic peoples:

She stated that the German occupation has enabled the people to sleep without fear of being taken off in the night, but that although the German troops were greeted with manifestations of joy and were acclaimed as Saviors, the Germans have failed to profit from this advantageous position in the eyes of the Latvians and are now hated only a little less than the Russians.³⁴

The United States position was even more delicate than that of the Baltic diplomats Hitler had provided both the Soviet Union and Great Britain with a common enemy; and although the United States might have had no fundamental interest in the continuation of the Soviet state, it plainly was dedicated to the survival of Great Britain. The Baltic diplomats realized that the United States was faced with a complex situation. Though the Lithuanian Minister requested the United States to lend its influence in bringing about a restoration of Lithuanian independence, he "made it plain that he fully appreciated the complexity of the prevailing world situation."³⁵ He obviously did not expect the United States to intercede at that time.

In fact, the United States had an opportunity to make the independence of the Baltic States a quid pro quo for assistance to the Soviet Union since the question of Lend Lease arrangements with the Soviets was soon raised. Furthermore, Lend Lease to Russia was being considered at the same time that the United States and Britain issued a statement of principles known as the Atlantic Charter.

The Atlantic Charter

This famous joint manifesto is today virtually forgotten except by those whose hopes of freedom are expressed in its provisions. Drafted by Sumner Welles, the proclamation represents the very principles on which Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians base their claims for freedom.³⁶ Referring to "no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned" and to the "right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live," the Charter was a welcomed beacon of hope for the Baltic peoples.

In September of 1941, the Soviet Union subscribed to the principles of the Charter. Soviet acceptance of the declaration must have surprised many. William C. Bullitt commented,

The President and the Prime Minister feared they might have some difficulty in persuading Stalin to adhere to the Charter because it was difficult to square the Soviet Union's aggressions against Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Rumania and Poland with the terms of the Charter...³⁷

Later in 1941, Churchill mentioned the Soviet record in a message to Clement Atlee: "Stalin's demands about Finland, Baltic States and Rumania are directly contrary to first, second and third articles of the Atlantic Charter, to which Stalin has subscribed..."³⁸

Unfortunately for the Baltic States, by the end of 1941 there was no doubt that the Soviets interpreted the Charter differently from Winston Churchill. Stalin told A. Eden that "he thought the Charter was directed against those who were trying to get world domination."³⁹ Stalin did not consider the Soviet Union in that category.

Another blow to Baltic hopes was administered by Churchill who, early in 1942, wrote to Roosevelt:

The increasing gravity of the war has led me to feel that the principles of the Atlantic Charter ought not to be construed as to deny Russia the frontiers she occupied when Germany attacked her. This was the basis on which Russia acceded to the Charter.⁴⁰

Although Churchill's concern with Britain's self-interest can be appreciated, exclusion of Russia from the principles of the Charter deprived the Baltic peoples of sorely needed support during a period when prospects for success could have been most favorable. If Britain had been able to hold firm regarding application of the Charter's principles to the Soviet Union, and if the United States had chosen to bargain, Lend Lease to the Soviet Union would have been an excellent vehicle for the improvement of the Baltic situation as well as for the post-war status of eastern Europe.

Lend Lease for the Soviet Union

On December 22, 1939, a public opinion poll showed that 70 per cent of those Americans questioned considered Communist activities in the United States to be more serious than the Nazi conspiracies. Yet, less than two months after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the same polling service disclosed that 38 per cent of those questioned favored inclusion of the Soviet Union in the Lend Lease program while 39 per cent opposed.⁴¹ The essential fact was that the United States knew the awful results which would come with a German victory but could only suspect what might happen if the Soviets won. Senator Harry Truman characteristically cast a pox on both of the struggling dictatorships:

If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible, although I don't want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstances. Neither of them think anything of their pledged word.⁴²

However, there is little doubt that aid to Russia was in the national interest of the United States. The war in the Soviet Union tied down a substantial number of German troops and forced Germany to commit the bulk of its material far from the English Channel. Yet, Soviet resistance did not eliminate doubts concerning Soviet intentions. Many experienced diplomats — Loy W. Henderson, A. A. Berle, Jr., and William C. Bullitt among them — were deeply suspicious of Soviet intentions in Europe. On the other hand, Joseph E. Davies extolled the virtues of the Soviets:

In my opinion, the Russian people, the Soviet government, and the Soviet leaders are moved, basically, by altruistic concepts. It is their purpose to promote the brotherhood of man and to improve the lot of the common people. They wish to create a society in which men live as equals, governed by ethical ideals. They are devoted to peace.⁴³

Harry Hopkins actively supported the issue of American aid to the Soviets. In a letter to Bredon Bracken, he wrote:

We are having some difficulty with our public opinion with regard to Russia. The American people don't take aid to Russia easily. The whole Catholic population is opposed to it, all the Nazis, all the Italians and a lot of people who sincerely believe that Stalin is a great menace to the world. Still I think it will come out all right in the end... The exhibition of the Russian Army has certainly made all of our military men look a little ill. Anglo-Saxons have a hard time believing that anyone can fight except themselves.⁴⁴

Colonel Philip R. Faymonville, whose judgment and impartiality concerning the Soviet Union have been questioned,⁴⁵ had cleared shipments amounting to \$145,000,000 before the President eventually made the Soviet Union eligible for Lend Lease on November 7, 1941. Faymonville, later promoted to brigadier general, headed the American Supply Mission to the Soviet Union. In October Mr. A. Harriman met with Stalin who asked for an enormous quantity of war material. The American delegate made no attempt to obtain a Soviet pledge regarding post-war Europe as the price for American aid.⁴⁶

This was on the part of the United States grossly inept diplomacy. The very nature of relations between states involves the process of give and take. America's decision to aid Russia did not involve giving and taking. Literally fighting for its survival, the Soviet Union was in no position to reject American conditions for granting aid. Yet, no conditions were made. Perhaps the United States considered continued Soviet resistance against Germany to be reward enough. However, as valuable as the Soviet war effort was to the Allied cause, it was essentially in the Russian national interest, not in the American. On the other hand, achievement of a postwar Europe free from Soviet domination was in the American interest, and no effort was made to obtain that goal. The United States showed its good faith toward the Soviet Union but lost the chance to obtain a guarantee of independence for the Baltic States and other states of eastern Europe. The initiative shortly passed to the Soviet Union which pressed G. Britain to guarantee Soviet gains in Europe.

Anglo-Soviet Negotiations

Early in 1942, Great Britain and the Soviet Union started negotiating a treaty which quickly involved the United States and the status of the Baltic States. It was proposed that the treaty contain territorial concessions to the Soviet Union, and the Soviets insisted that they would not sign a treaty without the concessions. Although it felt that it needed the Soviet treaty, Great Britain would not include the territorial clauses without American consent.

Under pressures of war, W. Churchill had wavered in his opposition to the Soviet absorption of the Baltic States. Though he continued to believe that the Soviet action was reprehensible, by March of 1942, he felt that his "moral position" of opposition could not be physically maintained.⁴⁷

In a tangled effort to reconcile the Atlantic Charter with British pressure and the announced American-Baltic policy, President Roosevelt proposed a compromise. Cordell Hull described it:

Then in the face of Churchill's belief that Britain had to sign, the President suggested a compromise. This was that Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and Finns who did not wish to be incorporated into Russia should have the right to leave those territories with their properties. He thought this would be more in accord with the Atlantic Charter.⁴⁸

In a memorandum to the Acting Secretary of State, Adolf Berle called the exchange of populations a "right to go into mass exile" and warned Welles that the United States was getting into a "dangerous position, both morally and realistically."⁴⁹ In his reply, Welles told Berle that the suggestions had been made to save the Baltic peoples from a situation equivalent to slavery and added:

I have felt more strongly on this issue, namely, the conclusion of this treaty, than on any matter which has before me in recent years. The attitude of the British Government is, in my judgment, not only indefensible from every moral standpoint, but likewise extraordinarily stupid.⁵⁰

Pressed by the British, American statesmen searched for a solution. Hull, who opposed the President's compromise, sent Roosevelt a memorandum which "bluntly expressed...belief that a signature on the proposed Anglo-Soviet treaty, with the territorial clauses included, would be a terrible blow to the cause of the United Nations."⁵¹

John Winant, U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, reflected the attitude of the wavering British when on March 3, 1942, he stated that it should not be forgotten "that the Baltic States had been given their independence contrary to the will of Russia."⁵²

While negotiations proceeded, the American public was being exposed seriously to pro-Soviet mass media efforts. Many American writers were supporting the ethnographic rights of Soviet Russia to the Baltic States.⁵³ Not only were the professional Communists — Browder, Foster, and J. S. Allen, for example — flooding the public, but respected Americans as well were pouring forth both anti-German and pro-Soviet propaganda. Joseph E. Davies, remembered for his Ambassadorship to Moscow, championed the virtues of the Soviet Union. He was joined by Corliss Lamont, and Henry A. Wallace, Vice President of the United States, lent the stature of his office to the rising wave of support for the Soviet Union in its struggle against Nazi Germany.

Early in 1942, popular support was a natural reflection of the determined Soviet defense of Russia. Americans who had never seen a communist respected the first army of World War II which did not collapse in the face of the formidable Wehrmacht. In addition, Soviet victories were occurring when American defeats made U. S. military forces appear most inept. This was the atmosphere in which a hard core of American diplomats struggled to maintain proper moral standards. In this case, they were successful. The United States refused to bless a British territorial concession to the Soviet Union, and the Russians then gave way to the British. A treaty was concluded without the controversial clauses in May of 1942.

A phase had ended. Mounting was a belief that Allied unity was the paramount issue, transcending the plight of the victims of Soviet aggression.

Notes

- 1 United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Soviet Union 1983-39* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 983.
- 2 A. Bilmanis, *Latvia as an Independent State* (Washington: The Latvian Legation, 1947), p. 165.
- 3 Telegram, No. 68, U.S. Minister in Tallinn to the Secretary of State, June 21, 1940. National Archives File 860P.O/276.
- 4 Note from the Minister of Lithuania, Legation No. 790, June 25, 1940. National Archives File 860M,00/445 FP.
- 5 Alfred Bilmanis (comp.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Documents* (Washington: The Latvian Legation, 1944), p. 204.
- 6 Unserialized note verbale from the Acting Consul General of Estonia to the Secretary of State, July 17, 1940. [Copy availb.]
- 7 Executive Order 8484 of July 15, 1940, had frozen the credits of the three Baltic States in the United States.
- 8 United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1940*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 397.
- 9 The Department of State Bulletin, III (July 27, 1940), p. 48.
- 10 Finland, popularly known in depression-ridden United States as the country which paid its debts, was invaded by the Soviet Union in December of 1939 when it failed to agree to concessions which were similar to those granted by the three Baltic States scarcely two months earlier.
- 11 See Harold Lavine and James Wechler, *War Propaganda and the United States* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1940), p.282 and Schuster, 1954), p. 75.
- 12 David J. Dallinn, *Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy, 1939-42*, trans. Leon Dennen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), p. 179.
- 13 Harold L. Ickes, *The Lowering Clouds 1939-1941* (Vol. III of *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*. 3 vols.; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), p. 75.
- 14 Reproduced copy available.
- 15 Unserialized note from the Acting Consul General of Estonia in Charge of Legation to the Secretary of State, July 23, 1940. [Copy available],
- 16 Alfred Bilmanis, *Latvian-Russian Relations*, op. cit., pp. 204-206.
- 17 W. L. Langer and S. E. Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 646.
- 18 *Foreign Relations, 1940*, Vol. I op. cit., p. 425.
- 19 See Memorandum of Conversation by Loy W. Henderson, August 15, 1940. National Archives File 711.61/743 ½
20. *Ibid.*
- 21 Memorandum of Conversation by Loy W. Henderson, September 5, 1940. National Archives File 860N.01/74.
- 22 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 2 vols. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), pp. 811-812.
- 23 Reported in a telegram from the U. S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union to the State Department, No. 1202, September 22, 1940. National Archives File 741.61/899.
- 24 Telegram from the Secretary of State to the U. S. Ambassador in Moscow, No. 586, September 25, 1940. National Archives File 741.61/763.
- 25 Memorandum of Conversation by Cordell Hull, October 14, 1940. National Archives File 711.61/763.
- 26 Letter from Rep. William B. Barry to the Secretary of State, October 21, 1940. National Archives File 711.61/763.
- 27 *Foreign Relations, 1940*, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 708-712.
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- 29 Jan Ciechanowski, *Defeat in Victory* (Garden City: Double-day and Company, 1947), p. 20.
- 30 Note from the Acting Consul General of Estonia to the Secretary of State, Legation No. 173, June 24, 1941. National Archives File 8601.00/467.
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- 33 Alfred Bilmanis, *Latvian-Russian Relations*, op. ext., p. 234.
- 34 Note from the U. S. Charge d'Affaires in Stockholm to the Secretary of State, No. 1112, November 1, 1941. National Archives File 860P.00/349. The note enclosed a memorandum of conversation between S. Walter Washington and a Mrs. Tenbergs.
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- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 60
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- 44 Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), pp. 372-373.
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- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 540.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 540-541.
- 51 Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 117²
- 52 Ciechanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 92.