

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Communist Challenge to Versailles: British and French assessments
of Soviet strategic policy in Europe, 1922-27

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

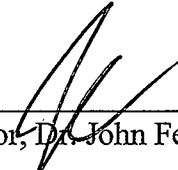
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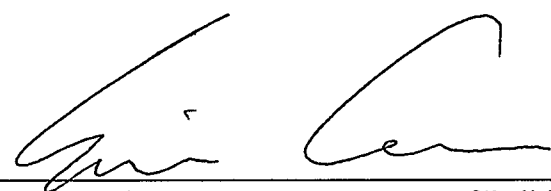
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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Abstract

The post-war victor powers, Great Britain and France, had one common strategic goal: establishing peace in Europe, although they had different visions of what shape this peace would take. A factor complicating their endeavours was the emergence of the world's first communist state. By 1921, the Bolsheviks had consolidated power, and while their leaders stated their intention to reach agreements with the states of Europe, in practice they did not play by established diplomatic rules and openly advocated the overthrow of the established political order. Deciphering Soviet strategic aims and capabilities was a complicated and frustrating process for British and French observers. When the USSR and Germany reached agreement at Rapallo in 1922, it signalled to London and Paris that Soviet Russia was a strategic threat that had to be taken seriously; one that, in concert with Germany, could overthrow the Versailles settlement and imperil the peace of Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

The Genoa Conference of April 1922 was the largest international gathering since the end of the Paris peace conference. Thirty-four nations were present, including the victor powers and the opponents which they had defeated in war and tried to reshape through peacemaking. The conference was organized primarily by British and French leaders, with a dual purpose in mind. The conference would overcome the differences between France and Great Britain over reparations and the best path to lasting security in Europe.¹ Genoa also was designed to promote economic recovery, and to allow Europe's nations to pursue the prosperity that they had achieved during the twenty-five years before 1914,² while disarmament would minimize the industrial and technological arms race that imperilled that prosperity. The Genoa Conference also was expected to bring back into the European order two Great Powers, Germany and Russia, that had been diplomatic pariahs since 1918. The establishment of the world's first communist government in Russia during 1917 had created frustrations for Western governments, first, militarily, as Russia left the war against Germany and Austria-Hungary, then diplomatically, as it rejected the established rules of international conduct, and sought to overthrow the capitalist political order that, it claimed, had plunged the world into war. By 1921, however, both the Bolshevik government's attempts at world revolution and the Allied efforts to overthrow it, had failed. The Western powers were establishing their first arrangements with the communist rulers in Moscow, while Bolshevik leaders retrenched

¹ Carole Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy 1921-1922* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 3.

² Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 191-198.

their revolutionary zeal and adopted more moderate policies like “peaceful coexistence” and the New Economic Policy (NEP). The signing of a trade agreement with Great Britain, and invitations to foreign investors to seek concessions in Russia during 1921, seemed to bolster the prospect that communist Russia could be brought back to Europe at Genoa.³

The conference, however, failed to attain any agreements save one: the Rapallo Pact, signed between German and Russian leaders in a town outside of Genoa on April 16, 1922. While the neglect of German concerns at Genoa was a primary factor behind Rapallo,⁴ German and Russian leaders had laid the groundwork for an agreement before the conference.⁵ The Rapallo partnership not only frustrated Western European leaders, it also exacerbated the problems they hoped that the Genoa Conference would repair. For Great Britain, the failure to link Germany and Russia to some modified version of the Versailles system crippled their hopes to change the policies of the USSR. Russia’s pact with Germany was the first indication that Moscow would happily settle on terms with individual nations and exploit the differences between them whenever it could. Soon afterward, Russia proved this point again by reaching an agreement with Czechoslovakia, much to the frustration of British officials, who were left to contend with irritating Soviet actions. For France, the prospect of German-Russian co-operation was a harbinger of a nightmare: that revisionist Germany and expansionist Russia would alter the territorial

³ Fink, *The Genoa Conference*, 5-6.

⁴ Peter Krüger, “A Rainy Day, April 16, 1922: The Rapallo Treaty and the Cloudy Perspective for German Foreign Policy,” in Fink, Axel Frohn, and Juergen Heideking, eds. *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1991), 50.

⁵ Fink, *The Genoa Conference*, 174.

settlement in Eastern Europe, thus encouraging further challenges to the Versailles settlement in the west.

During the 1920s, Britain and France both were status quo powers, but each approached that role in different ways. British leaders pursued pacification and stability in Europe, so that Britain could achieve economic recovery and world power without having to engage in costly entanglements in Europe.⁶ Financial considerations fundamentally shaped British strategic policy during the 1920s. As John Ferris notes, Britain had to balance the military strength necessary to support its strategic aims against what the economy could afford.⁷ French strategic policy, conversely, was dictated by three demands: to implement a security system that would prevent German aggression, obtain reparations to facilitate recovery at home while inhibiting German economic hegemony in Central Europe, and to establish the basis for industry able to sustain national defence and economic growth.⁸ Thus, British policy looked for recovery at home, augmented by colonial and international stability, while French policy focused on Europe and on preventing German hegemony and revisionism.

Though there was no clear-cut shift towards peaceful coexistence, from 1921 Soviet leaders slowly moved towards traditional diplomacy.⁹ The NEP represented the first significant shift towards this end, as it required peaceful conditions and substantial assistance from advanced industrial nations to revive Russia's agriculture and industry.

⁶ Anne Orde, *Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), 2.

⁷ John Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-26* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989), xii.

⁸ Jon Jacobson, "Strategies of French Foreign Policy after World War I," *The Journal of Modern History* 55:1 (March 1983), 79.

⁹ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154.

The Russian foreign ministry, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel or NKID), intended to establish relations with the top industrial powers – Britain, France, Germany and the United States. The conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement on March 16, 1921, as well as providing needed industrial and agricultural materials, was a benchmark for the Bolshevik government in that it served to legitimize it in the eyes of foreign states. Following this, the Western powers invited Russia to participate in the Genoa Conference in 1922, with the intent to further integrate it into the European economy. Unable to reach agreement on acceptable terms, however, the Soviets turned to the other European pariah – Germany – and concluded the pact that had been discussed in Berlin in the days prior to Genoa. Rapallo surprised the Western powers, and signalled that they would ignore Moscow at their own peril.¹⁰

This study will examine how Great Britain and France evaluated the Soviet Union during the five-year period after the Rapallo Pact. Using a comparative approach, it will explore how the Soviet government threatened French and British visions for European security, and how officials in London and Paris perceived these challenges: whether they saw these problems as central or peripheral to their security concerns, and if they believed the Soviet government had the economic, diplomatic and military strength to achieve their goals. This study will demonstrate that, between 1922 and 1927, the governments of Great Britain and France made similar but not identical assessments of Soviet power and its threat to Europe. In addition to the comparative perspective, this

¹⁰ Teddy J. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology: the origins of Soviet foreign relations 1917-1930* (London: Sage Publications, 1979), 69-74.

study also will recast historical evaluations of British and French perceptions of post-Rapallo Soviet policy. While the assessments of French military intelligence in this period have been largely unexamined, the evaluations of British observers of Soviet Russia have been thoroughly covered. Significantly, these studies have failed to appreciate the extent to which the USSR, by 1927, had become a tertiary concern to British officials. Immediately after the Locarno Treaty was signed in 1925, the Foreign Office, led by Austen Chamberlain, set out to ignore Russia whenever it could, as a means of better controlling Soviet influence over the Anglo-Soviet relationship and European politics. However, what started as a diplomatic tactic designed to minimize Soviet annoyances became, by 1926, the *modus operandi* in Whitehall, as it realized it could entice Germany into a comprehensive settlement with or without Moscow's participation. Historians have overlooked this feature of the early Anglo-Soviet relationship, and in doing so have neglected to identify the emergence of a major theme in their relations in the inter-war period. The British propensity to relegate Soviet influence on European politics to one of secondary or tertiary importance in these years came to have serious consequences when an aggressively revisionist Germany became increasingly harder to manage in the 1930s.

During the immediate post-war period, France and Britain neither co-operated fully nor exhibited open enmity towards each other. The centuries-old pattern of alternating rivalry and co-operation between Britain and France has lent itself to comparative studies of their policies, relations and ambitions. These works include broad

surveys,¹¹ as well as specialist accounts of the interwar years. All agree on the centrality of Germany to the Anglo-French relationship. Fifty years ago, Arnold Wolfers concluded that the problem of Germany was at the root of tensions between London and Paris in this period. France preferred a post-war settlement that built up an “unquestioned preponderance of power on the side of the defenders of the established order, and in equipping them with the means of coercion necessary to prevent a successful revolt.” Conversely, Britain advocated taking the new order as “a starting point in a process of continuous adjustment, intended eventually to produce a new and more generally satisfactory settlement.” For much of the 1920s, he argues, economic prosperity compensated for the grievances held by many European states within an unsettled political atmosphere. When prosperity crumbled in 1929, “the forces of rebellion against the existing distribution of power and wealth that had long been smoldering below the surface broke out openly, first in the Far East, then in the Mediterranean, and finally in the heart of Europe.”¹² More recently, P.M.H. Bell concluded that France had an overriding anxiety of German recovery and aggression, which Great Britain came to see as exaggerated or unreal. When the two sides purportedly reached a permanent solution – the Locarno Treaty – its language was short on guarantees to France. As Chamberlain’s biographer David Dutton notes, rather than representing the beginning of British

¹¹ Robert and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: Britain and France; the history of a love-hate relationship* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

¹² Arnold Wolfers, *Britain and France Between Two Wars: conflicting strategies of peace from Versailles to World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1966), 5.

participation in Western Europe, Locarno delineated the limit of British involvement in the affairs of that region, and “was thus valueless except as a gesture.”¹³

Historians have explored other aspects of British and French relations, including those with Soviet Russia. British-Soviet relations, for example, have been examined by Gabriel Gorodetsky, Stephen White, Stephanie Salzmänn, and Keith Neilson.¹⁴ Gorodetsky and Salzmänn focus largely on the ideological gulf between Soviet Russia and Britain. Gorodetsky credits British leaders with understanding this gulf, which he attributes to the different significance each side placed on their relationship. Soviet leaders used their standing with Great Britain as an indicator for their foreign relations as a whole, whereas for Whitehall, its standing with Moscow was of lesser importance. Salzmänn is much more critical of the failure of British officials, both in London and in Moscow, to understand the significance of ideology to the Soviet government, which crippled their ability to form solid relations with it. This failure had two consequences. For British representatives in Moscow, particularly Robert Hodgson, the inability to correctly understand ideology led to numerous inaccurate assessments of Soviet intentions. Second, Britain’s overall political strategy towards the USSR included no specific attempts to deduce likely Soviet political actions stemming from ideology. British actions repeatedly reflected the expectation that Soviet leaders would play by the

¹³ David Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain: gentleman in politics* (Bolton, UK: Ross Anderson, 1985), quoted in P.M.H. Bell, *France and Britain 1900-1940: entente and estrangement* (London: Longman, 1996), 151.

¹⁴ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce: Anglo-Soviet relations 1924-27* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Stephen White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979); Stephanie Salzmänn, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union: Rapallo and after, 1922-1934* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003); Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

same diplomatic rules that other states followed, when in fact their ideology rejected this system. White focuses on the origins of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement, and the impact of political debates within Whitehall over whether to pursue a confrontational or accommodating approach to Moscow. Neilson focuses on the dualism within British relations with Moscow in the 1920s. Domestically, many blamed Britain's social and economic problems on the "Red threat", regardless of the government in power. In foreign and strategic policy, however, every government had different relations with Moscow. Lloyd George and Labour politicians sought, albeit reluctantly, an economically motivated rapprochement with Moscow, while the Conservative foreign secretaries Lord Curzon and Chamberlain shunned or ignored the Soviet government.

The predominantly ideological focus of Gorodetsky and Michael Jabara Carley, and to a lesser extent, White, reflects the academic generations in which they produced their work. All three wrote about this period during the Cold War, and, standing on the left, blamed Britain for most of the problems that persisted between London and Moscow. Neilson, of the same era but a different political vintage, wrote about the topic after the Cold War was over, and blamed the problems on both sides. Salzmann, who wrote well after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, also attributes considerable importance to ideology, but in different ways. Gorodetsky emphasised the ideological antagonism that existed between London and Moscow as a cause of the breakdown in their relationship, while Neilson argues that British officials, angered by communist tactics, refused to let Soviet officials play two diplomatic games at once and receive the benefits of both. Conversely, Salzmann argues that the Anglo-Soviet relationship failed largely through London's inability to understand the importance of ideology in its

dealings with Moscow. Although they did not appreciate the diplomatic tactics employed by Moscow, antagonism alone did not cause the eventual breakdown of relations. Rather, because of mistaken attitudes on the part of British officials, it took Great Britain several years to understand the importance of ideology as a driving force behind Soviet politics. The Foreign Office made no specific attempts to deduce Soviet political actions from ideological principles. Salzmann's writing reflects a generation of historians less influenced by the politics of the Cold War, than they do for Carley, Gorodetsky, White, Ferris and Nielsen.

A substantial body of studies examine the broader problems and policies of Britain in the 1920s, including works by Carley, John Ferris, Anne Orde, Richard Grayson, Michael Hughes and Ephraim Maisel.¹⁵ Carley focuses largely on British-Franco-Soviet relations in the 1930s and the road to war in 1939; however, like Ferris and Neilson, he sees the Cold War commencing in 1917, shaping the failure of Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet negotiations in the 1920s. Notably, Carley's writing tends to view Anglo-Russian relations as a matter largely separate from the rest of British policy.¹⁶ Ferris examines the formulation of British strategic policy and the conflict between

¹⁵ Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy*; Orde, *Great Britain and International Security and British policy and European reconstruction after the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Richard Grayson, *Austin Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe: British foreign policy 1924-29* (London: Frank Cass Ltd., 1997); Michael Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World* (London: Routledge, 2006) and *Inside the Enigma: British officials in Russia 1900-1939* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1997) and Ephraim Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1994).

¹⁶ See, principally, Michael Carley, "Down a Blind Alley: Anglo-Franco-Soviet Relations, 1920-39," *Canadian Journal of History* 29 (April 1994), 147-172. Also, "End of the 'Low, Dishonest Decade': Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45:2 (1993), 303-341; "A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances': the Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-6," *Contemporary European History* 5:1 (1996), 29-62; "A Situation of Delicacy and Danger': Anglo-Soviet Relations, August 1939-March 1940," *Contemporary European History* 8:2 (1999), 175-208.

financial, diplomatic and service priorities; Orde analyzes how British officials handled issues of security and economics during the middle 1920s; and Grayson explores how debates within the Foreign Office shaped the policies that Chamberlain took to cabinet; he attributes Chamberlain's acceptance of the breach with the Soviet government in 1927 to the stabilized European situation after Locarno, not the Foreign Secretary's loss of influence in the cabinet. Hughes and Maisel assess decision-making within Whitehall, especially how it was influenced by officials in the Foreign Office and different leadership styles. Hughes' study of British officials in Russia emphasizes the impact of working and living under communist rule, and the schisms that resulted between the Moscow Mission and the Foreign Office.

In addition to these works that examine diplomatic issues, there exist significant studies of the British intelligence apparatus that, while it did not make decisions on policy, substantially informed that process in Whitehall. Two recent works are particularly relevant in that they reveal the central role that fears of communist subversion had on the British intelligence community, and also shed light on the persistent suspicions Whitehall had about Soviet motives in diplomacy. Christopher Andrews's study of MI5 highlights the importance of signals intelligence (SIGINT) in the early 1920s, and how decrypts from Moscow angered Curzon and promoted development of the hard line he took towards relations with the USSR. Andrews also details the work done by MI5 in detecting and weakening the influence of a Soviet espionage network that sought to subvert the British government between 1924-27, culminating in the Anglo-Russian Co-operative Society (ARCOS) raid that was the pretext for the breach between London and Moscow in 1927. A second study, by Keith Jeffery, examines work done by

the British foreign intelligence and espionage body, Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, commonly known as MI6). The global communist threat was the chief preoccupation for SIS in the interwar years, and it undertook numerous “adventurous operations” inside the USSR, as well as tracking revolutionaries and subversives in Europe and worldwide. This included recruiting collaborators to furnish information on various foreign communist movements, as well as monitoring the domestic threat to Great Britain posed by émigrés and British citizens, though Jeffery stresses that this information was frequently of dubious authenticity and therefore could not be relied upon. SIS had more success in posting operatives to foreign stations in places like Paris, Geneva, Constantinople, and Berlin, as well as the Baltic states.¹⁷

In addition to these broad works, more specialized studies by Ferris articulate the importance of foreign intelligence in assessing and interpreting the threat to Great Britain posed by collaboration between Moscow and other states. In his article on the British perception of a Muslim menace between 1840-1951, Ferris identifies the threat to British interests that was raised by the possibility of an alliance between Turkish nationalists and the USSR in the early 1920s. Although the dangers were overstated by SIS, which “tended towards alarmism”, it was nonetheless a tangible belief by Whitehall that co-operation between Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Moscow was a harbinger of a wider alliance that included the USSR, Turkey, Germany, Japan and other anti-British nationalist movements that would threaten the post-war status quo. Although

¹⁷ Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: the authorized history of MI5* (Toronto: Penguin, 2009), 139-159; Keith Jeffery, *The Secret History of MI6 1909-1949* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 172-208.

these views were discredited and dissipated by 1923, for a time they held considerable influence over British policy-makers. In a second article, Ferris examines the role of intelligence during the Chanak Crisis in 1922 and demonstrates how various agencies, including SIS, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&GS) and the British Army's Wireless Observation Group (WOG) deciphered communications between European powers both friendly and hostile to Great Britain. Although reliable intelligence existed on Soviet and Turkish communications, the lack of access to high-level decision-makers meant British officials often had to guess at Soviet and Turkish intentions, exacerbating the tense situation created by the stand-off between the outnumbered British forces and their Turkish nationalist counterparts. These studies highlight the practical difficulties that Whitehall encountered when trying to make assessments of Soviet intentions in regions of strategic concern to Great Britain.¹⁸

Less work has been done on Franco-Soviet relations in the 1920s than on Anglo-Soviet relations. Only two monographs, both now aging, are germane to this period, by Anne Hogenhuis-Seliverstovff and Maxime Mourin.¹⁹ Hogenhuis-Seliverstovff's work, based on the archives of the French Foreign Office, focuses on diplomatic relations between Moscow and Paris. She depicts a reluctant, isolated and destitute France that, in 1922 had no choice but to pursue recognition of Moscow and establish trading relations with. As the spectre of German-Soviet collusion loomed, French leaders were forced to

¹⁸ Ferris, " 'The Internationalism of Islam': the British perception of a Muslim menace, 1840-1951," *Intelligence and National Security* 24:1 (Feb, 1999), 57-77; " 'Far Too Dangerous a Gamble'? British intelligence and policy during the Chanak crisis, September-October 1922", *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 14:2 (2003), 139-184.

¹⁹ Anne Hogenhuis-Seliverstovff, *Les relations Franco-Soviétiques 1917-1924* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1981); Maxime Mourin, *Les relations Franco-Soviétiques (1917-1967)* (Paris: Payot, 1967).

sacrifice grievances over outstanding debts in order to attain economic stability, especially access to petroleum resources that were indispensable to French security. Additionally, although his work does not significantly address the 1920s, Carley explains the reasons why France intervened in the Russian Civil War, and the issues that hindered Franco-Soviet relations throughout the decade, namely the French desire to recover investments and debts from Tsarist Russia that had been abrogated by the Bolsheviks, who denied any responsibility to compensate Romanov debts.²⁰

More work has been done on French foreign and strategic policy in the 1920s, including Anthony Adamthwaite and Jacques Néré, although they do not significantly discuss the place of the USSR in French policy.²¹ Judith Hughes, Peter Jackson and Martin Alexander illuminate the role of the army and military intelligence in French strategic decision-making. Hughes, responding to an older literature that emphasised clashes between military and civilian leaders, asserts that a large degree of harmony existed. Jackson's more recent work, though focused on the Nazi period, stresses that tensions did exist between these two bodies. Especially problematic for the success of French policy was the fact that decision-making was a one-way street, in which soldiers had no recourse to the Quai d'Orsay if they did not agree with the direction of policy. The army lacked the means to influence diplomats about strategic threats facing France. Alexander provides an elaborate but well-formulated explanation of how intelligence

²⁰ Carley, *Revolution and Intervention: the French government and the Russian Civil War, 1917-1919* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983).

²¹ Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's bid for power in Europe, 1914-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Jacques Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914-1945* (London: Routledge, 1975).

officials gathered evidence and the preponderant weight French land forces exerted in the formulation of defence policy – though, again, they ultimately lacked recourse to civilian leaders when decisions were made.²² Additionally, Olivier Forcade has recently examined the role of French intelligence in observing and countering communist activities in France and other countries during the 1920s. French intelligence viewed communism as a serious threat both domestically and in Eastern Europe, where it feared new governments would be susceptible to communist subversion.

This study uses evidence from British and French archives to compare how officials of these states evaluated Soviet power in the mid-1920s, and advised policy-makers. It does not purport systematically to compare the intelligence reported to these states, as against their analysis. In the British case, these files are primarily the correspondence of the Northern Department, the section of the Foreign Office charged with observing and evaluating Russian policy. It includes discussions within the department and communications with British officials in foreign states, including Moscow. This thesis also uses the records of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), the interdepartmental body that assessed British strategy. In the French case, this thesis examines the files of the *Deuxième Bureau* (2e Bureau) of the French General Staff, which was the intelligence service of the French Army and the dominant one in the state.

²² Judith Hughes, *To the Maginot Line: the politics of French military preparation in the 1920s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: intelligence and policy making 1933-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Martin S. Alexander, "Did the Deuxième Bureau Work? The Role of Intelligence in French Defence Policy and Strategy, 1919-39," *Intelligence and National Security* 6:2 (1991), 293-333; Olivier Forcade, *La République Secrète: histoire des services spéciaux français de 1918 à 1939* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2008), 352-358.

While the 2e Bureau did not formulate policy, its observations demonstrate how soldiers perceived Soviet actions in relation to their broader concerns about security in Europe.

These British and French bodies were the dominant agencies in their states for the assessment of the USSR, but they also had substantially different aims and roles. The Northern Department had a broad perspective. Its officials handled diplomatic, military and economic issues, and sometimes played a significant role in the formulation of policy towards Russia. It also was the main agency for the estimation of intelligence on Russia, though that power was constrained by the existence of independent assessment bureaus in the British and Indian armies, and the healthy self-confidence of ministers like Winston Churchill. Meanwhile, the CID integrated all issues relevant to British strategy across the world. By contrast, the 2e Bureau took a more narrow approach, based largely on appreciations of the military power and strategic aims of European states. Its officials held a powerful, if isolated, position in the formulation of policy, with a near-monopolistic control over the collection and analysis of intelligence.²³ The 2e Bureau's observations illuminate how French military officials interpreted the Soviet threat (or, for many years, the lack of a one) to France's European policy.

In using the evaluations of the Northern Department and the 2e Bureau to compare how the two victor powers viewed communist Russia, other British and French governmental bodies are ignored – for example, the Quai d'Orsay or the War Office. The roles of the Northern Department and the 2e Bureau within their respective governments

²³ Jackson, 389.

do not fit perfectly, with analysis more case focused on diplomatic interactions, and in the other on military capabilities. This very dichotomy reflects something of the way that institutional systems shaped the intelligence analysis in Paris and London (though, in the latter case, military agencies always ensured that issues of capabilities were addressed and integrated with those institutions in high level discussions). None the less, comparison of these views of the Northern Department and the 2e Bureau does illustrate how these status quo powers assessed an unknown and hostile entity. This sphere has been understudied in the literature on national decision-making, while comparative studies of analysis are rare in the field of international history as a whole. Thus, students of diplomacy between the USSR and France and Great Britain have neglected crucial elements in the issue. Indeed, more broadly, in studies of both France and Britain, the literature on military and diplomatic policy are self-contained, despite their obvious relationships with each other. A comparative study illuminates the similarities and differences in the assessments and policies of Britain and France as they pursued a common goal – the peaceful settlement of Europe – despite distinct interests and concerns.

The Northern Department and the 2e Bureau were the central analytical bodies on Soviet policy in their states, but not in terms of policy. In Britain, policy pertaining to the USSR was decided in cabinet, where the Foreign Secretary confronted opposition that often was coloured by emotions stemming from the adversarial nature of relations with

Moscow.²⁴ The 2e Bureau did not participate with civilian decision-makers in formulating policy; rather, it provided observations and evaluations of Soviet power, but had little recourse if it disagreed with the decisions made by politicians.²⁵ On the other hand, these behind-the-scenes observers, while affected by emotions about Soviet Russia, did not operate in a public forum. They were freer from the emotional tensions and heated debates that shaped the formulation of policy on Soviet Russia in London and Paris. Thus, their views are a particularly clear illustration of how British and French observers evaluated their revolutionary rival.

Although, in terms of their roles within their respective governments, there is not a perfect fit between the Foreign Office and the 2e Bureau, comparison of their reports does illustrate clearly how, within the strategic sphere, status quo powers assessed an unknown and hostile entity. This sphere has been understudied. The focus on diplomatic dealings between the leaders of the USSR and France and Great Britain in the key studies of this period, such as those by Gorodetsky, White and Hogenhuis-Seliverstov, have neglected the strategic evaluations of the status quo powers. Using a comparative study as a means of analysis illuminates the similarities and crucial differences in the assessments and policies of Britain and France as they pursued a common goal – the peaceful settlement of Europe – in spite of different strategic interests.

The Northern Department and the 2e Bureau were the most important analytical bodies which assessed Soviet policy for their states. The Foreign Office's influence was

²⁴ Grayson, 268-269.

²⁵ Alexander, 299-300; Jackson, 11-44.

limited; policy pertaining to the USSR was decided in cabinet, where the Foreign Secretary confronted opposition that was often coloured by emotions that developed from the adversarial nature of relations with Moscow.²⁶ The 2e Bureau, as Alexander and Jackson have demonstrated, did not participate with civilian decision-makers in formulating policy; rather, it was a one-way street whereby French military intelligence provided observations and evaluations of Soviet power, but had little recourse if it disagreed with the decisions made by politicians.²⁷ The decisions made by the Cabinet in London and the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, and the areas in which security policies shared common ground and differed, are well known; far less attention has been paid to behind-the-scenes observers, who, while affected by their own emotions about Soviet Russia, did not operate in the same public forum as their political superiors. They were freer from the emotional tensions and heated debates that led to the formulation of policy on Soviet Russian in London and Paris. Their views illustrate how British and French observers truly evaluated the revolutionary power that faced them.

This evidence reveals contrasting trajectories for British and French perceptions of the USSR. In the British case, the negotiations of 1920-21 for a trade agreement, with the greater aim of reintegrating the USSR within the Versailles system, had failed by 1922. During 1922-23, British officials became increasingly angry at Russia. In 1924, a comprehensive Anglo-Soviet agreement under the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald, which facilitated British recognition of the USSR, represented the high point

²⁶ Grayson, 268-269.

²⁷ Alexander, 293-333; Jackson, 11-44.

of Anglo-Soviet relations in the 1920s. The defeat of that government in 1924, however, and the accession of Chamberlain to the position of Foreign Secretary, signalled the start of a policy in which Britain pursued a solution for peace in Europe without the participation of the Bolshevik government. By 1926, the USSR essentially was an afterthought in the evaluations of Northern Department officials. The security that Britain believed it had established at Locarno enabled the Foreign Secretary to agree to terminate relations with the Soviet government in 1927.²⁸ These constant shifts in British policy reflect, to some extent, the politics of the governing party and the Foreign Secretary (especially Curzon). Even more, however, they indicate that the persistent demands by a small faction of cabinet ministers that London sever relations with Moscow, ultimately defeated opinions within Whitehall. The Northern Department, while regularly irritated by Moscow, believed that poor relations were preferable to none at all. Politics, however, overrode expertise.

By contrast, French evaluations of Soviet Russia stemmed largely from assessments of the Red Army. Political viewpoints were virtually absent from its observations. For almost four years after Rapallo, the 2e Bureau perceived the Soviet military as a poorly organized and ill-equipped force that could not launch a significant offensive even if it wished to do so. In 1926, however, as the Soviet military recovered, this view changed. French intelligence came to view the Bolshevik government as a dangerous, militaristic power, that reinforced German power. In the course of making these assessments, the Foreign Office and French military intelligence came to hold many

²⁸ Grayson, 268.

similar beliefs about the USSR, though they described their significance in markedly different ways.

CHAPTER I

SOVIET DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY STRATEGY, 1922-1927

I

The USSR that France and Britain observed in the 1920s was a complex polity. The unstable conditions that characterized the first three years of the Soviet government's existence, as well as the proclamations of worldwide communist revolution, made the nation difficult to evaluate. Complicating this process were factors shared by all evaluators of Russia, and ones that were unique to observers of Communism. It was hard to obtain accurate reports about domestic activity in so vast and diverse a country. Additionally, Soviet restrictions on foreign observers crippled collection of political and economic information: the government was reluctant to allow the establishment of diplomatic posts outside Moscow, fact-finding missions and tours were rarely allowed, and foreign officials were prohibited from contacting Soviet officials outside the foreign ministry. Censorship of all media critical of government eliminated an alternative source of information to observers (though official speeches were frequently reprinted verbatim in government newspapers),²⁹ while Soviet security services monitored foreigners in an aggressive fashion.

None the less, by 1924 British and French sources inside Russia were able to provide increasingly thorough and accurate reports about the Soviet economy, governmental machinery and military. These observations depicted the nation as one that had been economically ruined by war from 1914 to 1921, where the population suffered

²⁹ Michael Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 190-194.

under periods of intense famine, and the military was poorly equipped, logistically disorganized and incapable of undertaking any kind of offensive action. However, these reports also confirmed that the Soviet government was firmly in power and did not face any serious threats of rebellion or usurpation. Thus, it would be the Bolshevik government, replete with all its frustrations and inconsistencies, which foreign states would have to handle.

Foreign understanding of Soviet policy was obscured by the dual nature of its aims: revolution and diplomacy. When the anticipated world revolution did not materialize following the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, its leaders had to preserve the USSR as the vanguard of that event.³⁰ This condition, called “peaceful coexistence”, aimed to enable the survival of the world’s only communist nation, while serving as an inspiration to revolutionaries abroad. The term peaceful coexistence originated just after the revolutionary period, when Soviet leaders believed they had a short “peace break” before foreign armies would attack communist Russia. However, once the Bolsheviks consolidated power, the term took on new meaning. Endorsed by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in May 1922, peaceful coexistence was recognized as the “inevitability, at the present stage of historical development, of the temporary coexistence of the communist and bourgeois systems of property.” The term did not mean a reconciliation of the communist and capitalist worldviews; in Bolshevik theory, the two remained mutually antagonistic and could not coexist permanently. Jon Jacobson stresses that peaceful coexistence was a state of international relations and not a Soviet policy,

³⁰ Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 134.

although within this condition Soviet leaders pursued trade and economic relations with the capitalist powers (the term later would be reformulated by Nikita Khrushchev as the only viable alternative to the mutual destruction of both communist and capitalist states in total thermonuclear war).³¹

As Gabriel Gorodetsky argues, early Soviet policy was motivated primarily by the need to encourage revolution, even though the day-to-day necessities of survival dictated an increasing shift towards the establishment of relations with external governments. Moscow never conceded that it was taking that step, instead calling any normalization of relations “breathing spaces”. However, the implications were clear – from 1924, Bolshevik leaders drifted towards a more traditional approach to foreign relations.³² Although no specific event or declaration marked this transition, Soviet leaders shifted from expecting global communist revolution to be imminent (first anticipated to occur within weeks, then later within months and years) to concluding that communism must survive and thrive as an island surrounded by a sea of capitalist states. Josef Stalin told the Fourteenth Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party in December 1925 that the state of equilibrium between capitalist and communist would be a long one.³³ However, while Soviet leaders refocused their diplomatic efforts to attain working relations with foreign states, they also felt the need to encourage revolutionary movements. The

³¹ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley CA, California University Press, 1994), 25-26.

³² Gabriel Gorodetsky, “The Formulation of Soviet policy: Ideology and *Realpolitik*,” in Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1991: a retrospective* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), 31-32.

³³ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 142.

tensions inherent in such a policy are clear to historians – these two aims could not successfully and simultaneously be pursued. As Jacobson writes,

The two modes of early Soviet foreign relations could not be integrated into a coherent grand strategy, and in actuality no reliable method was found both to participate in and to overthrow capitalist international relations. Nor, despite [Georgii] Chicherin's repeated efforts to do so, were the two projects effectively separated from each other within Soviet policy making, either institutionally or rhetorically.³⁴

The Communist International (Comintern) was founded in 1919 to oversee the international revolution by supporting foreign movements that sought to overturn their governments. While it influenced many leaders that shaped twentieth-century world communism – in Eastern Europe, China and Cuba – the Comintern's successes in its first decade were minimal. Jacobson identifies three contradictions that hampered its work. First, there was a tension between the theory of impending proletarian revolution, and their failures abroad, and the reality of post-war stabilization. Second, it was impossible to maintain strict central control over Comintern members, and yet allow these bodies to adopt an independent message suited to the politics of their nation. Third, the Comintern, increasingly centralized, was subordinated to the security needs of the USSR, which neglected the requirements of foreign members. Hence, proclamations of the Comintern, and its persisting belief in the inevitability of revolution, obstructed a fundamental objective in Soviet foreign policy – the need to establish sustained diplomatic and commercial agreements with other European states following the devastation caused by

³⁴ Ibid., 275.

the First World War and the Civil War.³⁵ Meanwhile, the needs of the USSR increasingly constrained the actions of the Comintern.

As Soviet leaders gradually altered their diplomatic strategy in the mid-1920s, they sought to minimize embarrassing incidents that could provoke resentment among neighbouring states. The failure of a communist uprising in Germany in 1923 and of a coup in Estonia in 1924, showed the limits of foreign-sponsored revolutionary activities that were not supported by Russian military forces.³⁶ A botched raid on the Polish border town of Stolpce, Poland, in August, 1924, convinced the Politburo that the “active intelligence” – acts of diversion and sabotage – that had marked early Soviet foreign policy, had become counterproductive, by threatening “more or less normal” diplomatic relations with its neighbours. Feliks Dzerzhinskii, head of Soviet intelligence and the secret police, urged the Politburo that the Soviet government should leave responsibility for organizing active intelligence to communist parties abroad. This initiative also had a revolutionary component: “active subversion not only undermined [traditional diplomacy] but had specific negative consequences for Soviet border policy. The Soviet leadership came to realize that active intelligence was not just diplomatically and militarily counterproductive; it directly contradicted efforts to convince neighbouring populations of the superiority of the Soviet system.”³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 33-34.

³⁶ Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 228.

³⁷ David R. Stone, “The August 1924 Raid on Stolpce, Poland, and the Evolution of Soviet Active Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security* 21:3 (2006), 331-341.

The change in Soviet diplomacy by the mid-1920s slowly was reflected in Comintern policy. In May 1926, the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), launched a general strike after British miners were locked out. Although initially they remained publicly withdrawn from the issue, the Comintern and Profintern (the association of international trades unions) soon declared support for the strikers; as Gorodetsky writes, “they could not possibly turn their backs on a class struggle of such magnitude even if their expectations were limited.” However, the TUC rejected support from Moscow and ended the strike, which failed. The strikers’ rejection of communist support had ominous implications for the dual policy of ideology and diplomacy: “the illusion of unconditional support from the world proletariat had been shattered beyond repair.”³⁸ Even worse, this event, and the last surge of communist involvement in a great revolutionary enterprise in China between 1923-27, shattered Anglo-Soviet relations. These conditions led to the emergence of a doctrine known as “socialism in one country,” closely related to the personality of Stalin, which dominated the USSR’s security policy for the next fifteen years. It emphasised “the need for a flexible diplomacy geared to the avoidance of international conflicts, an emphasis upon the defensive capacity of the [Red Army] as the ultimate guarantor against external aggression, and a reduced role for the Comintern.”³⁹ “Socialism in one country”, however, was not a departure from revolutionary ideology; although it deprioritized international revolution in favour of internal development, the theory held that socialism could be achieved independently in individual nations at

³⁸ Gorodetsky, “Ideology and *Realpolitik*,” 39-41.

³⁹ R. Craig Nation, *Black Earth, Red Star: a history of Soviet security policy, 1917-1991* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 59.

different times. The “complete victory” for socialism would occur when “the threat of imperialist interference and intervention was banished by proletarian revolution in several European countries.”⁴⁰

Meanwhile, by 1926 the Narkomindel perceived the need to alter the USSR’s diplomacy in order to improve, restore or establish its political relationships. The Locarno Treaty demonstrated that the capitalist powers would regulate their international relations without Soviet participation. Formally approved by the Politburo in December 1926, the *politika dogovorennost* (“the politics of understanding”) was intended to improve relations with the United States, Great Britain and France.⁴¹ This policy abandoned earlier hopes that diplomatic recognition would quickly be followed by comprehensive settlements, either multinational or bilateral, in favour of piecemeal agreements and neutrality treaties. It sought to secure better political and economic terms for the Soviet Union and to decrease the possibility that it would become embroiled in a conflict between European states. Early Soviet foreign relations held that the communist state always would benefit from conflict between capitalist states. Jacobson describes this new doctrine as perceiving that “peace is indivisible,” and a new war in Europe would devastate capitalist and socialist states alike. “The task of the NKID and the Comintern was, therefore, not to add to the tensions that contributed to interimperialist conflict or to the antagonisms between the capitalist and socialist camps, but, rather, to work to reduce them.”⁴² The first significant product of this approach was the Soviet decision to sign the

⁴⁰ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 140-141.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 197-201.

⁴² *Nation*, 278-279.

Briand-Kellogg pact in 1928, which prohibited the use of war as an instrument of national policy. Although not invited to participate in the signing ceremonies in Paris, the USSR was the first power to adhere to the treaty which it later supplemented by an agreement with its neighbours, including Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Romania (the “Litvinov Protocol”) that implemented the Kellogg-Briand pact in advance of its original signatories.

II

Precisely as the USSR ostensibly abandoned any idea of the use of force, it began to multiply its power in that sphere. R. Craig Nation writes that “during the 1920s, the Soviet Union possessed no ‘official’ military doctrine. It would be fairer to speak of a set of dominant assumptions.” This situation changed with the triumph of Stalin; the need to substantially strengthen the Red Army took prominence. In December 1925, the Communist Party Congress identified industrialization as the USSR’s primary strategic need, aiming to overcome the technical deficiencies of the Red Army. The Soviet High Command first tried to formulate a comprehensive war plan in 1926.⁴³ A series of events in 1926-27, including the General Strike in Great Britain and the seizure of power by Jozef Pilsudski in Poland, led Soviet leaders to believe that a war with a coalition of British-led powers was imminent. Historians have seen the war scare as exaggerated, although it certainly heightened the USSR’s sense of diplomatic isolation. David Stone, noting the continuities in Soviet defence policy before and after the war scare, holds that

⁴³ Lennart Samuelsson, *Plans for Stalin’s War Machine: Tukhachevskii and military-economic planning, 1925-1941* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 19-21.

it did not significantly augment defence spending nor produce particular strategic or tactical innovations. “The Bolshevik elites who deliberated over military budgets did not act especially concerned about immediate war.”⁴⁴ Stone concludes that the war scare was “far more useful for arming Stalin against his enemies, leaving the Red Army and military industry with little new to show for all the fevered rhetoric of danger.” Lennart Samuelsson indicates that a Soviet military intelligence official, Yan Berezin, conducted an assessment of the “unfavourable” and “advantageous” factors facing the USSR at the beginning of 1927, and concluded that neither was preponderant: “in what [the USSR’s neighbours have] undertaken during 1926 and is anticipated for 1927, we do not see any immediate war preparations during 1927.” Most scenarios at the time envisioned war as at least a decade away.⁴⁵

However, other historians argue that the war scare did lay the groundwork for the massive militarization that would occur over the next decade. While agreeing that the war scare was “grossly exaggerated,” Nation points to a “mass campaign” that included the creation in January 1927 of the *Osoaviakhim* (Society for Cooperation with Aviation and Chemical Defense), an umbrella organization intended to co-ordinate military preparation among the public at large. As well, the government appealed for “greater vigilance” and warned of an “enemy within”. Although historians have observed no connection between the war scare and the Soviet desire to join multinational pacts like Kellogg-Briand, they certainly played a role in compelling the Politburo to seek security in such an agreement,

⁴⁴ Stone, *Hammer and Rifle: the militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926-1933* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 44-49, 63.

⁴⁵ Samuelsson, 35-36, 203.

as did the growing awareness in Moscow that a second total war likely would cripple societies both capitalist and communist.⁴⁶

Thus, the war scare largely impacted diplomacy and domestic politics. The true decision to improve the state of the Red Army came in December 1925. The charismatic commander Mikhail Tukhachevskii called for the mass production of tanks, an emphasis on military aviation and an expansion of the nation's railway network. His strategic assessment was bleak: while Soviet Russia faced a threatening coalition of hostile powers led by Great Britain, it would take the USSR five to ten years to equip its army and air force properly for a successful mobile campaign against a power like Poland.⁴⁷ His observations, contained in two reports entitled *Report on Defence* (1927) and *The Future War* (1928), determined that a considerable gap existed between the defensive power of probable enemies and the offensive capacity of the Red Army, making it impossible for the latter to launch continuous and decisive operations. Stalin agreed with Tukhachevskii's conclusions and ordered that the Soviet economic system must be subordinated to the "inevitable war."⁴⁸

Subsequently, the Soviet Union's Labour and Defense Council instructed the Economic Council to draft a plan for the long-term reorganization of the nation's defence industries. In May 1927 a five-year plan for the defence industry linked weapons production with civilian industries, aiming for maximum peacetime production.⁴⁹ These sweeping reforms entailed a major commitment, which would alter Soviet economic

⁴⁶ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 246.

⁴⁷ Samuelsson, 25-27.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 48.

priorities in the years ahead. Only gradually did military requirements overcome budgetary constraints, due primarily to the fragile state of relations with the peasantry; preparation for comprehensive mobilization had to be carried out with minimal disruption to existing production of civilian goods.⁵⁰ A central component of the first Five-Year Plan was the drive to establish a defense industry that could give the Red Army the modern arms needed to defend the nation. This plan subsequently was augmented to produce a war industry that could support the conduct of war under an economic blockade by hostile powers.⁵¹ As foreign observers, including those in France, immediately perceived, the Soviet Union aimed to become a formidable military power. For British and French analysts between 1922-27, Russia was a moving target. It moved from being the government of a ruined country, with a weak army and revolutionary aims, to master of a restored economy, pursuing contradictory external policies and beginning a campaign to establish a great militarized economy. These developments caused confusion to analysis and policy in London and Paris.

⁵⁰ Nation, 66-68; Stone, *Hammer and Rifle*, 23, 40-42.

⁵¹ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 266.

CHAPTER II

THE NORTHERN DEPARTMENT AND THE SOVIET UNION

I

In the first decade after the First World War, Soviet Russia confronted British foreign officials with a unique set of challenges. Historians frequently divide European powers after 1918 into either status quo nations, which desired to uphold the First World War peace settlements, or revisionist powers, which sought to regain territory or status lost in the war or the peace treaties. Alternately, using terminology derived from economics, they divided states into either “producers” or “consumers” of peace. While France nominally was part of the former grouping, its repeated if irregular reliance on British support meant that Great Britain essentially stood alone as the “producer” of peace. The rejection by the United States government of support for the Versailles settlement left Britain as the lone power capable of generating security for the status quo.⁵² As Anne Orde writes, for Britain “security was a responsibility as well as a need.”⁵³ Strictly speaking, however, in the 1920s the USSR was neither a status quo (“producer”) nor a revisionist power (“consumer”). It neither supported the post-war political arrangements nor overtly acted to destroy them. It condemned the system under which Europe’s powers had conducted diplomacy both before and after the war and advocated the collapse of this system. However, after Soviet leaders proclaimed the pursuit of “peaceful coexistence” with world powers in 1920, the USSR did not overtly

⁵² Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 183.

⁵³ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, 2.

attack this system. According to its needs, theoretically the Soviet Union could align itself in either camp without much thought to the repercussions on the European security picture. The USSR did act to bring about the demise of the capitalist system, but principally acted to do so by attacking the British Empire in Asia, not in Europe.

Keith Neilson contends that its ambiguity of policy made the USSR Britain's most challenging problem of the inter-war period, though not its most important one – relations with France, Germany, Japan and the United States were more central to the primary goals of British policy. The Soviet Union shaped many British calculations about strategy and relations with third powers. As Neilson writes,

Could Soviet Russia be persuaded to help contain the revisionist Powers? If so, what was the price and was it worth the cost? Was Soviet Russia a potential enemy? If so, would one of the revisionist Powers have to be conceded its goals in order to prevent Britain's having to face not just three but perhaps four possible enemies? Would Moscow remain aloof from any possible conflict involving Britain in order to fish in troubled waters?⁵⁴

Although the Soviets were on the periphery of European politics in the 1920s, their intentions had to be accounted for when attempting to sustain European security, or to settle any of its aspects. Even when British diplomats set out deliberately to ignore the Soviet Union as an *actor* in European politics, as Austin Chamberlain did when Foreign Secretary between 1924 and 1927, the Soviets always were a *factor* in British strategy.

Several factors shaped the formulation of British policy toward the Soviet state in the 1920s, some being unique to Anglo-Russian relations, others common to diplomatic

⁵⁴ Neilson, 5.

activity in general. The first was a broad change in the organization and operation of the Foreign Office. Long before the July crisis, the Foreign Office had been changing its organizational culture. Reforms implemented between 1903 and 1906 brought it in line with other British departments. Zara Steiner's study of the final years of the "old" Foreign Office demonstrates how men who previously had been clerks became advisers. Personnel changes and administrative reforms were intended to attract older university men to the Foreign Office and improve the haphazard record-keeping system.⁵⁵ The MacDonnell Commission on the Civil Service of 1914 called for the amalgamation of the Diplomatic Service and the Foreign Office, so to ensure greater efficiency and a wider selection of qualified candidates to serve in key positions in Britain and abroad.⁵⁶ Though these reforms were only partially successful by 1914, the culture of the Foreign Office undeniably had changed by 1919.

Widespread dissatisfaction with "old" diplomacy, which was held partly responsible for the outbreak of war, sparked a renewed impulse for reform after the war. This pressure was ideological as well as organizational.⁵⁷ The distaste for secret diplomacy, attacked in the Fourteen Points by President Wilson who called for "open covenants, openly arrived at," was expressed in the media, public and House of Commons. Critics held that secret commitments had led Britain into the war, while foreign policy-making should be conducted by personnel more representative of society

⁵⁵ Steiner, "The Last Years of the Old Foreign Office, 1898-1905," *The Historical Journal* 6:1 (1963): 59-90.

⁵⁶ Christina Lerner, "The Amalgamation of the Diplomatic Service with the Foreign Office," *Journal of Contemporary History* 7:1 (1972): 109-110.

⁵⁷ Steiner and M.L. Dockrill, "The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-21," *The Historical Journal* 12:1 (1974): 132-133.

as a whole.⁵⁸ The dissatisfaction with “old” diplomacy altered the parameters of foreign policy-making within the Foreign Office, and also sparked distrust of the individuals charged with making its policies. This distrust curtailed the influence of the Foreign Office, even as it underwent changes designed to give it a more effective (and representative) voice. Though scholars debate the extent that its powers were curbed, they frequently have seen the Foreign Office in eclipse under the Lloyd George administration. The Treasury and War Office pressed onto “traditional” Foreign Office territory, as did the cabinet, and, most notably, the Prime Minister’s secretariat (the “Garden Suburb”), which gave him alternative policy suggestions.⁵⁹ Lloyd George would circumvent the Foreign Office by negotiating with foreign ambassadors behind its back and then deny such behaviour when he was challenged over it.⁶⁰ During the war, he had tended to circumvent traditional diplomacy. That practice marked his initial negotiations with the Bolshevik government.

None the less, the extent of Prime Ministerial influence over foreign policy can be overstressed. Recently, historians have questioned how far Lloyd George bypassed Foreign Office officials, including Curzon. G.H Bennett denies that Curzon was a lame duck Foreign Secretary; in fact, “when one examines the content of British foreign policy from 1919 to 1922, one is struck by the level of harmony between Lloyd George and Curzon, and by the scale of the latter’s influence.” As well, Curzon’s bruised ego was

⁵⁸ Lerner, 111.

⁵⁹ Alan Sharp, “The Foreign Office in Eclipse 1919-22,” *History* 61 (1976): 198-218.

⁶⁰ David Gilmour, *Curzon: Imperial Statesman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 534-35; G.H. Bennett, “Lloyd George, Curzon and the Control of British Foreign Policy 1919-22,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45 (1999): 473.

partly responsible for the perception of Lloyd George as an architect of a grand scheme to undermine the Foreign Office: “a less sensitive man might have seen (Lloyd George’s forays into diplomacy) for what they were – occasional indiscretions rather than the sinister usurpation of the functions of one of the great departments of state.”⁶¹ Ephraim Maisel agrees that “one must not exaggerate the degree of foreign office impotence. Lloyd George’s interventions were sporadic and focused on a few key questions.”⁶² One of those questions, however, was Russia, where he played an active role, despite scepticism from the Foreign Office.

Again, if other departments challenged the Foreign Office on matters that once had been the sole concern of diplomatists, the reverse also was true. John Ferris describes reciprocal interference amongst government departments (especially between 1919 to 1922) as “inevitable, since disputes often concerned matters of strategic policy which were of inter-departmental concern.” Each department coveted autonomy, and each sought to control not only its own area of responsibility but also those areas in which concerns overlapped.⁶³ Thus, the Foreign Office held that it should dominate any matter that was even indirectly related to foreign policy.⁶⁴ Though the problem was magnified in the post-war period, even during its prewar heyday of departmental influence, the Foreign Office had to confront incursions on its turf. In any case, the fall of the Lloyd George government in October 1922 eliminated one source of challenge to diplomats, and saw the Foreign Office return to prominence in the direction of British foreign policy.

⁶¹ Bennett, 478-80.

⁶² Maisel, 2.

⁶³ Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy*, 3; Maisel, 61-62.

⁶⁴ Maisel, 74.

Despite challenges to its influence, the Foreign Office continued to handle most of Britain's global diplomatic concerns.⁶⁵ The central figure in the Foreign Office was the Foreign Secretary, who exercised more control over his department than most other ministers had in their own. Any able foreign minister could dominate departmental policy on any issue that concerned him, but none could handle every issue they confronted. Meanwhile, the intermittent reforms of the previous two decades had given permanent officials in the Foreign Office a powerful voice. These men, including the permanent under-secretaries (Sir Eyre Crowe until April 1925 and William Tyrell after April 1925), the deputy or assistant under-secretaries and the individual department heads, shaped the direction of Britain's foreign policy. This was not a uniform process throughout the three ministerial reigns between 1919-27; for example, outside of the Middle East, Curzon was more a "selector" than an "initiator" of policy. He expected his permanent officials to produce suggestions about policy, though he jealously guarded the right to make the final decision on even minor issues. In contrast, MacDonald directed the overall course of policy-making by giving his officials a series of questions on which he wished advice. He left the initial stages of policy formulation in the hands of his assistants, not automatically implementing the final recommendation submitted to him, but modifying it as he saw fit.⁶⁶ The differences were subtle in many cases, but the importance of permanent officials undeniably increased in the 1920s, compared to the pre-war era.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 32-34, 130-133.

II

These characteristics of policy-making were applicable to all matters handled by the Foreign Office, but the existence of a revolutionary state on Europe's eastern fringes brought ideology and political passions into policy. "The Great Enigma", a state founded on the principle of the overthrow of the international capitalist system (centered on Britain and its imperial network) and the rejection of the established diplomatic "rules", complicated the process by which Europe's primary "producer" of peace hoped to deliver its product. Though no major issue confronted by British diplomatists in the 1920s could be described as uncomplicated, the establishment of a communist government in Russia presented a unique set of challenges, which, in turn, affected the politics of policy. While the permanent officials of the Foreign Office enjoyed considerable influence over policy from 1922, they could not contain the momentum of emotion and political agendas, which brought about the termination of Great Britain's formal diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1927, a decision that had lukewarm support among Northern Department officials. Politicians always had more influence over British policy toward the USSR, and the Foreign Office was more constrained over that matter, than over relations with any other power of the 1920s.

Soviet Russia presented two main problems to British policy-makers. The first was related to geography. The Soviet Union and Great Britain represented the final barriers to any attempt by a continental power (especially Germany or France) to establish hegemony in Europe. Their conflict or collaboration could significantly affect European stability. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was the sole European power that directly threatened British interests in Asia; from 1925, Soviet influence in China, Persia

and Afghanistan was a prominent concern to British strategists.⁶⁷ Second, Soviet Russia affected British policy-making in a uniquely ideological fashion. During the interwar period, new and radical ideologies attacked the perceived bankruptcy of liberal democracy.⁶⁸ Like fascism and Nazism, Bolshevism asserted itself as the modern answer to a worn-down political and economic system of the nineteenth century, of which Britain was the global leader. More than Nazism and fascism, however, Bolshevism threatened to sway many British people, war-weary and confronted by a morass of economic problems. Due primarily to the domestic issues confronting Great Britain after the war, Bolshevism was particularly troublesome as a threat to stability. Of the three revolutionary ideologies that emerged in the inter-war period, Bolshevism most affected British policy. Nazism and fascism were too radical to appeal to more than a small segment of British society. Bolshevism, a universalist creed with effective international organisation, could engage a wide audience, especially one suffering from unemployment or other problems related to post-war economic struggles.⁶⁹

External threats also shaped initial British encounters with communism. As the Bolsheviks rose to power in Russia, expecting that their victory represented simply the first step on the path to worldwide revolution, they looked out at areas they perceived as ready to rise against imperialism. Through bodies like the Comintern, Bolshevik leaders appealed to any foreign elements that could encourage the working classes of their nations to follow the example of Soviet Russia, or could motivate other oppressed groups

⁶⁷ Neilson, 2.

⁶⁸ Alan Cassels, "Ideology," in *The Origins of World War Two: the debate continues* ed. Robert Boyce and Joseph A. Maiolo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 231.

⁶⁹ Neilson, 3.

to strike at their masters. These nations included those either in the British Empire (India) or on its periphery (Afghanistan, Persia, China), a threat which became increasingly urgent to British officials as the 1920s progressed. Ideology and imperialism were prominent factors in Anglo-Soviet relations until 1927; the British definition of a satisfactory settlement with the Soviet government required a curtailment of communist ideology. British offers of diplomatic and commercial relations were conditional, among other things, on the cessation of revolutionary propaganda throughout the British Empire, as well as domestically in Britain.⁷⁰

The year 1921 represented a turning point in the post-war relationship between Bolshevik Russia and Great Britain. Two events in March of that year – the signing of the Treaty of Riga and the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement – signalled the conclusion of the first phase of Bolshevik rule in Russia. The former ended the thirty-month period in which the new leaders of Russia had been at war for the survival of their regime, first with the Allied powers Britain and France, and then with neighbouring Poland. The latter represented a British admission that the Bolsheviks were the government of Russia; the attempt to break their hold on power had failed.⁷¹ The domestic situation in Great Britain prohibited any further attempts to destabilize Bolshevik power, while in Russia, internal dissent, an economy devastated by seven years of war, and the failure of revolutionary movements abroad, indicated a time to seek a truce with the capitalist world. As Carole Fink writes, “the tides of revolution and

⁷⁰ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 107.

⁷¹ Keeble, 83-84.

counter-revolution had ebbed in 1921, and both sides were casting about for alternatives to military and ideological confrontation.”⁷² However, the tangible gains of the Trade Agreement must not be overstated. As Richard Ullman explains, it did not usher in an era of harmony and co-operation between the governments. Trade activity was negligible (only £108 million in the first five years of the agreement) and key promises were never fulfilled. Rather, the agreement was the product of the British policy of appeasement that emerged in the first decade after the war. While it would have rivals, Britain’s leaders emphasized that it should avoid having enemies, and policies that turned the former into the latter should be avoided.⁷³

To this end, Lloyd George held that the trade agreement represented a stepping-stone toward the taming of communist ideology and the reintegration of Russia into the European system. The Prime Minister spoke of a “gentlemanly process of instruction” of Soviet leaders that would terminate their “wild schemes”. Impressed by Lenin’s implementation of the NEP, Lloyd George saw the benefits of renewed commercial exchanges between the two countries. He dismissed the significance of the many outstanding issues between Great Britain and Russia by declaring “you cannot rule out half Europe and a vast territory in Asia by ringing down the fire curtain and saying that until it has burnt itself out you will never send another commercial traveller there”.⁷⁴ Historians have seen more than just economic necessity behind Lloyd George’s desire to

⁷² Carole Fink, “The NEP in Foreign Policy: The Genoa Conference and the Treaty of Rapallo,” in *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991*, 11-12.

⁷³ Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921: Volume III, the Anglo-Soviet accord* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 454-455.

⁷⁴ Keeble, 83-84.

establish formal ties with Russia. This approach was part of his scheme to stabilise Europe and lessen the need for British involvement in continental affairs. The Prime Minister's "Grand Design" entailed the elimination of all threats to peace, whether from aggressors or treaty enforcers, the dissolution of hostile blocs, the re-establishment of a balance among the European powers, and the achievement of general disarmament. This would allow Britain to resume its traditional (and preferred) role of leading Europe from the periphery.⁷⁵

When, in late 1921, Soviet foreign commissar Georgii Chicherin indicated that Russia was ready to rejoin the international community on an equal footing, Lloyd George was willing to move in this direction. During a meeting with French Prime Minister Aristide Briand, in January 1922, the agenda was set for a conference at Genoa which was intended to address a sweeping array of issues linked to European stability, including the integration of Russia into the European political scene, through a collective and simultaneous recognition of the Soviet government by all Western powers. Through the Genoa conference of April 1922, Lloyd George hoped to restructure the peace settlement and move it closer to his "Grand Design".

Genoa was doomed to failure for many reasons, including a fundamental disagreement between the Western powers and Russia on the matter of Imperial debts. In 1917, the Bolsheviks had repudiated these debts, and confiscated much foreign-owned property. The Western powers demanded that these debts be recognized and that they receive adequate compensation before any economic agreement was reached with the

⁷⁵ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 84-85.

Soviets. Though Moscow refused to change their stance on these debts, the Western powers hoped to change their minds. At the conference, each side stuck to its position, producing stalemate. The Western powers held to their demand that the Soviets recognize Tsarist debts, compensate Western firms and individuals for confiscated property, and provide guarantees that future contracts would be honoured. The Soviets, represented by Chicherin, offered only to repay debts after they had been adjusted to compensate the Soviets for damage caused by allied intervention in the civil war. They also wanted new financial credits and demanded that all war debts be cancelled.

Peter Krüger writes that “the Genoa Conference stood and fell with a minimum of European common sense.” Its success required the powers to find common ground, even though they had failed to do so since Versailles. Ultimately, they were too inflexible to succeed.⁷⁶ The participatory governments still mistrusted each other in 1922, making multi-national gatherings inappropriate forums for resolving outstanding post-war issues. Rather than progress on Lloyd George’s goals, the conference was the occasion for the rise of developments contrary to British hopes. The agreement that became the Treaty of Rapallo actually was negotiated before the Genoa Conference when Chicherin, en route to Genoa, stopped in Berlin and held talks with German officials. By the time they traveled to Genoa, each side carried a draft agreement that would become the Rapallo pact. After six days at the conference, disillusioned with their inability to further their

⁷⁶ Peter Krüger, “A Rainy Day, April 16, 1922: The Rapallo Treaty and the Cloudy Perspective for German Foreign Policy,” in Fink, ed., *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922*, 50.

interests, Soviet and German officials agreed to meet at Rapallo, where they signed the agreement in the morning, Sunday April 16, 1922.

Thus, with the Genoa Conference, Bolshevik Russia indeed returned to the international system, but not on the terms that Lloyd George had envisioned – to the contrary. The Rapallo Treaty enabled Russia to hinder British attempts to revise the post-war settlement in its preferred direction. The USSR sought to exploit differences among the European powers for its own gains, hampering British efforts to stabilise Europe. The effects were immediate: for example, Rapallo increased French concerns for its security, as the possibility of Russo-German co-operation in Eastern Europe threatened its allies. In assessing Rapallo, conversely, the Foreign Office took two principal approaches: to criticise British policy leading up to Genoa, and to downplay the significance of the treaty. The Foreign Office, surprised by the pact, sought to determine why no advance warning was given about it. Lord D'Abernon, the British ambassador to Berlin, was criticized for failing to warn of obvious signs of Germano-Russian negotiations. The Northern Department condemned Britain for failing to prevent France from driving Germany into the arms of Russia,⁷⁷ while many in the Foreign Office held that since 1919 British policy had been inconsistent, lacking firmness and direction.⁷⁸

Before Genoa, the Foreign Office had a straightforward perception of communist Russia as a revolutionary state committed to the spread of communism. After Rapallo, that image became complicated by the fact that Russia was a factor in European security.

⁷⁷ Minutes by Leeper and Wathlow, 20 April 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8208/N3725/2169/38.

⁷⁸ Salzmann, 28.

Thus, the Northern Department began to re-evaluate Russia. It saw Russia as an unknown quantity, whose ambitions and intentions could only be the subject of guesses. The assessments about the Soviet Union and European security made within the Northern Department and the Moscow Mission fell into three broad categories. The first addressed the relationship between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. These relations were unstable throughout the 1920s, as officials considered the value of stances such as rapprochement, isolation, indifference and renunciation. The second category concerned how Anglo-Soviet relations would affect the goals and policies of other European states, and British ambitions to bring long-term peace to Europe. Finally, the Northern Department sought to ascertain the nature and intentions of the Soviet state itself. An analysis of these three topics illuminates the difficulty in forming policy when dealing with a state whose form of government is largely unknown, and whose leaders are committed to the overthrow of the international status quo.

These evaluations reveal how Rapallo set a tone for Anglo-Soviet relations. Historians have described this relationship in the interwar years as rooted in intense suspicion, hostility and periodic belligerence.⁷⁹ These extreme delineations were not obvious in 1922, but they began to emerge in the next five years and persisted after Anglo-Soviet relations reached their nadir in 1927. Between 1922 and 1927, British observers expressed frustration and scepticism about their relations with Moscow. Outright hostility was rare, but the notion that British interests might best be served by

⁷⁹ Neilson, 323; Robert Manne, "The Foreign Office and the Failure of Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (1981), 725-55; Carley, " 'A Situation of Delicacy and Danger'," 175-208, and " 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances'," 29-69.

ignoring the Soviet government was increasingly appreciated. The study of the first British attempts to evaluate Soviet Russia as a European factor, and to set policy accordingly, reveals the roots of a mistrust that had great significance for Europe in the 1930s.

III

While the Foreign Office left Genoa with the hope of maintaining a united front of the European powers against Russia, it soon was clear that individually they slowly would settle their differences with Russia. The reports of negotiations with Russia by Sweden, Italy and France supported the Soviet claim of confidence that it would come to terms with the European Powers one by one. They also signalled that Great Britain would have to do so as well. In a lengthy assessment of British policy toward Soviet Russia, the Northern Department official, J.D. Gregory, argued that recognition was inevitable. For some time, Russia would remain a semi-barbarous Asiatic state, to be judged by the same standards as Turkey, Afghanistan and China, rather than those applied to European states. None the less, the Soviet government was safely in power, and Britain must recognise it sooner or later. Whitehall, however, must set conditions for such an act, like better behaviour and economic stipulations. If Britain were to accord recognition to Moscow without conditions, it "should gain a few promises which would not be worth the paper they were written on."⁸⁰ As a condition for political recognition, the Soviet government must meet basic international standards for relations between foreign powers.

⁸⁰ Memorandum by Gregory, 11 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8209/N9291/9291/38.

After the Genoa Conference, the Foreign Office saw the Rapallo Treaty as being merely a consolation prize for Germany, from which it could extract few benefits. D'Abernon held that the new relationship would be short-lived, as there already was controversy between Moscow and Berlin over propaganda. Rapallo was a provocative and retaliatory tactical demonstration rather than a serious strategic relationship. The Soviets, for their part, enjoyed "playing a trick" on the Western Powers.⁸¹ As it monitored the new relationship throughout 1922, the Foreign Office came to share D'Abernon's predictions. In November, it noted that the results of Rapallo after six months had been minimal. Commercial exchanges were "meagre" while the Germans were repeatedly disappointed in attempts to establish contracts in Russia.⁸² When contracts could be established, German firms experienced difficulty in getting their Russian counterparts to pay in cash.⁸³ Ultimately, Rapallo came to be seen as a last resort for the German government; D'Abernon observed that Berlin was not inclined to intimacy with Russia, but even less so towards isolation. It could ill afford to stand alone among hostile powers, with France on its western frontier and Poland and the Little Entente to the East.⁸⁴

Still, Rapallo changed the Foreign Office's approach to relations with communist Russia, by conveying more permanence to the new regime in Moscow. The agreement showed that European nations would establish relations with Moscow, tolerating the distasteful aspects of communist rule in exchange for anticipated benefits. Germany, a

⁸¹ D'Abernon to Curzon, 16 May 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8208/N4684/2169/38.

⁸² D'Abernon to Curzon, 4 Nov. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8209/N9937/2169/38.

⁸³ SIS report, 1 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8179/N10682/246/38.

⁸⁴ D'Abernon to Curzon, 4 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8209/N10703/2169/38.

pariah in European politics, took the lead from necessity, but other governments probably would follow suit. For Bolshevik leaders, Rapallo was a means to counter an anti-Soviet bloc. For other states, German links to Russia would complicate any settlement of Europe, and increase Moscow's bargaining position.⁸⁵ For Britain, "the whole situation was transformed."⁸⁶ Lloyd George told the House of Commons that Great Britain must not allow abhorrence of the principles on which a foreign government was organized to preclude relations with it.⁸⁷

Shortly after the treaty was signed, Robert Hodgson, the top British official in Moscow, reminded the Northern Department that Russian policy always tended towards reaching agreements with individual European nations, while the Genoa conference had revealed the discord among European states and their inability to co-operate against the Bolshevik government.⁸⁸ As the agreement with Germany demonstrated, bilateral negotiations let Moscow secure better terms than they could obtain from a united front. The Northern Department carefully monitored the prospect that individual nations might settle with Russia and thus weaken Britain's position in Europe. In November 1922 the Foreign Office learned about possible negotiations between Sweden and Russia on recognition, contradicting prior information that the negotiations were limited to trade. This information led the Northern Department to consider whether Britain should inform European powers that Britain opposed any recognition of the Russian government by any

⁸⁵ Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 169.

⁸⁶ Gregory to Curzon, 17 April 1922, quoted in White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 73.

⁸⁷ White, *The Origins of Détente: The Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western relations, 1921-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 192.

⁸⁸ Hodgson (Situation reports) 1 May 1922 and 22 May 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8182; Hodgson to Curzon, 13 June 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8170/N5655/123/38.

means other than a united front.⁸⁹ Gregory and Eyre Crowe argued that while Great Britain obviously could not tell foreign governments how to conduct their relations with a third government, it should let them know it opposed bilateral negotiations for the recognition of Russia. Again, in December, the Foreign Office feared that a shift within the Fascist government would lead to the establishment of relations between Italy and Russia. Dr. Gianni, head of the Italian Commercial Mission in Great Britain, told Gregory the Italian government believed that since The Hague Conference, European powers were free to act as they saw fit.⁹⁰ Again, the Northern Department concluded that it could not prevent such negotiations between European nations and Russia, but should communicate its dislike for them.

The fall of the coalition government in October 1922 and the replacement of Lloyd George by Conservative Andrew Bonar Law, reshaped Anglo-Soviet relations. British officials abroad warned that this change might not work altogether to Britain's advantage. Ernest Maxse, the Consul General in Zurich and a highly respected observer of communism, suggested to Curzon that the Soviet government, believing Lloyd George eventually would compromise with Moscow on a political settlement, hitherto had been averse to taking steps that might handicap the Prime Minister's policy. Now, however, feeling that the British government (excepting the left wing of the Labour Party) and public opinion was against them, the USSR was likely to increase subversion in Britain's Asian empire, actions which Moscow had restrained while Lloyd George was in power.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Hardinge to Crowe, 21 Nov. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8180/N10413/252/38.

⁹⁰ Minute by Gregory, 4 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8167/N10717/57/38.

⁹¹ Maxse to Curzon, 21 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8171/N11298/123/38.

At the same time, William Peters, a member of the British staff in Moscow, argued that the Russians were unwilling to make serious concessions to obtain speedy *de jure* recognition. So long as Europe was politically divided, the Soviet government had little need to establish itself on equal footing at conferences of Great Powers. Indeed, “at present Soviet Russia is in some ways at an advantage in being able to stand outside and to point to the differences which exist between the policies of the Great European Powers.” The Northern Department official, P.M. Roberts, noted that Soviet pressure for an agreement on recognition by Britain had decreased noticeably in the last two months.⁹² Such a view indicates that British officials recognized the tenor of their relations with Moscow had changed significantly with the assumption of power by Bonar Law.

The fall of Lloyd George also changed the Foreign Office’s approach to Soviet Russia. The two prime ministers under whom Curzon served his final period as Foreign Secretary, Bonar Law and Stanley Baldwin, were less interested in foreign affairs than their predecessor had been, leaving the Foreign Office more prominence in decision-making.⁹³ Curzon had bitterly opposed Lloyd George’s attempts to improve relations with the Bolshevik regime, and the tone of the Foreign Secretary’s communications periodically indicated irritation with the Soviet government. In late 1922, in conversation with Chicherin at Lausanne, Curzon expressed his frustration with Soviet policy, accusing Moscow, through Soviet behaviour at the Genoa and The Hague conferences, of deliberately spurning the opening offered by Lloyd George. Though insisting that Great

⁹² Memorandum by Peters, minute by Roberts, 11 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8164/N10893/50/38.

⁹³ Salzmann, 33; Michael Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World*, 25.

Britain wished to see Russia play a role in reconstructing the world, Curzon reprimanded Chicherin for spreading anti-British policies and propaganda in the Near East: “how could we be expected to embrace a would-be friend who thus stabbed us in the back?” In what would become a common retort to such accusations, Chicherin accused Britain of intriguing against Russia in the same region. Curzon then counter-attacked the Soviet minister by accusing Russian negotiators at the Lausanne conference of trying to move talks beyond the intended purpose of peace between Turkey and the Western Powers. The exchange revealed Curzon’s frustration with the Soviet refusal to play by the diplomatic “rules”, and his preferred response to this behaviour. As he told the Cabinet, “Chicherin has heard, probably for the first time from the lips of a British minister, what I believe to be the sentiments of nine Englishmen out of ten on the subjects which we discussed.”⁹⁴

This tone carried over into 1923, when the Northern Department debated British options regarding Russian propaganda in India. In discussing possible action, the department came to appreciate what would remain a continual problem until the breach of relations in 1927 – that the Foreign Office had few means to communicate displeasure to the Soviet government. Reginald Leeper observed that “the only option we have – and it is hard to judge how far it would inspire Moscow – is the rupture of the Trade Agreement.” Gregory argued that the best way to deal with Russia was to ignore it, which would become the Foreign Office’s primary tactic in dealing with Moscow under the leadership of Chamberlain from 1925-27. However, Gregory warned, rupture of relations

⁹⁴ Curzon telegram, 10 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8147/N11110/3/38.

with Russia was Britain's only diplomatic weapon, one that could be used only once, and hence must be treated with caution and prepared in advance. As a preliminary step, Gregory suggested that the Moscow mission be reduced in size. His suggestions were approved by the Assistant Under-Secretary Ronald Lindsey (who did, however, counsel that Britain proceed with caution) and Curzon.⁹⁵

The Foreign Office, however, did not yet fully understand the consequences of rupture. Following various incidents in Russia, and the Northern Department's pondering of a rupture of relations, Curzon asked Hodgson to assess issues pertaining to trade, the functioning of the mission, and the effect of a possible breach with the USSR upon public opinion both in England and worldwide.⁹⁶ Hodgson replied that a breach of relations, unless part of a concerted international effort, would have far more disadvantages than advantages. The British mission had a moderating influence on the Soviet government, and whatever good results it and the trade agreement had produced would be undone. The Northern Department evaluated Hodgson's claims with scepticism, but could not decide whether a breach with Moscow would produce positive or negative benefits. Owen O'Malley argued that a complete rupture would be an "interesting experiment", Gregory termed it a "leap in the dark" for the British government – terminology that hardly indicated confidence.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Minutes by Leeper, Gregory and Lindsey, 10 Jan. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9333/N298/44/38.

⁹⁶ Curzon to Hodgson, 11 April 1923, FO 371/9365/N3228/3198/38.

⁹⁷ Hodgson to Curzon, 14 April 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9365/N3228/3198/38.

British officials remained sceptical about Soviet motives or Moscow's appearance of being open to establishing economic and political relations with foreign states.⁹⁸ Gregory wrote that the Soviet desire for recognition stemmed not from a wish to obtain the usual benefits of international relations, but rather to demonstrate its success as the first recognized communist government in world history.⁹⁹ In early 1923, however, the Moscow mission began to perceive a different orientation within the Soviet government. British officials were evaluating what historians call the policy of "accommodation" that emerged after Rapallo, when Moscow's revolutionary overtures were muted by its need to establish political ties and economic assistance with foreign powers. The move of French troops into the Ruhr presented the Russian government with the prospect of encouraging revolution in Germany, which might develop from the anticipated economic malaise, or the need to support its treaty partner.¹⁰⁰ During the crisis, Peters speculated about Russian action in case of revolution in Germany: "one of the crucial questions of the moment is whether the Soviet Government is guided entirely by the interests of world revolution or has acquired, through its work of ruling Russia, specifically Russian interests which may give it pause in its Communist task." Though information was inadequate to form a conclusion, Soviet policy might well change.¹⁰¹ Hodgson later observed that the influence of the Communist party on the national government was waning.¹⁰² Both the mission and the Foreign Office stressed the

⁹⁸ White, *The Origins of Détente*, 35-37.

⁹⁹ Memorandum by Gregory, 11 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8209/N9291/9291/38.

¹⁰⁰ *Nation*, 43-45.

¹⁰¹ Peters to Curzon, 7 Feb. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9345/N1202/74/38.

¹⁰² Hodgson to Gregory (confidential), 10 Dec. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9358/N9632/687/38.

importance of economic pressures upon the Moscow government. Hodgson wrote that despite divisions within Bolshevik circles, “economic exigencies” admitted no other course. The bleak economic picture in the Soviet Union would drive it to reach a settlement with the West that would restore confidence abroad and improve domestic conditions. While the event did signal that Russia had emerged from the communist struggle as a world power, the attitude of the government was friendly and willing to reach agreement on all issues outstanding between the two states.¹⁰³

The Northern Department was not persuaded. O’Malley’s admitted that *de jure* recognition probably would make the Soviet government more confident. “However strong the disapproval felt for their policy or the disgust entertained for their persons, a government which can speak with authority is to be preferred to an administration agitated by fears of sedition, obstructed by passive resistance and exposed to the influences of accident and caprice.” None the less, recognition was unlikely to affect the Anglo-Soviet issue of greatest concern to the Foreign Office: outstanding financial liabilities and propaganda. The 1921 trade agreement demonstrated Moscow’s willingness to settle present economic questions, but left “unaffected their desire to upset the peace of the world and to propagate revolutions in foreign countries.”¹⁰⁴

The possibility of a Franco-Russian rapprochement occurring at a time when British relations with both countries were fraying, however, raised consternation within the Foreign Office. In September 1922, Edouard Herriot, mayor of Lyon and a senior

¹⁰³ Hodgson to MacDonald, 25 Feb. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10465/N1670/10/38.

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum by O’Malley, 26 Feb. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10465/N1730/10/38.

French politician, travelled to Moscow to seek a basis for commercial relations between France and Russia. These negotiations were seen as a warning signal, not only of closer Franco-Russian relations, but also to a French challenge to Britain.¹⁰⁵ These concerns were increased when a SIS report indicated that France was making “a determined effort to get in touch with the Soviet Government, and that their aims are not only to re-establish trade relations but to pave the way towards a definite political agreement.”¹⁰⁶ These French advances to Russia seemed to hold little tangible benefits and Britain’s best response appeared to be avoiding any confrontation with Paris. Leeper held that France stood to gain little from “stealing a march” on Britain. Since Britain did not wish to break with France, its best response was calm, regardless of French bravado. Britain should not seek a new combination of European powers (possibly including Russia) to check French power, and must strive to avoid any actions that might alarm France.¹⁰⁷

While its own relationship with Moscow evolved, the Foreign Office continued to monitor relations between the Soviet Union and other European governments. By 1923, it perceived the Soviet government as an increasingly normal government, which might therefore co-operate with other European powers. Peters raised a fundamental question about the guiding principles of the Soviet government: was Moscow guided entirely by the interests of world revolution, or would the work of ruling Russia take precedence

¹⁰⁵ Grigg to Crowe, 10 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8184/N9472/573/38.

¹⁰⁶ SIS report, 14 Nov. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8184/N10158/573/38.

¹⁰⁷ Minute by Leeper, 18 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8184/N9472/573/38.

over that desire?¹⁰⁸ Later in 1923, the Moscow mission argued that the Soviet government was emerging from a state of subservience to the Communist Party. It was acting more as a government and less as a party. Its leaders now viewed their actions from a national rather than a revolutionary point of view.¹⁰⁹ Such perceptions shaped Foreign Office concerns over relations between the Soviet government and other powers. Thus, in 1923, the Foreign Office became alert to the possibility of increased Franco-Soviet co-operation. In a newspaper article, Gaston Doumergue, president of the Senatorial Foreign Affairs Committee, advocated closer ties with the Soviet government. Though France had reasons for disliking the Soviet regime, he argued it had still better reasons to mistrust Germany. The latter realized that Russia, even with a communist government, was a political power which could serve German policy; France should adopt the same attitude. Indeed, the British government would be more inclined to support France in time of need if Paris had support from powers like Turkey and Russia.¹¹⁰

This time of need came quickly; on January 11 French troops occupied the Ruhr region of Germany in an attempt to bolster the failing reparations scheme. Britain did not support these actions, but neither did it want to break with France or side with Germany. Soon after the occupation, Leeper warned that France was reconsidering its relations with Russia, not surprisingly, given the existence of Rapallo and France's lack of support from Britain and Italy. As the Foreign Office was continuing to pursue a policy of isolating

¹⁰⁸ Peters to Curzon, 7 Feb. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9345/N1202/74/38.

¹⁰⁹ Hodgson to Gregory, 10 Dec. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9358/N9632/687/38.

¹¹⁰ Crewe to Curzon, 2 Jan. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9343/N76/62/38.

Russia, Leeper suggested that the time was ripe for a frank discussion with France on the subject of Russia.¹¹¹ Curzon, however, was not ready for this step. He sought more precise information about French intentions before speaking with French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré, who was strongly anti-communist and with whom British relations were strained. The Foreign Office, however, had little precise information about French intentions beyond press rumours, and could find little on the matter in Paris.¹¹²

A secret Soviet despatch from Moscow to Berlin, however, which SIS allegedly obtained, illuminated these questions. The despatch, Leeper noted, demonstrated that Franco-Russian interests no longer clashed, while deputy foreign commissar Maxim Litvinov's policy increasingly was anti-British. Indeed, Litvinov thought that Franco-Soviet conversations at the Lausanne Conference indicated that French hostility towards Moscow had passed. In order to counter closer Anglo-American ties, which the Soviets expected to be the logical by-product of increasing Anglo-French friction, France needed better relations with the USSR. Such a change in policy, however, was unlikely while Poincaré was in power; it would require a change of government.¹¹³ Three days later, Poincaré, downplaying media reports, reassured Crewe that a political understanding with Russia was impossible, because it would inflame public opinion in France. Further, he pledged France would act in concert with Britain when establishing political relations with Moscow.¹¹⁴ A second SIS report contradicted Poincaré's denials, noting that since Genoa, the French government had striven to create commercial and political agreements

¹¹¹ Minute by Leeper, 12 Feb. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9343/N1339/62/38.

¹¹² Crewe to Curzon, 26 Feb. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9344/N1823/62/38.

¹¹³ SIS Report, 2 March 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9344/N2028/62/38.

¹¹⁴ Crewe to Curzon, 5 Mar. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9344/N2085/62/38.

with Moscow. Both sides, however, were reluctant, the French watching for British reactions and the Russians distrusting French motives and waiting for changes in the latter's politics to improve the Soviet position. These reports ceased, however, and the Foreign Office made no significant mention of the possibility of Franco-Soviet political co-operation for the remainder of Curzon's tenure as Foreign Secretary.

In his final months of office, Curzon confronted the Soviet government over actions which frustrated the British government.¹¹⁵ Following a series of incidents that increased tension in Anglo-Soviet relations, Curzon directed Hodgson to present a note to the Soviet government, demanding a series of measures to rectify British injustices, or else face a breach in relations. Moscow fully complied to the "Curzon Ultimatum" showing that it valued the relationship with Great Britain. In August, Peters indicated that other foreign representatives thought that the ultimatum had introduced a "new phase in Anglo-Soviet relations", and that he perceived a more accommodating attitude on the part of the Soviet government. Thomas Preston, the British representative in Leningrad, noted that British prestige in Russia had been restored to its highest point since 1919.¹¹⁶ During the short Bonar Law and Baldwin governments, the Foreign Office was able to rectify the frustrations it had encountered under Lloyd George, and thought that the harder stance it had taken against Moscow had produced tangible, if limited, results.

The installation of the first Labour government in January 1924 signalled significant changes in British politics, but in foreign relations, it largely followed the

¹¹⁵ Keeble, 94.

¹¹⁶ Peters to Curzon, 15 Aug. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9370/N6942/3198/38.

approach of the previous administration. The Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald, who jointly served as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, believed that his government could achieve its objectives within the established political system. He did little to implement the far-reaching changes desired by many to the left of the political spectrum. None the less, MacDonald intended to resolve Britain's unsatisfactory relations with other European powers. He sought to promote a healthier atmosphere in Europe and to help other powers avoid problems, such as the Ruhr occupation, that continued to plague the continent. Given the challenge of his dual profiles, MacDonald had to focus his attention on broad issues of foreign policy and lacked the time to master details. He shared many views with his senior Foreign Office staff; his rhetoric on traditional diplomatic methods may have put some on guard, but his staff soon saw that he had a sober view of European relations. He did not share the Francophobia of his labour colleagues and the Foreign Office, but neither was he willing to offer guarantees that would have calmed French concerns about security.¹¹⁷

One area where MacDonald and senior officials in the Foreign Office did clash, however, was over Russia. This difference was most obvious in Crowe's refusal to participate in the negotiations for a possible Anglo-Soviet treaty, though Gregory and O'Malley did join those discussions.¹¹⁸ The Northern Department accepted that Britain soon would recognize the Soviet government and immediately sought to ascertain the consequences of so sudden a change in policy. Ten days after the Labour government

¹¹⁷ Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World*, 40-55.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

assumed power, MacDonald instructed Hodgson to inform Moscow that Britain accepted the Soviet government as the *de jure* rulers of those territories of the former Russian Empire which accepted its authority. Three days before granting recognition, Gregory prepared a memorandum that outlined the issues which this action would produce. As early as February 1920, Gregory himself had recognized the inevitability of peace with the Bolsheviks, and advocated that the Foreign Office resign itself to this step.¹¹⁹ His memorandum of 1924 focused on how recognition would affect the post-war settlement of Europe. He accepted MacDonald's view that events in Europe since Genoa had moved in a downwards spiral. Moreover, the "united front" approach to relations with the Soviet government, adopted at the Genoa and The Hague conferences, had failed in practice, and individual agreements had proven easier to reach than collective ones. Gregory still preferred the united front approach, and suggested that events since June 1922 were an argument for attempting European co-operation, though along different lines than those pursued at Genoa.¹²⁰ Gregory, in fact, was asserting the notion that would come to fruition under Chamberlain, that Europe's nations must settle their differences without the participation of the Soviet Union.

One example of the complications produced by *de jure* recognition was the status of countries that one day might adhere to the Soviet Union. The Northern Department sought to define courses of action if the borders of the Russian state should expand to encompass additional nations. Thus, William Strang assessed the question of the disuse

¹¹⁹ Maisel, 67.

¹²⁰ Memorandum by Gregory, 29 Jan. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10464/N751/10/38.

of the term “Russia”, in favour of the term “Soviet Union”, as requested by Moscow. That change in name was “politically rather dangerous” as it went beyond *de jure* recognition of a government toward a tacit endorsement of Soviet political doctrine, thereby committing Great Britain in advance to recognition of any extension of the Soviet system to other countries. As such, Strang advised that Britain explicitly recognise that it applied only to the area hitherto known as “Russia”, less those regions which subsequently had become independent states.¹²¹ MacDonald accepted that wording. Later, when Poincaré requested clarification of British policy, MacDonald stated that the extension of recognition to future republics would occur on a case-by-case basis.¹²²

When MacDonald came to office, Whitehall officials returned to focus on how the recognition of Russia would affect European politics. Gregory emphasised the need to utilize the recognition to further Britain’s desire to stabilise Europe. Since “the most important political effect we may hope to secure from recognition is the entry of Russia into the League of Nations”, it was not enough for Britain alone to recognize Russia; other nations must be invited to do so as well. Such steps might encourage Americans and their government, frightened of and disgusted with European politics (due to Bolshevism and French militarism), to “render us invaluable help in cleaning out the European stables.”¹²³ Notably, the Northern Department saw the effects of the recognition of Russia on Washington, and other global capitals, as secondary to that on relations with Paris. A month after the Soviet government had been recognised, O’Malley

¹²¹ Memorandum by Strang, 8 Feb. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10465/N1093/10/38.

¹²² MacDonald to Crewe, 18 Feb. 1924, NAUK, FO 371 10465/N1423/10/38.

¹²³ Memorandum by Gregory, 29 Jan. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10464/N757/10/38.

noted that its effects on Japan, Italy, Scandinavia and the nations of the Little Entente had been negligible; it was the impact on Anglo-French relations which mattered.¹²⁴ British officials believed that France ultimately depended on Britain for its security and thought that whatever form a commitment to France took would have to be accepted in Paris (which was an incorrect assessment of France's position).¹²⁵ Since Versailles, London had considered two directions for Anglo-French relations. The first was an *Entente*, directed against German aggression (its advocates, such as the General Staff, saw British security as equal to French security);¹²⁶ the second a "continental system" of friendships and understandings, based upon the League of Nations, which was really not a serious consideration in London until Chamberlain became Foreign Secretary. For France, the two systems need not be mutually exclusive. For Great Britain, they were so. One had to be selected, for if it tried to pursue both courses, it would enjoy the advantages of neither. Subsequently, O'Malley thought that if Britain were to pursue a continental system, its relations with the Soviet Union would rise in significance. If Britain were determined to choose between the two options, it must call on the French government to "define its attitude in a wholly new manner towards the question of reparations and inter-allied debts and would leave France under no misapprehension as to the measures of coercion which obduracy or equivocation would oblige them to take."¹²⁷ O'Malley clearly thought that Britain, frustrated by recent relations with France and its

¹²⁴ Memorandum by O'Malley, 26 Feb. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10465/N1730/10/38.

¹²⁵ Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy*, 106.

¹²⁶ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, 66.

¹²⁷ Memorandum by O'Malley, 26 Feb. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10465/N1730/10/38.

own sense of impotence, could use *de jure* recognition of Russia and a tougher stance against Paris, to modify French behaviour.

While it was accomplished rapidly, the granting of recognition to the communist government in Russia was not a straightforward matter. It affected British policy on the settlement of Europe, as well as the stability of Eastern and Central Europe. The Foreign Office believed that to recognize the Bolsheviks as the legitimate rulers of Russia would not solve any of the problems that had persisted in Europe since 1919. To recognise Moscow would not produce Soviet participation in European security, nor make the Russian government stop being a disruptive force. As with many other political considerations pertaining to Russia, this one caused much conjecture. As the Foreign Office official, Harold Nicolson, informed the CID in early 1925, Europe was divided into three factions – the victors, the vanquished and Russia. The victors feared losing what they had won, while the vanquished resented what they had lost; “one half of Europe is dangerously angry; the other half is dangerously afraid.” The feeling of uncertainty in Europe, and the structural weakness in the distribution of power, stemmed largely from the disappearance of Russia from the European concert. Nicolson added that the effects of the development of Russia on Europe were impossible to forecast. While it did not presently affect stability, it was the most menacing of all uncertainties. Europe must work out its own security in spite of Russia.¹²⁸

While in formal terms relations between the Soviet Union and Great Britain were better than ever since 1917, the Foreign Office still found it difficult to formulate a

¹²⁸ Nicolson memorandum, February 1925, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 593B.

consistent approach to Moscow. Indeed, Northern Department officials increasingly thought that friendly relations were impossible. In a memorandum on the behaviour of the Soviet government, Henry Maxse argued that the “fundamental difficulty is that so long as the Soviet Government remains willing to attempt to upset by revolution all other governments of the world, a fully correct attitude on its part is always impossible, much more so a fully amicable one.” Maxse’s memorandum was motivated primarily by concerns over anti-British propaganda, an issue that generally centered on Asia but also affected the Foreign Office’s attitudes toward the role of the Soviet Union in Europe.¹²⁹ Maxse’s view represented prevailing feelings within the Northern Department, and was also echoed by the Moscow mission. Peters told Litvinov that “normal” diplomacy between the two governments would be impossible so long as the Soviet government persisted in appealing over the heads of governments to their people. In other words, propaganda undermined the diplomatic relationship which Moscow purported to value. Peters noted that a *modus vivendi* was not beyond the power of diplomacy, but Britain would not make all the adaptation needed.¹³⁰

In addition to pursuing an agreement with the Soviet government, MacDonald sought to bring both of the Rapallo partners into the European settlement by having them enter the League of Nations. The German Foreign Ministry official Ago Van Maltzan told D’Abernon that Germany no longer insisted that both Rapallo partners join the League at the same time. This marked a new direction in German policy, signalling that

¹²⁹ Foreign Office memorandum, 2 April 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11015/N2290/75/38.

¹³⁰ Peters to Chamberlain, 15 Dec. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10491/N9200/1185/38.

Germany, frustrated with the Soviet government, might look West rather than East. Increasingly, the Foreign Office saw Rapallo as a relationship of words rather than deeds, the significance of which could be reduced through a careful policy of conciliation of Germany.¹³¹

This development, as well as the installation of Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary, following the return of the Conservatives to power after the October 1924 election, marked a significant change in Anglo-Soviet relations. Chamberlain too doubted the importance of the Rapallo partnership. While the Soviet Union was increasingly seen as dangerous to British interests in Asia, he doubted that it threatened a European settlement. While one day it might do so, that day was in the future, by which time Chamberlain hoped to have tied Germany to a concert of Western European powers centering on Franco-German reconciliation and British mediation.¹³² Early in his tenure, Chamberlain demonstrated that he would pursue the resettlement of Europe without the participation of the Soviet Union. As a sort of blueprint for this vision, Chamberlain endorsed the Nicolson memorandum, which advised the settling of Europe's problems without consideration of Russia.¹³³ His attitude towards the Soviet Union between 1924-27 was consistent. He refused to let frustrations with Moscow hinder his goal of establishing a security settlement in Europe, or allow ideological antipathies to dictate Britain's policy.¹³⁴ The Foreign Office directed its energies towards settling the differences between France and Germany. Chamberlain believed, as did his senior

¹³¹ Salzmann, 50-52; Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 23.

¹³² Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 167; Salzmann, 56.

¹³³ Maisel, 162-166; Nicolson memorandum, February 1925, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 593B.

¹³⁴ Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World*, 72.

officials, that another European war was inevitable if legitimate German ambitions were dashed, and French fears were ignored.¹³⁵

Considerations of Soviet policy did shape the evaluations of Chamberlain and the Foreign Office, but essentially through its impact on the establishment of European peace. In and of itself, the USSR was tertiary to British policy in Europe. Recognition had made the Soviet Union a better known entity to Whitehall, and officials felt more comfortable in their ability to accurately assess Soviet intentions. In February 1925, Strang surmised that recognition of the Soviet Union by many states had added an element of stability to Europe. Britain's position was still uneasy, but at least calculable; the USSR was under continuous observation and the known, bad as it was, was preferable to the unknown. Recognition had produced few brilliant results, but it was a necessary, however disagreeable, move towards enhancing European stability.¹³⁶ As the British government conducted the negotiations with France, Belgium and Germany which led to Locarno, it rarely discussed the Soviets at all. The Foreign Office knew that a Western Pact would not prompt Germany to abandon its relationship with Moscow, while the Soviets initially seemed unconcerned about the negotiations. Chicherin stated publicly that whatever agreements Germany might make with the Western powers, still it felt the need to secure its eastern frontiers. German policy had wavered in the past and would do so again, but Germany would never break with the Soviet Union. At present, the Franco-

¹³⁵ Maisel, 164.

¹³⁶ Memorandum by Strang, 13 Feb. 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11022/N838/838/38.

British refusal to evacuate Cologne would drive Germany to safeguard its relations with Moscow.¹³⁷

In June 1925, Peters noted that the Soviet government was anxious to reach an agreement with Britain due to “the pressure of circumstances,” by which he probably meant that the combination of conservative electoral victories across Europe, and the fact that all European nations had recognized the communist government as *de jure* rulers of Russia, had reduced the freedom of action of the Soviet government.¹³⁸ Peters advised that “the Soviet Government, above all things, cannot bear to be ignored.” Describing these observations as “interesting and instructive . . . Peters hit the nail on the head”, Chamberlain added that “I wish everyone at home understood the value of the reserve which foreigners believe to be our national characteristic.” Maxse agreed that the longer Britain ignored Moscow while treating it correctly, the more likely the USSR would be to behave.¹³⁹ This exchange of opinions inaugurated the policy of indifference to Moscow’s pressure for an Anglo-Soviet agreement, that persisted until the two governments broke in 1927. It was not a new approach, as Lindsey had recommended ignoring the Soviets in 1923; but Chamberlain was the first foreign secretary to implement the tactic.

Chamberlain received confirmation that the policy was effective. At the Conference for the Control of International Traffic in Arms, the Estonian representative, General Laidoner, told him that the Soviets “were more afraid than ever because you are doing without them.” At the Genoa and The Hague conferences, the Soviets had thought they

¹³⁷ Hodgson to Chamberlain, 23 March 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11022/N1609/710/38.

¹³⁸ Peters to Chamberlain, 2 June 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11016/N3153/102/38.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

were being courted and that Europe needed them. Now, “they are afraid because they see you in the course of making agreements without reference to, or thought of, them, and as if they did not exist.” Chamberlain told the Northern Department that when Britain complained to the Soviet government, Moscow believed that London was preoccupied with or afraid of it; his approach, on the contrary, showed Moscow that Britain had no need of it and could afford to ignore the USSR.¹⁴⁰ Chamberlain subsequently obtained the approval of cabinet for this policy, with the stipulation that the growing demand for a breach of relations with the Soviet Union should be rejected.¹⁴¹

As he orchestrated this policy, Chamberlain faced pressure for harsher sanctions against the Soviet Union. This originated from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for India Lord Birkenhead, and Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks. This trio pressured for a breach of relations with Moscow that included effective use of press to garner public support for their demands.¹⁴² This pressure made it increasingly difficult for the Foreign Office – which held that the advantages of maintaining ties to Moscow outweighed those of a breach – to maintain their position. It was augmented by the British press, which increasingly recommended the deportation of Soviet agents.¹⁴³ Chamberlain’s resistance to this pressure was reinforced by his primary goal as Foreign Secretary, which was to achieve a permanent settlement for Europe that would quash German ambitions to revise the Versailles Treaty. Chamberlain sought to accomplish this aim without regard to Soviet influence. He did not wish to antagonize the

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum by Chamberlain, 16 June 1925, NAUK, FO 371/N3432/102/38.

¹⁴¹ Cabinet secretariat, 15 July 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11016/N4037/102/38.

¹⁴² Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World*, 72-77; Grayson, 256-263.

¹⁴³ Grayson, 267.

Soviet Union, and actually strove to avoid increasing their paranoia that the Western powers were hostile towards them.¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, the pressure from the vocal element in Cabinet, which grew increasingly strong and came to include Conservative backbenchers after the General Strike in 1926, made pursuit of this policy impossible, and overwhelmed the moderate course that Chamberlain sought to pursue.

Despite Britain's nonchalant approach, the German-Soviet relationship still affected the Locarno negotiations. The primary source of conflict for Germany was Article 16 of the League covenant, which stipulated that all League members must break political and economic ties with any power perceived to be an aggressor. This clause, obviously contradictory to the Rapallo agreement, remained a difficulty in negotiations until the final agreement.¹⁴⁵ Russian pressure on Berlin, including claims that Germany would become a "cat's paw" of a British-dominated League and lose its room for an independent policy with its key eastern neighbour, did not shake Streseman or other German officials.¹⁴⁶ Nor would they abandon their relationship with Moscow, which increased their leverage on Western leaders.

The Northern Department believed that Chamberlain's course was having short-term benefits, but in the long run would have limits. Following the negotiation of the Locarno agreements, Gregory warned that the settlement of Europe will "not be complete until it is ultimately extended to include Russia." Having assumed the diplomatic leadership of Europe at Locarno, Great Britain could afford the luxury of restraint, but

¹⁴⁴ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 137.

¹⁴⁵ Salzmann, 66.

¹⁴⁶ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 157; D'Abernon to Chamberlain, 20 October 1925, NAUK, FO 371 11022/N5905/710/38.

also must maintain vigilance. The Foreign Office had to consider the possibility that Britain would remain isolated while other powers settled accounts with Moscow, as the Locarno agreement might encourage them to do. Gregory endorsed Chamberlain's approach, noting that the policy of "masterly inactivity" was producing effects and was likely to aid the pacification of Eastern Europe and settlement of Anglo-Soviet problems. However, he implied, Soviet Russia could be ignored diplomatically for only so long, and European settlement required Soviet participation.¹⁴⁷

In April 1926, the Foreign Office received a blunt demonstration of the importance of the Soviet relationship to Germany. D'Abernon warned of a change in Soviet attitudes towards Germany. Before Locarno, the Soviet government had demanded an unrestricted treaty of neutrality with Germany, which Berlin had rejected; it merely offered a promise not to join in aggressive actions against the Soviet Union. After Locarno, the Soviets reduced their demands, while Germany wished to keep Russia "in bounds." D'Abernon thought some agreement between them was likely. The German Secretary of State told him that Russia, at loose ends, might challenge German interests: "consider what she might conduct with Poland." The initial Foreign Office reaction was not negative. Maxse thought such a pact likely would help rather than hinder European pacification, though it would not be liked in France and the Border States. It would create an additional link between Russia and western Europe, bringing the USSR a step closer to membership in the comity of Europe. Gregory, more guarded, noted that "if ever the Balance of Power theory again dominates European diplomacy, then this combination

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum by Gregory, 10 Nov. 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11016/N6239/102/38.

may be but the first step to yet another partition of Poland.” Still, Gregory argued, Streseman deserved credit for not repeating the methods of Rapallo. Britain and France should not oppose a German-Soviet agreement, but rather intensify their approach to Germany, giving it every incentive to stay within the shelter of Locarno.¹⁴⁸

Yet as officials pondered the pact and obtained more information on it, their concerns over the German-Soviet relation intensified. This attention focused almost exclusively on Germany, even within the Northern Department. Germany’s future within Locarno was the priority; insofar as Russian motives were evaluated at all, its desire for closer ties with Berlin was seen as a “last throw” to defeat Locarno, or the perceived hostile Western bloc. The Foreign Office believed that since Rapallo, the German and Soviet positions had been reversed. C.W. Orde noted that “at the time of Rapallo, Germany was weaker than today – Russia was stronger. [...] Then it was Germany who might have been attracted into the Russian orbit. Today the greater probability is in favour of Russia being attracted into the German orbit.”¹⁴⁹ Chamberlain observed that “in view of past history, one could not entirely discard suspicion as to the real motivation of the German government”, which William Max-Muller later speculated might be a desire to see how far it could push the Western powers without a break, or else to gauge the best proposal it could garner from the East.¹⁵⁰

The Foreign Office recognised that while it presently held the key to treaty revision, that power was waning. Eventually, Chamberlain decided that it was pointless

¹⁴⁸ D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 3 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1487/718/38.

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum by D’Abernon, 13 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1617/718/38.

¹⁵⁰ Max-Muller to Chamberlain, 12 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1600/718/38.

to question the German government regarding its good faith over its Locarno promises. Even when pressed to do so by worried Central European leaders such as Czechoslovak President Edouard Benes, Chamberlain insisted that the German government either was acting in good faith (as he believed was the case) or they were not, which would become apparent when the treaties were published.¹⁵¹ To badger the German government about its intentions would “play into the hands of Moscow”. Britain urged friendly governments like Belgium not to press the German government on this issue.¹⁵² The Foreign Office’s perception that Berlin was the senior partner in its relationship with Moscow influenced its decision to downplay the German-Soviet pact. Though Chamberlain worried that German interpretations of Locarno and the League of Nations Covenant left it room to wriggle out of a joint action against Russia based on Article 16,¹⁵³ the best course of action was “faire bonne mine à mauvais jeu” [which means “put on a good expression despite an unfair game”] rather than to press Berlin on the matter.¹⁵⁴ Instead, he asked D’Abernon to pass on the idea “it is obvious that [the] Soviet is trying to play on everybody’s fears of somebody else. [The] German government should be on its guard against constant misrepresentation of aims and acts of German policy by [the] Soviet in other quarters.”¹⁵⁵

The Moscow mission, and Hodgson in particular, was even more critical of the policy of ignoring the Soviet government, which, increasingly, they viewed as

¹⁵¹ Clerk to Chamberlain, 19 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1726/718/38.

¹⁵² Grahame to Chamberlain, 21 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1823/718/38.

¹⁵³ Ingram to Chamberlain, 22 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1840/718/38.

¹⁵⁴ Chamberlain to Crewe, 10 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1585/718/38.

¹⁵⁵ Chamberlain to D’Abernon, 24 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11792/N1880/718/38.

dangerously short-sighted. After the Locarno agreements, Hodgson argued that Moscow was “clearly anxious” to come to terms with Great Britain. Hence, the time was propitious to reach agreement with the Soviets, lest they conclude terms with the French first. Hodgson was so anxious to further an agreement that, while on leave in London in December 1925, he manoeuvred behind the scenes to set up an informal meeting between Foreign Office officials and A.P. Rosengoltz, the Soviet chargé d’Affaires at the London mission. By this point, Hodgson was getting a reputation as being too enthusiastic for an Anglo-Soviet agreement, and his despatches to London increasingly put his views at odds with opinion in the Foreign Office.¹⁵⁶

Hodgson was not alone at the Moscow mission in urging a speedy settlement with Russia; Peters encouraged an agreement on the basis that the first nation to reach a settlement on the issue of debts and compensation for property likely would receive the best terms, while if Europe were settled, Soviet foreign policy would approximate more closely that of an ordinary state.¹⁵⁷ George Mounsey admitted that Peters’ assertion was “probably true”, but noted that Britain must have guarantees of Soviet compliance with its promises if the sides were to reach agreement.¹⁵⁸ The Foreign Office and the Moscow mission developed divergent views on the necessity of settlement with the Soviet government for many reasons. Perhaps most importantly, the Moscow mission was insulated from the broader European concerns of the Foreign Office, which had to consider the impact of Soviet participation in (or exclusion from) a general settlement

¹⁵⁶ Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 209-213.

¹⁵⁷ Peters to Chamberlain, 19 Oct. 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11018/N5875/710/38.

¹⁵⁸ D’Abernon to Chamberlain (minute by G. Mounsey), 20 Oct. 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11018/N5905/710/38.

across the continent. As well, the mission was inclined to focus on local issues and saw the Soviet government as needing a settlement to solve domestic problems, whereas the Foreign Office dealt mainly with diplomatic issues like propaganda and debt settlement, and also had to defend its views against public and political pressure that at times was impassioned.¹⁵⁹

While Hodgson's opinions on some matters still received respect in the Foreign Office, by 1926 his pleas for an end to the "policy of reserve" were ignored. In a despatch to Chamberlain, written just days after the end of the General Strike of May 1926, Hodgson argued that the attitude of reserve had been justified by results, but the time had come to examine the merits of a more constructive policy. Hodgson noted several indicators that the Soviet government was inclined to consider a fair settlement with Great Britain, such as economic difficulties, the breakdown of negotiations with the French, and the failure of Soviet Asiatic policy. Hodgson's urgings had negligible impact in the Foreign Office. C.W. Orde admitted that "it is difficult to be altogether happy about the policy of reserve" and conceded that Great Britain might find itself out in the cold if it waited too long to settle with Moscow, but downplayed Hodgson's suggestion that an agreement would serve as an impetus to trade. The United States, after all, displayed a more hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union than did Great Britain, but enjoyed greater trade benefits. Chamberlain brushed off Hodgson with the perfunctory reply that "it is right and necessary that both you and I should periodically review the

¹⁵⁹ Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, 209.

situation and consider the effect and appropriateness in gradually changing conditions,” without responding to Hodgson’s comments.¹⁶⁰

By mid-1926, the Foreign Office and the Moscow mission held divergent views on the future of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. The mission wished to accept the Soviet demand for the resumption of negotiations, while the Foreign Office increasingly considered the possibility of a rupture of relations. Chamberlain warned Rosengoltz that Britain desired to avoid rupture “*if possible*”, but that it had tolerated more bad behaviour from the Bolshevik government than it ever had done from Tsarist governments.¹⁶¹ The General Strike, and Russian support for striking workers, further pushed the Foreign Office toward rupture, which was advocated by the “die-hard” faction in the Cabinet, like Joynson-Hicks, who called attention to the Anglo-Soviet relationship in cabinet and forced the Northern Department to examine the consequences of rupture.¹⁶² After the strike, Gregory concluded that nothing was to be gained by denouncing the 1921 agreement or expelling Russian representatives, and saw “no use in slamming a door which has only got to be opened again quite soon.” Yet relations never could be completely satisfactory as long as the existing regime continued to govern Russia, and a strong line recently had succeeded in Egypt, perhaps proof that British prestige was higher than the Foreign Office knew. Gregory concluded that the balance was against

¹⁶⁰ Hodgson to Chamberlain, 17 May 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11786/N2241/387/38.

¹⁶¹ Chamberlain conversation with Rosengoltz (*italics in original document*), 14 July 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11786/N3278/387/38.

¹⁶² Salzmann, 80.

rupture, but the Foreign Office was leaning more heavily toward the option of a break with the Soviet government.¹⁶³

In December 1926, Tyrell urged that British diplomats should realize that Great Britain “was virtually at war with Russia,” which substituted propaganda and subversion for the use of force. Though he accepted Gregory’s suggestion to continue a policy of wait-and-see, he wanted the Foreign Office to watch for instances which would garner universal approval for a break with the Soviet government.¹⁶⁴ Gregory echoed Tyrell’s characterization of the Anglo-Soviet relationship as being at “war,” but still held that “the ejection of the Bolsheviks from this country would be a thoroughly pleasurable proceeding, but it would be rather the satisfaction of an emotion than an act of useful diplomacy.”¹⁶⁵

Before the rupture of relations, Hodgson issued one last plea to the Northern Department to avoid such a breach. It was Hodgson’s strongest argument on the topic, issued at a time when his influence on such matters was low. Hodgson emphasised that to break relations as a “mere demonstration” against Soviet indignities would be a trivial policy, with counterproductive ramifications to European politics. Britain most likely would stand alone, while forcing the Soviet government to make considerable sacrifices in order to retain relations with other European powers, which might accept such advances. Moreover, a rupture would increase Soviet desires to work with nations with dubious loyalties to the status quo – Germany, for example. Such understandings might

¹⁶³ Memorandum by Gregory, 21 June 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11795/N2868/1687/38.

¹⁶⁴ FO minutes (Gregory and Tyrell), 7 Dec. 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11787/N5425/387/38.

¹⁶⁵ FO memorandum, 23 Dec. 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11787/N5670/387/38.

damage British interests and destabilise Central Europe, threatening the peace of Europe and even presenting the possibility that Russia might clamour for her old frontiers. Despite an element of alarmism, Hodgson's warnings did remind readers of the need to keep Germany far from a partnership with its Eastern neighbour.

Hodgson, however, had lost his influence within the Foreign Office. Upon receiving the despatch, C.W. Orde condescendingly noted that Hodgson "would no doubt like to see it in print [and circulated to the Cabinet and British embassies]", but that this step should not occur. Chamberlain agreed that it would be "inexpedient" to send the despatch outside of the Northern Department.¹⁶⁶ The Foreign Secretary and his officials basically thought a rupture with Moscow inevitable. Hodgson's predictions, however, were accurate; upon news of the breach in May following the ARCOS raid, the French government indicated that it would not follow suit lest Germany move closer to Soviet the USSR, and the Soviets fear "encirclement" by European powers.¹⁶⁷ The Foreign Office, for its part, justified the breach in weak terms; Gregory admitted that when an action publicly deemed inexpedient in February was declared essential in May, questions must arise. When queried by Herr Dieckhoff, a counsellor at the German Embassy, about the breach, why London now perceived the European situation as "easier" than it had earlier in the year, and the introduction of this "further disturbing element" into Europe, Gregory replied that even in February, relations had hung by a slender thread: "In suspending relations with Russia we were endeavouring to rid ourselves of one of the

¹⁶⁶ Hodgson to Chamberlain, 23 Feb. 1927, NAUK, FO 371/12589/N791/209/38.

¹⁶⁷ Crewe to Chamberlain, 26 May 1927, NAUK, FO 371/12591/N2401/209/38.

obstacles to peace – this Asiatic menace to Locarno – and be free to proceed unhampered in our pursuit of a true European sense, the only policy that could bring to us Western nations a real lasting peace.”¹⁶⁸ Gregory’s justification, which probably he himself did not believe, seems weak compared to the standard view of the Northern Department for three years past, that peace in Europe could not be concluded without Russia.

As the British government grew increasingly disillusioned with Anglo-Soviet relations, and the possibility of a breach between the nations rose, considerations of European security scarcely entered its discussions. Gregory’s memorandum on the arguments for and against a breach of relations regarded such issues as tertiary to the problem. European states might benefit (or suffer) from a rupture of Anglo-Soviet relations; France might welcome a rupture but probably not benefit from it, while Germany would “deplore” a development which would complicate its delicate position between Locarno and the Soviet Union. Poland, which found security in a stable Anglo-Soviet relationship, might find it desirable to create new (and dangerous) security guarantees. However, “the sum of these possible contingencies does not necessarily create an international situation that is directly against our interests,” although “peace is the paramount international need, and a definitely outlawed Russia would be bound to seek increased means of disturbing it.”¹⁶⁹ Otherwise, the Northern Department ignored

¹⁶⁸ Gregory conversation with Dieckhoff, 25 May 1927, NAUK, FO 371/12591/N2429/209/38.

¹⁶⁹ FO memorandum, 23 Dec. 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11787/N5670/387/38.

how a rupture of relations with Moscow would affect European peace. That it did so illuminates its attitudes towards both the USSR and Europe.

IV

Historians have seen two primary motivations from the breach with Russia in 1927. First, a combination of increased pressure for such an action from cabinet and the growing acceptance within the Foreign Office that proper relations were impossible and a break was inevitable, created conditions under which relations steadily worsened, with increasingly less resistance.¹⁷⁰ Second, once the pacification of Western Europe had been achieved and Germany was tied to a wider security scheme, Chamberlain believed that to maintain the Anglo-Soviet relationship no longer was necessary for the sake of European stability. Gorodetsky notes that Chamberlain's primary objection to a break with Moscow was the fear that this step would spark a European chain reaction and drive Germany into Soviet arms.¹⁷¹ Once the European situation stabilized after Locarno, the Foreign Secretary was less resistant to political pressure for a break.¹⁷² Until this stage, however, Russo-German relations had been a matter of continual vigilance and a source of concern for British observers.

Before Locarno, Chamberlain's reasoning for rejecting a breach with Moscow was that doing so would upset European stability. After the pact was reached, Chamberlain was more willing to accept the severance of relations and grew less resistant

¹⁷⁰ Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World*, 77.

¹⁷¹ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 228.

¹⁷² Grayson, 268.

in cabinet.¹⁷³ Conversely, Hodgson grew increasingly aggressive in his push to reconcile the two governments. Undoubtedly, his appreciation of the mood in London was not always perfect – his despatch issued days after the General Strike in 1926 could not have had worse timing – and his attempt in 1925 to engineer a meeting between Foreign Office and Soviet representatives (with Chamberlain in Geneva) could be best described as clumsy. But fundamentally Hodgson failed to appreciate the thrust of Chamberlain's policy – incorporating Germany into Europe through a permanent agreement with the Western European powers. Once this step was accomplished, Whitehall saw Germany as the senior partner in the Soviet-German relationship. The Northern Department's strategic assessments of the 1926 Soviet-German treaty focused almost exclusively on Germany, with the Soviet role seen as a last, desperate bid to upset the Locarno arrangement. Far from being a necessary component to European security, by 1926 the Soviet Union had become a mere nuisance. Chamberlain's primary objection to a rupture of relations was that it would spark a chain reaction, pushing Germany into Soviet arms and threatening the peace of Eastern Europe, creating an intolerable situation for Paris.¹⁷⁴ The Locarno Pact and Streseman's assurances during the 1926 Soviet-German negotiations encouraged Chamberlain that, despite Germany's need to make agreements with both her Eastern and Western neighbours, Berlin was firmly committed to the Locarno agreement and the League, and consequently, that the USSR was increasingly insignificant in European politics.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 258-268.

¹⁷⁴ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 227-30.

Historians have overlooked London's growing perception that the Soviet Union was a tertiary factor in European politics. Gorodetsky's work, the authoritative study of this period, asserts that increasingly deteriorating relations between Moscow and London led to the breaking of diplomatic ties in 1927.¹⁷⁵ Undoubtedly, the years 1926 and 1927 were not particularly smooth ones in this relationship, but no more so than those between 1922 and 1925. From the point that it established commercial relations with Moscow in 1921, the Foreign Office experienced frustrations. The sense that Anglo-Soviet relations deteriorated in 1926 and 1927 stems mainly from the pressure in the cabinet to break ties with Moscow. The Foreign Secretary and his officials assessed Britain's relationship with Moscow outside of a charged political atmosphere, where emotions about communism, rather than strategic concerns, often dictated demands. In 1927, the Foreign Office thought that the ARCOS raid was a weak justification to end relations with Moscow. It believed that poor relations with the Soviet government were preferable to none at all, and that greater influence over Russian actions could be exercised by maintaining a link to Moscow. By this time, however, the Foreign Office had stopped seeing the Soviet Union as a factor in European politics. The pressure for a break with Moscow was primarily political; because of Foreign Office confidence that Germany was thoroughly linked to Western Europe, Chamberlain acceded to this pressure and accepted the termination of relations with Soviet Russia.

This assessment of Anglo-Soviet relations, to the point of complete deterioration in 1927, better illuminates the subsequent failures of British officials to incorporate the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 134.

USSR into a permanent European security arrangement. It was not that conducting relations with Moscow frustrated Whitehall, although those emotions cannot be completely dismissed. They were, however, secondary to evaluations of European stability and security. London viewed Locarno as an adequate solution under which Germany and France could co-exist without threatening another European war. The events of the mid to late 1930s, when the German government fell into the hands of a leader determined to redraw the Central European map by force if necessary, provides a vastly different context than those of the 1920s, when Germany, militarily weak, was still struggling to stabilise its economy and political life. At that time, the British evaluation of Soviet Russia led its leaders to conclude that they could arrange the peaceful settlement of Europe without the participation or consent of the USSR – in other words, favouring Harold Nicolson's advice that Europe must solve its problems in spite of Russia, and ignoring J.D. Gregory's caution that such a solution would never be complete without Soviet participation. In the mid-1930s, the Foreign Office saw the USSR as a useful factor in European politics, even if it was not an actor, with whom one might have actively to work. However, at a crucial moment in 1939, when Britain offered a guarantee of Poland's borders and only after the fact determined that Soviet favour would be beneficial, the British government again opted for the approach of the 1920s. By failing to emphasise the extent to which, in Whitehall's eyes, Moscow had become a tertiary factor in European security by the mid-1920s, and remained so, historians have missed the continuities in British policy towards the USSR in the interwar years. In 1925, with both Germany and Russia still second-rate military powers, this approach was acceptable. By the late 1930s, it had much more serious consequences.

Gorodetsky writes that in the 1920s the importance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship was different to each party. To the Soviet Union, the state of its relations with Britain was the standard of success. British officials in Moscow appreciated the transformation from a revolutionary state to a permanent one with pressing needs essential to its survival, but not the Foreign Office. To Britain, the main problem in its relationship with Moscow was to determine what exactly the Soviet state represented, and to communicate effectively with a state that did not play by traditional rules of international relations.¹⁷⁶ The Soviet government constantly aggravated British officials. Foreign Office communications reveal repeated frustrations as its officials failed to find a means to overcome the obstacles that hindered their relationship with Moscow. British officials pursued several approaches to impress moderation upon Moscow. The results were not entirely negative and even met with periodic successes. But the existence of a formal relationship with Moscow was never crucial to the post-war British goal of creating a stable and peaceful Europe that would no longer solve its problems by military means. Once Germany had been tied to Western Europe, even the existence of a revived German-Soviet relationship had little impact on how Moscow was perceived by London.

¹⁷⁶ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 257.

CHAPTER III

THE DEUXIÈME BUREAU AND THE SOVIET UNION

I

In order to ensure its long-term survival against German resurgence, after the war France needed to achieve three basic requirements— military security, financial recovery and a strong heavy industry. The first matter on this list was of paramount importance, since without it all other accomplishments would be futile.¹⁷⁷ The study of France's foreign and security policy in the first decade after the First World War centres on its pursuit of security against Germany through a variety of avenues. These issues included: pursuit of agreement with Great Britain; the formation of regional alliances (with Belgium in Western Europe and the grouping of the newly-formed nations Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe); coercion (the Ruhr occupation in 1923); and finally, the accession to a multilateral agreement (Locarno in 1925) that required considerable sacrifices of French interests on Germany's western and eastern frontiers.¹⁷⁸ Broadly speaking, two interrelated goals motivated all French security initiatives in the 1920s: enforcement of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, and the reduction to the lowest possible extent of the military burdens on the war-weary French society.¹⁷⁹ The problem that prevented the attainment of these goals was simple yet inescapable; as Jon Jacobson writes, "the requirements of French policy far exceeded the resources available to support it." The position of France in the post-war world,

¹⁷⁷ Walter A. McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914-1924* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 362-363.

¹⁷⁸ Adamthwaite, 121.

¹⁷⁹ Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, 100-101.

Jacobson states, “was inherently weak and vulnerable despite the victory of 1918.”¹⁸⁰ As such, French strategists constantly were wary of the resurgence of Germany. This concern shaped their assessments of every aspect of power politics in Europe.

Few matters could distract French strategists from the need to prevent Germany from ever again threatening their nation with a cataclysmic war. None the less, France had to address issues beyond Germany. One such issue was Soviet Russia. On the periphery of France’s foreign policy until the early 1930s, the Soviet Union still presented French strategists with significant problems. France’s first reaction to communist rule in Russia was to try to overthrow it, through intervention in the Civil War that followed the Bolshevik revolution. This intervention, initiated during the First World War, occurred primarily for strategic reasons, but France also had strong economic motives for the action.¹⁸¹ However, when intervention failed, French leaders quickly changed their approach toward communist Russia. They strove to turn the successor states in Central and Eastern Europe into a *cordon sanitaire* along Russia’s western frontier that would contain the spread of Bolshevism. The idea was later expanded to serve as a means to prevent Germany from entering political or military relations with Russia.¹⁸²

This endeavour failed; Germany and the Soviet Union were able to reconcile and forge an alliance during the Genoa Conference in 1922. The Treaty of Rapallo surprised all participants at Genoa, but had special security implications for Paris. French premier

¹⁸⁰ Jacobson, “Strategies of French Foreign Policy after World War I,” 79-80.

¹⁸¹ Carley, *Revolution and Intervention*, 125.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 166-167, 186.

Raymond Poincaré, speaking shortly after the signing of Rapallo, declared that the new Soviet-German relationship “may become tomorrow a direct threat to Poland and an indirect threat to us.” Poincaré insisted that Rapallo proved Germany would launch its inevitable attack against the Versailles system not on the Rhine, but in Eastern Europe.¹⁸³ Interestingly, at the time of Rapallo, French and Bolshevik leaders were engaged in quiet negotiations aimed at establishing a de facto relationship that would allow Paris and Moscow benefit mutually from reconstruction of the Russian economy. These talks collapsed, at least in part because of the Rapallo agreement. This first French encounter with Russian diplomacy failed.¹⁸⁴ The Rapallo pact also forced changes in France’s strategic perceptions of Soviet Russia. The latter represented a serious threat, not because the USSR was a great military power, but rather because in combination with Germany it could subvert the Versailles Treaty.

These French perceptions are little studied, yet they can be important. The files of the French military intelligence department– the *Deuxième Bureau* (2e Bureau) – represent fundamental evidence on the development of French military perceptions of European power politics in the 1920s. The 2e Bureau was the department that gathered and evaluated intelligence – largely from military attachés posted abroad but also from secret sources – that was used to guide policy decisions about French security, including matters like allies, foreign armies, possible trouble-spots in Europe, and relations between two or more unfriendly nations. Decision-making was not a streamlined process and the

¹⁸³ Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 261.

¹⁸⁴ Anne Hogenhuis-Seliverstoff, “French Plans for the Reconstruction of Russia: A history and evaluation,” in Fink, ed., *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922*, 131-147.

absence of records (such as *procès-verbaux*) often leaves many questions unanswered. As Martin Alexander notes in an excellent overview of the 2e Bureau during the interwar period, “it is a problem to determine what influence intelligence information . . . was able to exert. We know far more about the gathering and analysis of French intelligence than we do about its use and impact.” Fortunately, one does not require a complete picture of the decision-making process in order to understand how decision-makers perceived a foreign power. As Alexander writes, “the intelligence services did not exist to determine rearmament priorities, weapons procurement programmes or operational plans. They existed to assist those who did bear the responsibilities to meet them from the security of as well-informed a basis as possible.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, the files of the 2e Bureau illuminate the major issues that French military intelligence faced as it sought to assess exactly what the revolutionary Soviet power entailed for the future of European security.

Strategic decision-making in France during the interwar years was a joint civilian-military process, albeit one that was fraught with complications. Forty years ago, Judith Hughes wrote that analysis of the decision-making process had tended to depict a struggle between soldiers and civilians, leading to the defeat of 1940. This emphasis, however, had obscured the large areas of agreement between the two sides, in particular during the 1920s, a crucial period for the formulation of military policy. Hughes writes that “the usual assumption that the military chiefs and civilian leaders acted as two separate blocs does not hold up after a more detailed analysis of the workings of the institutions that formulated military policy.” However, the army leadership generally

¹⁸⁵ Alexander, 300, 321.

dominated military policy, if only because the chief of the French General Staff enjoyed a much more secure tenure than did most War Ministers.¹⁸⁶ Peter Jackson's more recent study of French intelligence supports Hughes arguments, though he adds other dimensions to the issue. He maintains that tensions between the foreign ministry and intelligence community did exist, for example over the process by which intelligence officials gathered evidence in foreign states, and the general ambivalence which the Quai d'Orsay displayed towards 2e Bureau assessments. Civilian policy-makers did have access to intelligence; more problematic was the convoluted means by which this information was disseminated and evaluated, through a one-way mechanism. Intelligence was gathered and analysed by the military, then passed on to civilian officials. Hence, Jackson writes, the 2e Bureau "operated as a self-contained community deprived of the external stimulus which would have challenged the assumptions upon which analysis was based." This absence of two-way communication between military and civilian leaders, when the two were not in harmony, meant the former lacked the means by which to assert its concerns to the latter over serious security matters, such as the Nazi menace.¹⁸⁷

While historians cannot precisely determine the influence of the 2e Bureau over French policy-makers, its views remain crucial to understanding French strategy in the inter-war years. The views that French military intelligence officials held about the USSR – ones in which Soviet power was repeatedly seen as weak, logistically inefficient and poorly commanded – almost certainly affected the decisions made by civilian leaders.

¹⁸⁶ Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, 101-102.

¹⁸⁷ Jackson, 11-44.

French politicians in the 1920s generally were not interested in rapidly ameliorating the poor state of Franco-Russian relations that emerged after the First World War, and did not share the infrequent and isolated calls from foreign officials that Paris would be better served by closer relations with Moscow.¹⁸⁸

For its part, the Quai d'Orsay generally held that close relations with Russia were unnecessary to the pursuit of France's strategic goals. Their views are noteworthy for two reasons. First, the office of Premier of the French Republic and Minister of Foreign Affairs were frequently united, during the premierships of Alexandre Millerand, Raymond Poincaré, Aristide Briand and Edouard Herriot. This gave the executive branch the upper hand in foreign policy, especially considering that the French constitution did not require that all treaties be submitted to parliament for ratification. Second, the frequent turnover in the foreign ministerial office – there were eight foreign ministers between January 1920 and July 1926 – gave the permanent staff at the Quai d'Orsay an important role in the formulation of strategic policy.¹⁸⁹ However, it was France's political leaders that made the final decisions. Although the Quai's permanent officials periodically suggested better relations with Moscow, their advice was not always heeded. For example, in 1923 the Political Director, Emmanuel Peretti de la Rocca, suggested to Marshal Ferdinand Foch that better relations with Russia were in France's strategic interests. Foch, and ultimately Millerand, rejected any change in policy. Later, Jean Herbet, who was named France's ambassador to Moscow in 1924, encouraged closer

¹⁸⁸ Carley, "Prelude to Defeat: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1919-39," *Historical Reflections* 22:1 (1996), 163-169.

¹⁸⁹ Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 377-378.

relations with Moscow as a means to enhance French security on the Rhine. While the Quai did not share his enthusiasm, it recognized that there were certain advantages to better Franco-Soviet relations, and gave the Foreign Minister lukewarm encouragement on these lines. These initial attempts at rapprochement were ultimately thwarted when Briand returned to the Foreign Office in 1926 and renewed demands for compensation on French war debts and property lost during the Bolshevik revolution.¹⁹⁰ For French leaders, domestic political considerations, ones that frequently entailed passionate and divisive issues such as debt recovery and anti-communism, took precedence over any strategic advantages perceived by ambassadors or permanent officials.

For all of these decision-makers, however, the Treaty of Rapallo represented a turning point for French political and military authorities. While not yet on an equal footing with the Allied powers that sought to enforce the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, Germany had restored relations on its own terms with a significant European power, without any loyalty to Versailles or any interest in upholding the treaty's clauses. Worse of all for Paris, the new Soviet-German partnership represented a significant danger to the newly formed states of Eastern Europe; the Rapallo alliance increased the possibility of treaty revision by force in the East, a situation that French leaders wished desperately to avoid. Less than one week after the Rapallo agreement was signed, the 2e Bureau drafted a memorandum about power politics in Europe. It concluded that Europe had two groupings, one that included Belgium, Poland, Denmark and the states of the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia) oriented towards France; this

¹⁹⁰ Carley, "Prelude to Defeat," 162-172.

grouping saw in the treaties the guarantee of their continued existence. The other grouping, which included Russia, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria, were oriented towards Berlin in hopes of treaty revision.¹⁹¹ For many years, the 2e Bureau maintained this view of the Soviet-German relationship and evaluated Moscow's actions through this prism. Its assessments of Soviet Russia between 1922 and 1927 focused on three major subjects: evaluations of the capabilities of the Red Army, the Soviet-German relationship, and its potential impact on France's allies in Eastern Europe.

II

Among these subjects, it focused most attention on the state of the Soviet military. The 2e Bureau regularly assessed the Red Army and the organs that supported it, like factories and transportation networks. From the start of 1921, French military leaders held that the Soviet military machinery was in extremely poor condition, a situation which Bolshevik leaders were determined to remedy. Initially, the 2e Bureau was occupied with ascertaining what form the communist army would take. At the time of the Bolshevik revolution, many Soviet leaders had favoured the abolition of the regular army, to be replaced by citizen militias. However, experience with its many internal and external enemies led the government in Moscow to accept the necessity for a professional army, well-instructed, trained and equipped, and overseen by career officers. At the start of 1921, some agitators again demanded that the regular army be demobilized and replaced by militias; the government replied that the regular army was the only force on which the government could rely. The 2e Bureau concluded, correctly, that the regular

¹⁹¹ "Note sur la situation générale en Europe," 21 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

army was the principal force on which Moscow depended both to preserve internal stability and to defeat any foreign enemies. The 2e Bureau also noted the implementation of a method designed to ensure the loyalty of Red Army troops to the communist regime. This method, referred to as the *direction politique de l'armée*, was intended to oversee the education and training of new recruits to the army, as well as the morale and loyalty of existing soldiers, and to ensure political control over the officer corps. The primary goal of this endeavour, the 2e Bureau concluded, was to avoid a repetition of the situation of 1917, when the Tsarist army fell into disorder, contributing to the fall of the Imperial government. The 2e Bureau believed that the Bolshevik government had tenuous control over the loyalty of its troops, and, realizing the risk attached to this situation, was determined to remedy this problem; "the mass of the Army has yet to be seriously penetrated by communist propaganda; it continues to drift, and the Bolsheviks know how easy it is for large masses to go astray – especially soldiers." The report also noted that to the communist leaders, propaganda was seen as "a weapon more powerful than tanks, armoured vehicles and airplanes."¹⁹² After observing this strategy, in 1922 the 2e Bureau concluded that although there were signs of progress, overall the political loyalty of the Red Army was not yet sufficiently stable to enable an offensive. While the success of this effort was hard to ascertain, the 2e Bureau did note that since 1918 there had been no significant military revolts (in spite of some isolated desertions), and that the Red Army

¹⁹² "Les forces Bolsheviques – Organisation générale", 22 Feb. 1921, SHD/DAT, 7N3138.

had demonstrated “tangible combat qualities” in numerous theatres, as well as in suppressing the 1921 Kronstadt rebellion, mounted by sailors.¹⁹³

Overall, however, in early 1921 the 2e Bureau thought little of the competence of the Red Army. Despite efforts to maintain regular forces and political control over its soldiers, the Bolshevik high command had yet to establish a modern, homogenous army; lack of equipment was especially glaring, due to the “economic catastrophe” in Russia, though military industries were better protected than any others. Still, while the army lacked the equipment or training of Western European armies, it was strong enough to present a serious threat to its smaller neighbours, as well as to Poland and Romania.¹⁹⁴

The 2e Bureau maintained this perception of Soviet military power until 1927. As it gained a better understanding of the problems that plagued the Red Army, French military leaders increasingly downplayed the likelihood of a Soviet offensive in any region of immediate concern to France. In early 1922, the 2e Bureau concluded that, due to the lengthy time period needed to supply its soldiers, the Red Army could not embark on a significant offensive for at least a year. The material and forces existed to support a small-scale offensive, or to exploit a coup in neighbouring states, with the intention of supporting isolated workers’ movements. However, any larger offensive moves would have to wait “for victory to be prepared from all sides” (proper supply for the Red Army troops combined with revolutionary circumstances in foreign states).¹⁹⁵ None the less,

¹⁹³ “La direction politique de l’armée”, 17 Feb. 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3149.

¹⁹⁴ “Les forces Bolsheviques – Organisation générale”, 22 Feb. 1921, SHD/DAT, 7N3138.

¹⁹⁵ “Situation politique en Russie Soviétique”, 22 Jan. 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3149.

Bolshevik leaders intended the Red Army to handle not only minor events, such as insurrections, but eventually to become capable of fighting top European armies.¹⁹⁶

This information about the rudimentary state of Soviet forces shaped the 2e Bureau's reasoned response to Red Army movements on Russia's western frontier in early 1922. Romania and Poland started reporting hostile Soviet actions – troop and weaponry movements and the construction of living quarters and munitions depots – along their border in February 1922. Although no verifiable information could be obtained by French sources, the 2e Bureau monitored the situation. By April the 2e Bureau had enough information, allegedly from reliable sources, to believe that Soviet military action in the near future was possible. Red cavalry had moved into the Kuban Republic, east of the Crimean peninsula, which might indicate a concentration towards the Polish border, while the head of the Bolshevik delegation in Sweden allegedly stated that Russian failure at the Genoa conference would encourage a Bolshevik provocation of revolutionary movements in Europe, followed by attacks by Soviet troops. The 2e Bureau thought that the Soviets might be considering military action in Eastern Europe, because of frustration caused by the failure of its diplomats at Genoa, and increasing problems within Russia, characterized by famine and industrial and financial disorganization. Lenin's changes had proven inefficient, the 2e Bureau observed, and only a foreign military action by the Red Army could check general chaos. French military intelligence, however, was not alarmed by this danger. The 2e Bureau took the possibility of Soviet offensive action against Poland and Romania seriously, given the desperate state of

¹⁹⁶ “Annexe du compte-rendu de renseignements”, 5 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3152.

Russian economy and industry, but clearly believed that such a conflict would be localized and would have negligible impact on the political stability of Poland. Additionally, the 2e Bureau reasoned that in the event of hostilities between Russia and Romania or Poland or both, Germany was unlikely to take up arms in assistance of Russia (as it would give France a pretext for action on the Rhine); German assistance would likely be indirect. The “current state of the Russian military makes an offensive beyond its power, whatever the hopes of [Bolshevik] command for worldwide conflict might be.”¹⁹⁷

This brief discussion about a Red Army offensive in Eastern Europe represented the only instance between 1922 and 1928 that the 2e Bureau was concerned about such an action by Moscow. While the French high command continued to view the Red Army as a potential threat to its neighbours, and the Polish-Little Entente grouping, it did not perceive an immediate danger along the lines of that of April and May 1922. By 1923, the 2e Bureau argued that for some time, the Soviet government would focus on remedying its political and economic weaknesses, and reorganizing the combat capability of the army and navy. French military intelligence learned that political leaders and military specialists in the Soviet Union believed that future Soviet military operations must be based on the principle of the offensive. Military specialists, realizing that Soviet technology was well below the standards of Western European armies, favoured a reduction of tension in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe so to buy time for

¹⁹⁷ “Note sur l’éventualité de prochaines hostilités en Europe Orientale”, 17 May 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

improvement. The 2e Bureau believed that Soviet military leaders were closely following technical developments (especially in infantry operations) that were occurring in France, Poland and Romania, in order to model their army along modern lines. This was expected to be a time-consuming process, as supply for soldiers and sailors still lagged considerably; troops lacked proper amounts of firearms, automatic weapons, explosives, armoured vehicles, tanks and airplanes. Hence, the 2e Bureau expected Soviet diplomats to proffer the “false belief” that the Soviet government wanted peace and desired to reduce its military force to the point of almost complete disarmament. This would “buy time” for the Soviet military to bring its supply and training standards up to those of Western European nations, without disruptions caused by recurrent war scares along its western frontiers.¹⁹⁸

The 2e Bureau monitored the progress of the Red Army over the next three years, but not until 1926 did it start to notice tangible improvements in the quality of the Soviet military and its supporting organs. While Soviet infantry and artillery continually was seen as sub-standard (compared to other European militaries), by 1925 the French military leadership began to notice a marked improvement in its military aviation. It credited this rise to the presence of German military technicians in Russian aviation industries – although 2e Bureau intelligence on Soviet-German military collaboration was weak, it knew that German officials were employed as technicians in artillery and

¹⁹⁸ “Préparation militaire politique de la Russie des Soviets à la prochaine guerre”, 9 May 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3152. For discussion of Soviet desire to model Red Army more closely along lines of Western European armies, see “Considérations générales sur l’armée rouge”, 2 May 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3140.

aviation industries.¹⁹⁹ In April 1926, the 2e Bureau observed that Soviet aviation was sufficiently advanced to be able to cease foreign purchases of aircraft engines (except for advanced or complicated types), and also to construct commercial aircraft. The French military leadership concluded, for the first time since the establishment of Bolshevik power in Russia, that Soviet war industries were “significant”, if overworked and outdated. In this area, none the less, its position was superior to that of its neighbours.²⁰⁰

This observation marked a change in 2e Bureau perceptions of Soviet military capabilities and intentions. French military intelligence, noting the evolution of the Red Army since the Civil War, perceived improvements in its long-maligned organization and supply organs. An obligatory conscription law implemented by Moscow in 1925 was credited with facilitating this improvement. This change was not sweeping – the 2e Bureau maintained that, compared to Western armies, the Red Army was inferior, its actual capabilities limited to controlling internal problems and checking its neighbours; but it had occurred, and suspicions rose regarding the future intentions of the Soviet military.²⁰¹ By 1927, French leaders raised considerable alarms about the militaristic tendencies perceived in Moscow. Noting that the Soviet army was a “worthy force” (albeit technologically behind and poorly equipped), the 2e Bureau observed that Russia was the most militaristic nation in the world, as witnessed by the financial sacrifices its leaders had made to develop their military strength.²⁰² This growing concern prompted a memorandum entitled “The so-called antimilitarism of the Soviet government.” This

¹⁹⁹ “Note sur l’activité Allemande en Russie”, 14 Jan. 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

²⁰⁰ “URSS – les fabrications de materiel de guerre”, 20 April 1926, SHD/DAT, 7N 3141.

²⁰¹ “Notice sur l’armée de l’URSS”, 15 Jan. 1927, SHD/DAT, 7N 3138.

²⁰² “Reseignements sur l’URSS”, 4 Nov. 1927, SHD/DAT, 7N 3148.

document assessed the military improvements undertaken by Moscow over the past five years, and reflected the changing perception of Soviet military capabilities. The 2e Bureau noted that, after the Civil War, with external threats lessened and economic needs pressing, one might have expected a reduced emphasis on military development. Instead, Soviet leaders had become preoccupied with improving military power. This militaristic spirit present hinted at “aggressive plans, rather than supporting the claims of mere defence offered by Bolshevik leaders.”

Moscow argued that a strong military was needed to defend the Soviet Union from the dangers of capitalist states (especially Great Britain) and the formation of an anti-Soviet bloc in Europe and Asia. The 2e Bureau retorted that Soviet relations with its neighbours (most notably Japan, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey, Lithuania and Germany) were in varying degrees amicable, which rendered improbable the formation of an anti-Soviet bloc, while the nature of the Soviet frontier (including a large maritime frontier) and the sheer size of the nation made attacks improbable. Its European neighbours feared the Soviet Union more than they sought to menace it, although Poland and Romania obviously posed problems for the Red Army. The 2e Bureau concluded that, rather than needing to dramatically augment its military power, the Soviet Union was one of the few nations that could afford to reduce its forces without incurring significant risks. The claims of danger from external sources, such as neighbouring capitalist nations, could only be intended as means to justify to its citizens the establishment of an army that was

not necessitated on strategic grounds. The Soviet military system placed a greater burden on its citizens “than any state in the world.”²⁰³

This 2e Bureau evaluation offered an oversimplified view of the geographical and political realities confronting Soviet leaders. It ignored realities such as the always-unsettled nature of Polish-Soviet relations since the Treaty of Riga,²⁰⁴ and the recently severed relationship between Moscow and London. It failed to discuss realistically how allied intervention had affected Soviet security fears. None the less, these oversights in the 2e Bureau’s evaluation of Soviet military power in 1928 do not undercut the underlying theme of the document: Moscow had developed substantial military power that threatened France’s strategic interests in Eastern Europe. Despite serious defects in organization, the Red Army had become “a noteworthy force” and the Bolshevik government planned to augment its power – including troop instruction, supply, formation of reserve units and preparations for administrative, economic and industrial mobilization. The 2e Bureau concluded it was “tempting” to believe that Moscow had aggressive plans for its military, rather than its claims of self-defence.²⁰⁵ By 1928, the Red Army could no longer be characterized as a threat only to the smallest of its neighbours; it was a significant weight in the balance of European power politics.

III

Politically and diplomatically, the Treaty of Rapallo appeared to be a major blow to France’s security policy. The rapprochement between Russia and Germany introduced

²⁰³ “Le soi-disant antimilitarisme du gouvernement Soviétique”, April 1928, SHD/DAT, 7N 3138.

²⁰⁴ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 187-188.

²⁰⁵ “Le soi-disant antimilitarisme du gouvernement Soviétique”, April 1928, SHD/DAT, 7N 3138.

another area of concern for French leaders, already alarmed by numerous developments that were facilitating German economic and industrial recovery. Anthony Adamthwaite describes France's deepening sense of insecurity during 1922, as they were convinced of Germany's bad faith on the Versailles Treaty and alienated by British indifference toward this issue. Further, the recovering German steel industry was outpacing its struggling French counterpart in Lorraine. The German-Russian rapprochement at Rapallo reinforced these concerns.²⁰⁶ France thought that the treaty, which stipulated mutual liquidation of war reparations and a trade convention, reflected German and Russian desires to subvert the Versailles system, and confirmed expectations that Germany would first do so not on the Rhine, but in Eastern Europe.²⁰⁷ Rapallo was an "indirect" menace, because Germano-Soviet cooperation magnified the vulnerabilities of the politically instable and economically imbalanced nations of Eastern Europe.²⁰⁸

Media reports following the failure of the Genoa Conference revealed that both Berlin and Moscow considered their mere invitation to that meeting as a diplomatic success; Trotsky told a *Daily Herald* correspondent that Germany and Russia were natural allies and that their invitation to the conference in itself represented a revision of the Versailles Treaty. Genoa also enabled Germany and Russia to proclaim to the world their alliance, a combination clearly against French interests.²⁰⁹ In addition to a rise in diplomatic prestige the Rapallo Treaty was widely suspected to contain secret clauses for

²⁰⁶ Adamthwaite, 99.

²⁰⁷ Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 261-268.

²⁰⁸ Krüger, 59.

²⁰⁹ "Etude de la propagande Bolchévique et de ses rapports avec l'Allemagne", 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3130.

the resumption of Soviet-German military collaboration, which in fact already had been in effect for some months.²¹⁰

Immediately following the signature of the Rapallo agreement, the 2e Bureau drafted a memorandum on the general political situation in Europe. With the refusal of Great Britain and Italy to participate in an alliance, instead focusing on “personal” political issues in the Middle East and Central Europe, the 2e Bureau concluded that France essentially stood alone. As a counterweight to the bloc aligned with Germany, France had its alliance with Poland and the favourable orientation of the Petite Entente. This region, however, was fraught with difficulties for France, as its members were divided, and included irredentist groups susceptible to German-Soviet-Hungarian propaganda. Meanwhile, Rapallo represented a more assertive foreign policy than the USSR had exhibited before; this made the maintenance of the territorial status quo in Eastern Europe even more crucial to the survival of the Versailles system.²¹¹

In spite of these strategic concerns, strategically the 2e Bureau had no immediate fears of the new partnership due to the weakness of the German army and the disorganized state of the Red Army. French military planners doubted that Soviet Russia could contribute what Germany most lacked: modern war equipment. They expected Russian war industries to remain inefficient for many years. Their initial assessments of the Rapallo pact focused almost exclusively on the potential benefits accruing to Germany. The 2e Bureau wrote that “the entire German will is focused on the rapid

²¹⁰ McDougall, 188-189.

²¹¹ “Note sur la situation générale en Europe”, 21 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

preparation of revenge. From that perspective Bolshevism constitutes for a resurgent Germany a valuable instrument that could be used like a catapult.”²¹² By the end of 1922, the 2e Bureau offered a more developed view of the German-Soviet partnership. Although evidence was “fragmentary”, Russian economic and financial weaknesses, and political divisions between Moscow and Berlin, had thus far prevented a fruitful relationship. The military relationship was weak, with only German military officials attached to the Red Army as the primary military product of the relationship. The 2e Bureau did, however, warn of the potential for a more dangerous partnership in the future.²¹³

Piotr Wandycz argues that the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 was in part an answer to Rapallo, “a notice served on Germany and Russia not to infringe in any way the post-war settlement.”²¹⁴ In diplomatic terms, the Rapallo relationship did affect the 1923 crisis, as the Narkomindel pressured the Polish government not to exploit the occupation of the Ruhr so to attack Germany from the east. Moscow acted primarily to prevent France from gaining strategic control of western Germany, which Chicherin believed could lead to a second war of intervention in Soviet Russia.²¹⁵ However, Russian support for Germany was guarded, leading German officials to question the reliability of their partner. Russia did not offer open support for Germany,²¹⁶ because its deteriorating relations with Great Britain made it wary of alienating the only other

²¹² “Etude de la propagande Bolchevique et de ses rapports avec l’Allemagne”, 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3130.

²¹³ “L’infiltration Allemande en Russie”, 18 Nov. 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

²¹⁴ Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 270-271.

²¹⁵ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 131.

²¹⁶ Hogenhuis-Seliverstov, *Les relations Franco-Soviétiques*, 246-247.

significant Western power while it believed the time was ripe for communist revolution in Germany.²¹⁷ The 2e Bureau perceived this complication in the Soviet-German relationship, when it observed that Bolshevist independence, its revolutionary aspirations and apprehensions of German militarism were obstacles to the establishment of a Russo-German military link.²¹⁸

French military officials perceived Russian war industries as weak, and the Russo-German partnership as ineffectual. At the end of 1923, the 2e Bureau concluded that Soviet-German commercial relations had improved, especially through agreements about import-export enterprises, sea transport and aviation. However, Bolshevik efforts to improve their war industries had not strengthened their relationship with Germany, which had gained little from Rapallo. The Soviet government branded key military-related industries, such as metallurgy, as state concerns, and would not surrender them to outside control, thus crippling the value of the German technical experts offered to Moscow.²¹⁹ For Berlin, the principal benefits of the Rapallo partnership lay in the future; Germany had gained knowledge of Russian markets and was well prepared for the day when Russia truly opened to world enterprise.²²⁰

The 2e Bureau maintained this evaluation of the Soviet-German relationship – that it had little military impact but a potentially significant economic one – until 1927.²²¹ One of the impediments to assessing this relationship, especially its military aspects, was

²¹⁷ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 131-132; Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 271.

²¹⁸ "Note sur l'activité Allemande en Russie", 14 Jan. 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

²¹⁹ "Note sur l'activité Allemande en Russie", 20 Nov. 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3141.

²²⁰ "Note sur l'activité Allemande en Russie", 14 Jan. 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

²²¹ "Ingenieurs et technicians Allemandes en Russie", 12 May 1925; "L'industrie nationale de guerre en Russie Soviétique", 11 Oct. 1925, SHD/DAT, 7N 3141.

lack of good intelligence. The 2e Bureau frequently noted that its appraisals rested on incomplete or vague information. Meanwhile, the Soviet-German military partnership developed slowly and unofficially, beyond the watchful eyes of the victor powers. By 1927, however, the 2e Bureau obtained better information, much of it generated from a scandal in Germany, which revealed key details about the cooperation between the Reichswehr and the Red Army, and was better able to assess the military partnership. Notably, this information did not spark alarmist interpretations. Motivated by a note written by the French Ambassador in Moscow at the end of 1926, which denied that Germany and Soviet Russia had a military alliance, because Berlin wished to postpone the obligations of a military convention until unavoidable, the 2e Bureau offered its most thorough evaluation of that topic since 1922. It concluded that there was no proof of a Soviet-German military convention, but that the Reichswehr and the Red Army cooperated closely, to benefit themselves and to disrupt the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty. The ability to manufacture armaments in Russia, prohibited by Versailles but beyond the Entente's power to control, greatly aided Germany. Recent information confirmed that this manufacturing was initiated, directed and sponsored by the German government and, despite Soviet disorganization and intransigence, had produced results in aeronautical, metallurgy (artillery) and chemical industries. Despite the efforts of the German government to conceal the fact, the 2e Bureau knew that Russia had given armaments and warships to Germany.²²²

²²² "Collusion de la Reichswehr et des autorités Soviétiques", 28 Feb. 1927, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

In 1927, for the first time, French military intelligence thought that the German and Soviet militaries had collaborated in establishing war industries that could supply both states. It also noted German participation in Red Army activities, such as aviators training with the Soviet air forces, or the execution of simultaneous maritime manoeuvres by the two navies. Until 1927, the main benefits of the Soviet-German partnership had been seen as commercial. By 1928, the improved state of the Red Army and Soviet industry led the 2e Bureau to view the Soviet Union as a significant, even a dangerous power, and the Soviet-German military relationship as a tangible threat.

IV

Soviet-German collaboration challenged France's Eastern European policy. As Wandycz notes, initial French plans for a barrier in Eastern Europe were designed to separate Bolshevism from the West, rather than Russia from Germany.²²³ French intentions for Central Europe first took shape in late 1918, when a strong Polish state was seen as the best means to combat the westward spread of Bolshevism.²²⁴ After the Russian Civil War, the role of Central European nations in French policy shifted from east to west as Paris demanded support from its allies against Germany.²²⁵ The notion of a barrier between Soviet Russia and Germany did not become important to French political and military leaders until 1921-22. Then, however, concerns over Soviet-German collaboration became the primary motivation behind France's pursuit of

²²³ Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 186.

²²⁴ Carley, *Revolution and Intervention*, 164-167.

²²⁵ Kalervo Hovi, "Security before Disarmament, or Hegemony? The French Alliance Policy 1917-1927," in Rolf Ahmann, et al., eds., *The Quest for Stability: problems of West European security, 1918-1957* (London: German Historical Institute, 1993), 119.

alliances with the newly created nations of Central Europe. Nicole Jordan writes that “France concluded its treaties of 1921 and 1924 with Poland and Czechoslovakia in a context marked by an obsessive fear, fanned by the Treaty of Rapallo (1922), of German-Soviet collusion against the peace settlement.”²²⁶ French policy had two phases: the first, concluded in 1921, consisted primarily of an alliance with Poland, and tacit support for its relations with the Little Entente. The second phase consisted of a series of political agreements with the members of the Little Entente.

This outcome was not the favoured scenario of French strategists after the conclusion of peace. Kalervo Hovi argues that the Eastern alliances represented the third preference for French leaders. An alliance with Great Britain and possibly the United States was the most desirable long-term solution; it was accomplished only with the signing of the Locarno pact, and even then just in part. The second preference was an alliance with Belgium and possibly Italy. French leaders often found themselves at loggerheads with Britain in the immediate post-war period and thus pursued a policy of strengthening its relations with Eastern Europe between 1918 and 1921. Although alliance with Britain remained a French ambition, unable to accomplish this, Paris concluded a military treaty with Belgium in 1920 and a political and military treaty with Poland in 1921. Hovi notes that the periods of French alliance building, 1921, 1924 and 1926-27, coincided with periods of reserve in Franco-British relations. When France perceived Britain as caring about French security needs (1922 and 1925), the drive to

²²⁶ Nicole Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: dilemmas of French impotence, 1918-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

secure support from Germany's eastern neighbours waned; they rose when France perceived Britain's priorities as diminishing French security interests.²²⁷

The need to counter German dominance over Central Europe overrode the misgivings that French political and military leaders had about joining forces with Poland, an unstable nation and a risk to pursue dangerous adventures in the East.²²⁸ Jordan sees the Franco-Polish Treaty of 1921 as defining the common concerns of the signatories: a Soviet menace and German mobilization. While the French General Staff supported the idea of an eastern counterweight comprised of the states that separated Germany from Russia, it questioned the wisdom of precise engagements to the obstreperous and unsettled Polish state.²²⁹ These attitudes are revealed in the 2e Bureau's assessment of the situation in Europe, completed shortly after the Rapallo Treaty, which outlined the challenges to France's Central European alliances. The new grouping under French influence lacked unity, while its members contained irredentist groups susceptible to German, Soviet and Hungarian propaganda. In order to suit French purposes, these states must overcome two serious problems. Domestically, they needed to infuse different nationalities with the sense that they shared a homeland, including ethnic groups that may have felt cheated by the outcome of the war. Collectively, these nations needed to demonstrate unity, in order to maintain the status quo created by the treaties. None the less, the 2e Bureau saw relations with Poland and the Little Entente as crucial to French interests, because they separated Russia and Germany by 70 million people. The French

²²⁷ Hovi, "Security before Disarmament, or Hegemony?", 120-121.

²²⁸ Jacques Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914-1945* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 40.

²²⁹ Jordan, 7.

General Staff also stressed that French economic support was essential to the success of the Central European alliances. The alliance could not develop without French financial support, especially for war industries; France was responsible for organizing military supply for these armies. The 2e Bureau foresaw many of the problems that were to wreck France's strategy in Eastern Europe a decade later, though it also believed they could be overcome.²³⁰

The second phase in France's Eastern alliances occurred between 1924-26, when it concluded a treaty with Czechoslovakia and explored the possibility of agreements with Romania and Yugoslavia. These projects differed in character from the Polish alliance, in that they did not have the automatic nature of military agreements; instead, the emphasis was political co-operation. Hovi writes that "France was collecting a 'homologous' group in East Central Europe, or in Aristide Briand's words, France wanted to regard and treat Poland and the Little Entente as a single barrier." Hovi sees this period as marking a change in France's alliance policy in Eastern Europe, stemming from the failure of its approach toward Germany.²³¹ Wandycz concurs, noting that French policy had failed to gain support both domestically and internationally. The French citizenry were not unreservedly supportive of aggressive policies in Central Europe, while Great Britain was increasingly wary that Paris's coercive approaches to Germany would lead to French hegemony in Europe and Germany's complete collapse. Further, the Ruhr occupation had increased France's dependence on British-American finances, leading to the Dawes

²³⁰ "Note sur la situation générale en Europe", 21 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

²³¹ Hovi, "Security Before Disarmament, or Hegemony?", 121.

Plan.²³² The electoral defeat of Poincaré in May 1924 at the hands of Herriot's *Cartel des Gauches* signalled an important turn in French security policy, one that was determined to "bring the country out of international isolation, renounce unilateral action and inaugurate a policy of peace, reconciliation and fulfillment."²³³

The new direction in France's European policy alarmed its Eastern allies, especially Poland. Not only were relations between Paris and Berlin likely to become friendlier, Herriot's long-advocated stance of abandoning French hostility to the Soviet Union aroused concerns in Poland. "Warsaw could see the connection between German and Russian policies aimed at the destruction of the Polish state, and feared that any French attempt to detach Russia from the Rapallo policy could only be made at Poland's expense."²³⁴ While rapprochement between Paris and Moscow was certainly more probable in the wake of the *Cartel* victory, Wandycz's claim that the rise of Herriot to power in France sparked increased fears of Russian belligerence is not supported by the documentary evidence. Germany remained the primary concern in Eastern European capitals, while Soviet Russia was a secondary threat.

In early 1924, Polish officials asked Paris to participate in the preparation of an updated Polish-Romanian military agreement.²³⁵ The Polish and Romanian general staffs feared the possibility of attacks from either the west or the east; until that point, the convention had only prepared for an attack from Soviet Russia. Although the Eastern allies emphasised the need to address Soviet improvements to aviation and chemical

²³² Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 312-313; Adamthwaite, 116.

²³³ Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 313.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 314.

²³⁵ "Accords militaires entre la Pologne et la Roumanie", 19 Jan 1924, SHA/DAT, 7N 3007.

warfare, the general staffs believed that their pact did not adequately address the problem of Germany. Paris was informed that Romanian officials believed the pact would be useless until the French General Staff endorsed it.²³⁶ This led to trilateral discussions in Warsaw between General Dupont, the head of the French military delegation to Poland, Polish General Haller and Romanian General Floresco during April 1924. In these meetings, Polish and Romanian officials agreed that in any conflagration involving France, Russia and the Central European nations, Germany was the principal opponent on which all efforts should be focused. Haller and Floresco, believing that they needed to leave few troops on the side of Soviet and Bulgarian fronts, asked what role France would play in such a case. Dupont's response was non-committal; he only indicated that the French General Staff would hold discussions with its allies to prepare for such eventualities. This equivocal French response to the clear position of the Polish-Romanian general staffs supports Hovi's assertion that the French change of direction in its eastern policy was intended to decrease the possibility of being unnecessarily involved in a Central European conflict. "French foreign policy planners and negotiators with the East Central European representatives were very strict in avoiding any commitment over local disputes. France should in no circumstances be drawn into a possible war in East Central Europe."²³⁷

Despite this cautious response, Dupont and his Central European counterparts did agree to further study scenarios for a conflict involving Russia, Germany or both. The

²³⁶ "Etudes entre les Etats-Majors Français, Polonais et Roumain", 1 March 1924, SHA/DAT, 7N 3007.

²³⁷ Hovi, "The French Alliance Policy 1917-1927: a change of mentality," in John Hiden and Aleksander Loit, eds., *Contact or Isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period* (Stockholm: Centre for Baltic Studies, 1991), 97.

three parties outlined five areas that required attention when considering this potential conflict: 1) Mobilization (either simultaneous or with the Russian one preceding that of Germany by one-to-two weeks); 2) Course of hostilities (either Russia commencing hostilities followed by German entry into war , or simultaneous attacks by both parties); 3) Plans of Russian attack; 4) Involvement (or neutrality) of Czechoslovakia or Hungary; 5) Material situations of Poland and Romania in case of war.²³⁸ One year later, the 2e Bureau produced a memorandum that addressed these issues. It anticipated that Poland would face the brunt of the Red Army offensive, while the USSR would maintain a primarily defensive position against Romania. On the Polish front, simultaneous operations would be conducted in White Russia and the Ukraine, intended to disrupt Polish-Romanian communications, and to provoke risings in Eastern Galicia. However, due to the poor condition of the Russian transportation network, troops might not move according to plan. Concentrations of Soviet troops would be smaller than expected and forces would reach their appointed districts in separate units; this was advantageous to both Polish and Romanian forces.²³⁹ The fact that such a memorandum was written does not reflect a belief that war was imminent; the 2e Bureau repeatedly suggested that the Red Army was mired in too much chaos to attempt an offensive. Equally, however, it insisted that the Red Army was a threat to its immediate neighbours; for example, in May 1924 the 2e Bureau wrote that “even if the Red Army does not for a long time re-

²³⁸ “Conversations avec les Généraux Haller et Floresco”, 19 April 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3007.

²³⁹ “Mobilisation and concentration of Soviet armies in the event of war with Poland and Romania”, 1925, SHD/DAT, 7N 3144.

establish its power enjoyed in prior times, it is still strong enough to merit salutary assessments.”²⁴⁰

Thus, by 1924 a clear divergence between French interests and those of its Eastern European allies was beginning to appear. The failure of the coercive approach that characterized French strategic policy in Europe in the first five years after Versailles had failed to accrue to France the security its leaders sought against the inevitable resurgence of Germany. A defensive strategy began to supplant the offensive, culminating in the implementation of the Maginot Line in 1929. A myriad of factors, many of them by-products of the inherent weaknesses of the Versailles Treaty, forced France to seek conciliation with Germany with British support. Among these factors was the belief that the allies in Eastern Europe, whom Adamthwaite describes as “more lame ducks than guard dogs,” could not offer the same assurances as a Great Power ally.²⁴¹

The Treaty of Locarno was a mixed story for French politicians and military strategists. France won a guarantee of the Versailles settlement in Western Europe, backed by Great Britain and Italy. However, these powers rejected similar guarantees on Germany’s eastern and southern frontiers, which caused consternation in Paris. Austen Chamberlain’s indifference to any security concerns east of the Rhine undermined the position that France had worked to establish in Eastern Europe. By agreeing to Locarno and linking its pacts with Poland and Czechoslovakia to the League of Nations, France minimized the potential threat of offensive action against German revisionist aims.²⁴² The

²⁴⁰ “Note sur la situation actuelle de l’armée rouge”, 1 May 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3124.

²⁴¹ Adamthwaite, 117.

²⁴² Ibid., 121.

best that French Foreign Minister Briand (who had returned to the Quai d'Orsay in 1925) could extract from the assembled powers at Locarno was a stipulation whereby Poland, Czechoslovakia and Germany agreed to refer any conflict over their frontiers to the League of Nations for arbitration. Wandycz notes that while the French government and public opinion regarded the eastern aspects of Locarno as an integral component to power and stability in Europe, "the nagging question whether Locarno increased or weakened the security of the smaller allies remained very much alive." While Briand privately suggested that Locarno had left the eastern allies no better or worse off than they were before, the Belgian minister observed a difference between the Rhine pact and the "second-class guarantee" received by Poland. Indeed, Locarno represented the first official admission by the Allied powers that treaty revision would occur in Central Europe, and that Poland and Czechoslovakia would bear the costs of readmitting Germany to the European community, as Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet observed with hindsight in 1938-39.²⁴³

The willingness of French leaders to obtain security on the Rhine at the expense of its Eastern European allies was due in a minor part to the low estimation of Soviet military capabilities offered by French military intelligence. This was confirmed in a subsequent memorandum, in which the General Staff suggested that Paris attempt to reorient the Poland-Little Entente grouping away from a focus on Russia towards one on Germany. The 2e Bureau noted that only the Franco-Polish agreements had been directed

²⁴³ Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish relations from Locarno to the remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 25-28.

against Germany, with the others (the treaties between Poland and Rumania, and between the members of the Little Entente) focused primarily on Russia, Hungary and Bulgaria. France should seek to co-ordinate or widen these agreements, to focus on a case where Germany would be the primary aggressor, aided by Hungary and Bulgaria, with Russia a secondary enemy or neutral. The French General Staff noted that all these accords had been signed to meet present concerns, without an overall vision. The tentative efforts to combine them had failed, largely due to divergent political interests amongst their members, especially regarding Russia. Despite these problems, the 2e Bureau was optimistic that a common cause could be established between France and its Eastern allies. The recent agreement between Poland and Romania linked Paris to Bucharest through Warsaw, and established the base for a three-way alliance. Similarly, improving political and economic relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia raised the possibility that those nations might agree to military co-operation in case of conflict with Germany.²⁴⁴

The 2e Bureau's post-Locarno evaluation of the Eastern alliances reflects how French authorities moved from viewing them as a *Cordon sanitaire*, to contain the spread of Bolshevism (1919), to a barrier between the Rapallo partners (1922), to a check on German attempts at treaty revision (1926). The suggestion that Germany replace Russia as the primary threat to the Eastern European nations was expected to unite, not divide, France and its friends. Those states had differed in their attitudes towards Bolshevik

²⁴⁴ "Note sur les accords existant ou en projet entre la France, la Pologne et les états de la Petite Entente", Dec. 1926, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

Russia in the 1920s, while the Little Entente had developed as a series of bilateral, limited agreements, rather than a sweeping alliance directed against any Great Power. French strategists anticipated that the spectre of German revisionism in Eastern Europe, given an impetus by Locarno, would push France and its Eastern allies closer together. Their hopes proved optimistic. In 1927, Poland, the Eastern European nation most threatened by Germany, reached out to France with a plan for an “Eastern Locarno”. This appeal halted immediately when France replied that such an agreement must involve a trade of Danzig to Germany, which insisted that its territorial disputes with Poland be resolved should it enter any broader agreement, with Poland receiving compensation in the form of the Lithuanian port city of Memel. This event revealed the flaw in relations between France and its eastern allies. What Wandycz refers to as the “shadow of Locarno” in Eastern Europe was not enough to make the nations in the region abandon their differences (especially those between Poland and Czechoslovakia) and form a homogenous bloc directed against Germany.²⁴⁵

V

By 1927 the 2e Bureau concluded that the spectre of German revisionism in eastern Europe was strong enough that France might be able to co-ordinate its alliances there on the premise that Germany, not Russia, was the potential primary aggressor. This attitude shows how far French planners were focused on Germany. They proposed this shift in the focus of the Eastern allies, even as they warned of Russia’s military resurgence after years of chaos and disorganization, a fact sure to be significant to Poland

²⁴⁵ Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 73-105.

and Romania, which also could be expected to have reservations about an alliance focused almost exclusively against Germany. Moreover, this assessment occurred at a time when the 2e Bureau was beginning to perceive real dangers of German-Soviet military collaboration, and to warn that their relationship might produce war industries capable of supplying both sides in future conflicts.

Jordan writes that a “central imperative” of French military planning in the interwar period was the need to enable France to project power and to fight outside its frontiers.²⁴⁶ This necessity was the rationale behind the pursuit of alliances with Belgium and the states of Eastern Europe. The Treaty of Locarno in 1925, however, narrowed the options for this project; if Germany did start a war, it was likely to look east, rather than west, where it faced a Franco-Belgian alliance guaranteed by Great Britain. This situation drove the French General Staff to try to strengthen its alliances in Eastern Europe, the area where France most needed to build power and was most likely to fight outside its frontiers. The 2e Bureau’s views of Soviet capabilities was subordinated to the dominant role which Germany played in French military policy, and to the belief that Germany would one day seek to revise the Versailles Treaty by force. This matter overrode any other consideration, including the 2e Bureau’s emerging belief that the USSR was beginning to become a great military power, one that was threatening and even dangerously militaristic.

To appraise accurately the significance of French military intelligence is not straightforward; the General Staff and civilian politicians did not function congruously.

²⁴⁶ Jordan, 50.

The evidence from the 2e Bureau does not indicate which political leaders viewed the reports offered by the General Staff, how they evaluated this intelligence, and if they incorporated it into their policies. None the less, the 2e Bureau observations indicate that the USSR was not perceived as a primary consideration in French strategic policy-making. Although it potentially threatened France's Eastern European allies, the 2e Bureau held that Bolshevik leaders had no aggressive intentions in this region, and sought a breathing space in which to rebuild the Russian economy and put the Red Army on a more equal footing with the forces of its European neighbours. The infrequent warnings offered by the French General Staff, about Soviet resurgence or Russo-German collaboration, were vague and offered little reason to act. The tone of the 1927 and 1928 communiqués, in which the 2e Bureau offered more stringent warnings about Soviet militarism and possible co-operation between Berlin and Moscow, is strikingly different from those of preceding years. These observations, which depict Russian leaders as having militaristic obsessions despite their bleak economic situation, communicate an urgency about the Soviet Union that had been missing from earlier assessments. The French General Staff was urging their political superiors to pay more attention to the Russian side of the Berlin-Moscow alliance. This warning was ignored. Franco-Soviet relations languished for the remainder of the 1920s, not drawing attention in Paris until the rise of the Nazis in Germany in 1930.²⁴⁷

The 2e Bureau observations on the USSR between 1922 and 1927 further illuminate the direction taken by France's political leaders in the 1920s. Undoubtedly

²⁴⁷ Carley, "Prelude to Defeat," 173.

Russia was a secondary concern compared to Germany, a decision that is questionable given the significance of later failures of French leaders to reach a viable agreement with Moscow in the 1930s. The 2e Bureau files indicate that French military intelligence did not see Russia as a credible enough factor to affect the course of French policy until the 1930s, when France deemed it necessary to pursue a relationship with Russia that would enhance security against German resurgence. Further, the view that Russia was not yet strong enough to affect this resurgence was a principal cause for the weakening of the Eastern alliances. The evaluations of Soviet power offered by the 2e Bureau before 1925, when the Red Army was in disarray and several years away from becoming a worthy fighting force, meant that Paris could afford to sacrifice some security in Eastern Europe in order to gain more on the Franco-German frontier. This is precisely what happened with the Locarno agreement, where French leaders obtained peace of mind about their direct border with Germany, at the cost of a weaker alliance in Eastern Europe. After Locarno, France's alliances with the states of Eastern Europe became more diplomatic and less military.²⁴⁸ The overwhelming French preoccupation with security against German resurgence, and the failure of the coercive methods of the early 1920s, compelled France to sacrifice security in Eastern Europe for security on the Rhine at Locarno. But the belief, confirmed by 2e Bureau intelligence prior to 1926, that for the immediate future Russia could not constitute a viable military threat to its neighbours, undoubtedly persuaded French politicians that Locarno was an acceptable bargain.

²⁴⁸ Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 450.

In the 1920s, Russia never was a central element in French strategic planning, although it stood next to, and directly affected, central elements in French strategy. The advice offered by French military intelligence suggests that Russian power largely was insignificant to the course which military planners sought to follow. Had the Soviet threat been given more credence by military observers, French politicians might have been more diligent in pursuing closer ties with Moscow, and urgings from the likes of Herbette may not have been downplayed or ignored. Carley alludes to a statement by Herbette, the French ambassador to Moscow from 1924 to 1931, as being an eerie portent of the failed Franco-Soviet rapprochement in the 1930s. Herbette, in 1926, warned Paris that “if others reproach us later for having allowed a new war and a new invasion to be prepared because we could not find the necessary solutions to settle the Russian debt and because we did not anticipate inevitable future changes in eastern Europe, what responsibility will we bear?”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Carley, “Prelude to Defeat,” 170.

CHAPTER IV
SIMILAR BRITISH AND FRENCH CONCERNS
OVER SOVIET STRATEGIC POLICY

I

During the 1920s, the comprehension and evaluation of Soviet power, intentions and diplomacy were important components in the European security strategies of Britain and France. After communist Russia failed to join the comity of nations at Genoa, British and French officials were left to interpret the actions of a state that signalled its intentions simultaneously to promote a global revolution while pursuing normal relations with its neighbours. The primary body of officials who undertook such evaluations in Britain and France, the Northern Department and the 2e Bureau, had different functions and concerns. The former adopted a broader approach to the Soviet Union, which accounted for diplomatic, commercial and strategic matters. Its evaluations rested on an appreciation of numerous factors, including diplomatic relations with third parties (such as Germany), the capabilities of the Red Army and the actions of the Comintern. The 2e Bureau had a narrower focus, concentrating primarily on Soviet strategic intentions and its ability to act on them. Its appreciations of Soviet intentions were linked to its perceptions of the quality of the Red Army and of Soviet industrial capabilities. Despite these differences, the Northern Department and the French General Staff frequently had common views. Fundamentally, between 1922 and 1927, British and French officials evaluated the Soviet Union as being a second-rate power, but also one that, if associated with Germany, could seriously endanger stability in Europe.

Great Britain and France agreed that the Soviet government would not conduct its external relations in the manner commonly accepted by established nations. Instead, in order to obtain its goals, the Bolsheviks would disrupt foreign relations. Citing Russian behaviour at Genoa and The Hague in 1922, the 2e Bureau concluded that Moscow was a disruptive factor in international relations. It distrusted Soviet claims to be pursuing peace and disarmament, indeed, as Moscow maintained a military force superior to that of its neighbours, it must be seen as a menace to them, and to international stability.²⁵⁰ Russian behaviour at international conferences prompted a comparable response in Britain. In December 1922, Curzon indicated his frustration at the way that the Soviet delegation at Lausanne was trying to sidetrack the talks towards discussion of the Straits, rather than of peace with Turkey, which was Britain's concern at the conference.²⁵¹

Earlier in 1922, the Northern Department suggested that Soviet diplomatic goals – such as obtaining recognition from other European powers – were intended to demonstrate its significance as the first recognized communist government in history. British officials believed that recognition would legitimize the Bolsheviks' form of government and give “fresh heart” to Western European communist parties. This legitimacy might entrench Soviet diplomatic methods in international relations and serve as a model for future communist governments. Hence, the Northern Department insisted that recognition of the Soviet government should be conditional on better behaviour, not

²⁵⁰ “Mise à jour – Russie”, 15 April 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3144.

²⁵¹ Curzon telegram, 19 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8147/N11110/3/38.

simply on economic and political calculations. Essentially, the Foreign Office argued, the prize of British recognition should be withheld until Moscow adopted basic standards of international intercourse.²⁵² Despite the failure of that hope, the Northern Department discovered direct and indirect means to check Soviet intransigence and behaviour, such as the signing of treaties or the granting of recognition by European states. In 1925 Hodgson noted that each new agreement, by widening Moscow's scope of relations, tended to check the impertinence of Soviet diplomacy and limit its tactics of "political manoeuvre".²⁵³ Still, despite these subtle improvements, both London and Paris believed they were confronting a government that sought to exploit and expand the differences between European powers.

II

British and French observers of Soviet Russia were closely interested in the state of its military. Both governments believed that the Soviet Union represented a threat to its neighbours, which could upset the settlement in Eastern Europe. The 2e Bureau assessed the Soviet military more regularly than did the Foreign Office, or the War Office for that matter, but the state of the Red Army was a significant concern to both bodies. They soon developed divergent views of Soviet military capabilities. In 1922, both the 2e Bureau and the Northern Department thought that the Red Army wished to develop a first rate military that could match the best European armies.²⁵⁴ British officials thought that

²⁵² Memorandum by Gregory, 11 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8209/N9291/9291/38.

²⁵³ Hodgson to Chamberlain, 24 August 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11022/N4802/710/38.

²⁵⁴ SIS reports (War Office), 17 March 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8164/N2559/57/38; "Annexe du compte-rendu de renseignements", 5 April 1922, SHD/DAT 7N 3152.

the Red Army was too badly organized as yet to be significant,²⁵⁵ but soon would become a threat to its neighbours, and a force that all would have to reckon with.²⁵⁶

Until 1927, the 2e Bureau continued to view the Red Army as inferior to other Western armies despite some progress in aviation. Conversely, by the summer 1923 the Northern Department began to view the Soviet military as being in good condition and “fully equipped for war”. This perception originated in a report from Ernest Rennie, head of the British Legation at Helsingfors (Helsinki), which noted that a Finnish representative at Moscow assessed the Red Army as being well-prepared for combat, with strong discipline and good equipment.²⁵⁷ This appraisal alone probably would not have altered the Foreign Office’s perception of the Soviet military; it was, however, given further credence later that year when Hodgson informed Curzon that Soviet military preparations continued “with the object of impressing the outside world, but mainly in order to be prepared for any situation which unknown factors may bring into existence.”²⁵⁸ He later reported to Gregory that “serious efforts to improve their technical equipment as rapidly as possible” were underway in Russia, for deployment potentially as early as spring 1924.²⁵⁹ These assessments stand in stark contrast to the 2e Bureau’s observations this same year, which emphasised the severe equipment shortages for Red

²⁵⁵ Hodgson to Curzon, 11 April 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8178/N3623/246/38.

²⁵⁶ Hodgson to Curzon, 29 August 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8182/N8243/472/38.

²⁵⁷ Rennie to Curzon, 16 Jan. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9336/N486/47/38.

²⁵⁸ Hodgson to Curzon, 5 Nov. 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9339/N8668/47/38.

²⁵⁹ Hodgson to Gregory, 10 Dec. 1923, NAUK, FO371/9358/N9632/687/38.

Army troops and the Soviet fleet; for example, soldiers were missing basic equipment such as firearms, machine guns, explosives, armoured vehicles, tanks and airplanes.²⁶⁰

These divergent viewpoints stem from their relationship to each government's concern with a Soviet strategic challenge. French military planners, focused on current issues or those in the near future, realized that the Soviet threat in Eastern Europe (the focal point of their interests) was negligible, and thought the Red Army was unlikely to attack in that region. They believed that Soviet strength, when compared to the existing strength of France's eastern allies, let alone its own, was weak.²⁶¹ The 2e Bureau was close to the mark in assessment of Soviet military capabilities; R. Craig Nation notes that between 1923 and 1925 "the army's technical level was markedly inferior to that of potential rivals."²⁶² However, during this period British and French officials anticipated that Moscow's would focus on spreading the communist revolution in Asia rather than Europe. By late 1922, the Northern Department warned that Bolshevik activities in India were its steadily increasing, which foreshadowed a general increase in communistic subversion in Asia. The fall of Lloyd George had prompted Moscow to alter its strategy. It had believed that Lloyd George eventually would reach terms with communist Russia and had not wanted to jeopardize this prospect. His fall, the creation of a conservative government and the belief that British opinion was turning against Russia, opened the door to attempts to spread revolution in Asia – the heart of the British Empire.²⁶³ By

²⁶⁰ "Préparation militaire politique de la Russie des Soviets", 9 May 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3152.

²⁶¹ "Aperçu générale sur la situation de l'armée rouge", 15 May 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3140.

²⁶² Nation, 52.

²⁶³ Memorandum by Leeper, 11 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8170/N9302/123/38 and Maxse (Zurich) to Curzon, 21 Dec. 1922, FO 371/8171/N11298/123/38.

1925, Whitehall believed Moscow desired territorial conquest in Asia.²⁶⁴ In Asia, Soviet military forces were relatively better compared to their local competitors than was true in Europe. Hence, even if Hodgson and Rennie overrated the existing quality of the Red Army, their reports did not seriously degrade the quality of British assessments on strategic issues. The 2e Bureau also perceived this shift in strategic emphasis. French military officials realized that Moscow was targeting the British empire, and hoped to “break the back of the British government.” It believed that Moscow pursued the establishment of communism in Persia, India and Turkey: “all ingredients for revolution in the Orient were present.” All that was lacking was organization, which must come from an outside source.²⁶⁵

Not surprisingly, the Foreign Office believed the USSR to be capable of significant military action, even if this perception was inaccurate. London anticipated that the Soviet government soon would pursue a policy of territorial conquest in Asia, which could cripple British power there. Whitehall recognized that the Soviet government regarded Britain’s dependencies as its most vulnerable points.²⁶⁶ The overthrow of British rule in India remained the perceived primary goal of Soviet strategic policy, although Whitehall came to believe that this would most likely occur through indirect action, such as establishing control of Afghanistan, rather than direct action.²⁶⁷ Conversely, both London and Paris believed that a Soviet attack in Europe was unlikely at present. France, with fewer colonial and commercial interests in Asia than Great Britain, had smaller

²⁶⁴ Extension of Soviet Influence in Asia, December 1925, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 655B.

²⁶⁵ “Plans politiques et militaires des Bolshéviki en Orient”, 18 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3130.

²⁶⁶ Home Office Memorandum (Secret), 5 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8170/N9113/123/38.

²⁶⁷ Soviet activities in Central and Eastern Asia, March 1927, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 782B.

concerns about aggressive Soviet intentions there. Despite the brief concerns following the failure of the Genoa Conference, throughout the 1920s the 2e Bureau remained confident that it did not face a significant threat from Moscow in Eastern Europe, a region that was as important to Paris as Central Asia was to London.

III

Despite the belief that Eastern Europe was safe from Soviet offensive actions, the Rapallo Treaty forced France and Britain to monitor closely the relationship between Germany and Soviet Russia. Initially, the Foreign Office and the 2e Bureau tended to downplay the immediate benefits of the Soviet-German relationship, but both knew the combination could become dangerous if certain conditions, such as Soviet economic resurgence, were met. The Foreign Office at first did not take the threat of Rapallo seriously, describing it as a “retaliatory demonstration” rather than a sign of serious co-operation.²⁶⁸ Its first assessments of the Soviet-German partnership noted the benefits German firms had gained from Rapallo, but that as yet commercial exchange between the two was meagre.²⁶⁹ British observers were not concerned about the possibility of Soviet-German co-operation in case of conflict in Eastern Europe. Thus, the Foreign Office received details of a German query to Moscow about the Soviet position in case Poland attacked Germany. The alleged Soviet reply – that Rapallo did not oblige Moscow to act, and Russia would sit on the fence and await an outcome – bolstered British expectations that the partnership had not automatically created Soviet-German collaboration.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ D'Abernon to Curzon, 16 May 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8208/N4684/2169/38.

²⁶⁹ SIS report, 1 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8179/N10682/246/38.

²⁷⁰ Hodgson to Curzon, 29 Aug. 1922, FO 371/8208/N8144/2169/38.

Whitehall thought that the differences between the two governments, despite their shared status as pariahs, would hamper co-operation between them. In particular, Bolshevik revolutionary proclamations would harm its relations with most European nations, including Germany. As Hodgson noted in 1924, Germany had rendered Russia “a signal service” with the Rapallo pact and presumably expected a return favour. During the Ruhr crisis however, Soviet officials informed their German counterparts in supercilious fashion that their bourgeois form of government had caused their problems, and it must now face the inevitable consequence of its errors.²⁷¹ British officials also watched the development of commercial relations between the Soviet Union and Germany, where their views often mirrored those of French officials (for example, in 1926, Lord D’Abernon indicated the partnership revealed a “very poor measure of success”).²⁷²

From 1925, however, the Foreign Office primarily focused on how diplomatic relations between Moscow and Berlin could affect British plans to achieve a permanent settlement among Western Europe’s major powers. During 1925, the Foreign Office knew Soviet officials were warning their German counterparts from becoming closely aligned with the Western European powers, and thus losing the clout emanating from their connection to Moscow.²⁷³ The renewal of the Soviet-German association in the Treaty of Berlin in 1926 surprised the Foreign Office, given prior Soviet failures to lure Germany into an unrestricted treaty of neutrality. However, unlike after Rapallo, when

²⁷¹ Hodgson to MacDonald, 28 Jan. 1924, NAUK, FO 371/10464/N716/10/38.

²⁷² D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 28 Jan. 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N718/718/38.

²⁷³ D’Abernon to Chamberlain, 20 Oct. 1925, NAUK, FO 371/11022/N5905/710/38.

British officials were not sure what to expect from the surprise agreement, by 1926 Germany was securely associated with a Western European treaty system. Hence, the Foreign Office did not see the renewed link to Moscow as a threat to that system – if anything, they believed it would help rather than hinder European pacification, although France and the Eastern European nations might feel a revived sense of insecurity.²⁷⁴

Some, including Chamberlain, expressed suspicion of German motives (“in view of past history one could not entirely discard suspicion as to the real motive of the German Government”),²⁷⁵ but the Foreign Office, confident about the orientation of German policy, took the fact that the Moscow had severely reduced its asking price to maintain German favour, as proof that Berlin did not place its relationship with Russia above that with the Western European powers. By 1926, British officials evaluated the Soviet-German relationship almost exclusively from the perspective of Berlin’s actions and intentions; determined to settle Europe’s outstanding issues without Soviet participation, the Northern Department virtually ignored Moscow’s participation in the new treaty, instead focusing on how the treaty shaped the sustenance of the Locarno agreement.

While London gradually minimized the significance of Soviet Russia in European diplomacy, the 2e Bureau took a more balanced view of Moscow. It believed that Berlin dictated the pace of the relationship, but always saw Moscow as a significant factor. French military officials viewed the Soviet Union as a potential threat that, in

²⁷⁴ Minute by Maxse, 3 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1489/718/38.

²⁷⁵ Chamberlain to Crewe, 10 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11791/N1585/718/38.

combination with Germany could endanger French interests in Eastern Europe. The 2e Bureau's discussions of the Soviet-German relationship focus primarily on tangible evaluations of this link, and its ability to threaten France's scheme for security. Immediately after Rapallo, French military officials postulated that Germany viewed Bolshevism as a catapult. With German will focused on the rapid preparation of measures of revenge, the 2e Bureau wrote, Russian attacks on its neighbours served German interests. The German-Russian collaboration was the lever that Germany could use to upset the Versailles settlement in Eastern Europe.²⁷⁶ Paris identified Germany as the focal point of a European grouping, including Russia, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria, dedicated to treaty revision, and as the senior partner in the German-Soviet relationship and the pacesetter in that relationship.²⁷⁷ These views were in contrast to those in London, which initially identified Moscow as the senior partner and Berlin as the supplicant at Rapallo.

The 2e Bureau was quick to perceive the collaboration between the German and Soviet militaries, but for several years, due to insufficient evidence, found it hard to define the impact of these efforts. In the months after the Rapallo pact, French soldiers suggested that the military contact consisted primarily of the enlistment of German officers, engineers, technicians and specialists in the Red Army, but cautioned that the evidence on the topic was fragmentary and doubtful.²⁷⁸ One year later, the 2e Bureau reported German activity in war-materials production in Russia, but warned that

²⁷⁶ "Etude de la propagande bolchevique et de ses rapports avec l'Allemagne", 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3130.

²⁷⁷ "Note sur la situation générale en Europe", 21 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

²⁷⁸ "L'infiltration Allemande en Russie", 18 Nov. 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

information was vague and unverifiable.²⁷⁹ By 1924, while specific information on Soviet-German military collaboration was still weak, the General Staff had developed a better understanding of the encumbrances to a strong partnership between Berlin and Moscow: "Bolshevist independence, its revolutionary aspirations, and, without doubt in large measure, its apprehensions of German militarism experienced in full at Brest-Litovsk, are the obstacles to the realisation of a partnership . . . that [none the less] remains a future threat."²⁸⁰

Yet even it did not fully understand this danger until 1927 when, in response to a query from the French Ambassador at Moscow, the French General Staff provided its most conclusive appreciation to date of Soviet-German military co-operation. Although there was no military alliance, collusion between the Soviet and German militaries clearly existed, aimed to benefit the Soviet army and to disrupt the disarmament clauses of Versailles. The German and Soviet general staffs had exchanged views regarding collaboration and the establishment of a war industry able to supply both states. Most crucially, Berlin was the driving force behind these efforts at collaboration. Although the disorganized nature and intransigent nationalism of the Soviet government had limited the benefits for Germany, the results were evident in aeronautical, metallurgical and chemical industries. The ability to manufacture armaments prohibited by Versailles in Russia was to the great advantage of Germany.²⁸¹ Although French military officials took considerable time to determine the extent of the Soviet-German partnership in military

²⁷⁹ "Note sur l'activité Allemande en Russie", 20 Nov. 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3141.

²⁸⁰ "Note sur l'activité Allemande en Russie", 14 Jan. 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

²⁸¹ "Collusion de la Reichswehr et des autorités Soviétiques", 28 Feb. 1927, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

matters, the 2e Bureau did not form hasty conclusions from poor information, and provided a reasonable assessment of the threats to France, a warning that was supported by future evidence gathered by intelligence services.²⁸² The 2e Bureau did, however, miss the full extent of the Soviet-German collaboration since Rapallo, as the tactical exercises and developments in aviation and gas warfare, carried out jointly in the Soviet Union by both sides.

While French soldiers developed a full understanding of the military relationship between Moscow and Berlin very slowly, the 2e Bureau was more confident about its information on their economic partnership. Much like the Northern Department, French military intelligence initially perceived a fundamental weakness in the Russian economy that would hinder the development of a successful relationship with Berlin. The danger was the establishment of a foundation that could facilitate a fruitful relationship between Berlin and Moscow,²⁸³ especially by giving Germany knowledge of Soviet markets and systems when Russian commerce reopened to world enterprise.²⁸⁴ Similar to its views on the military relationship between the two states, the 2e Bureau perceived Berlin as the senior partner, and evaluated the this relationship in terms of the benefits accrued by Germany.

IV

British and French officials had similar views about Soviet propaganda. The Comintern, formed during 1919 in Moscow so to spread the October Revolution beyond

²⁸² "Renseignements sur l'URSS", 4 Nov. 1927, SHD/DAT, 7N 3148.

²⁸³ "L'infiltration Allemande en Russie", 18 Nov. 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

²⁸⁴ "Note sur l'activité Allemande en Russie", 14 Jan. 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3143.

Russia's borders, used propaganda to appeal to working classes and other susceptible groups in foreign countries so to internationalize the Bolshevik revolution. While the Comintern gradually reassessed its goals, realizing that revolution would occur in years rather than weeks, propaganda remained one of its basic methods. Meanwhile Moscow claimed that it had no control over the Comintern, thus circumventing a standard demand of governments entering into relations with the Soviet state that it desist subversive propaganda against them.²⁸⁵ London and Paris shared this problem, though peripheral interests, specifically Britain's Asian empire, gave them substantially different concerns about it.

The Comintern sought to encourage revolution in France and Great Britain through two domestic entities: the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). The Comintern acted as overseer of communist activities in foreign states, with the goal of preparing for the anticipated assumption of power in those states. The CPGB and PCF both were formed in 1920 on the basis of agreements with the Comintern that they would follow directions from Moscow, who believed that its foreign allies needed guidance from experienced communists. However, in their initial years, communists in Britain and France were not always willing to follow Moscow's orders, producing splits that stunted the growth of communism in these nations. In France, the PCF initially retained many features of its predecessor, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, which favoured a softer version of socialism than did the Bolsheviks, and was slowly reorganized along Leninist ideals. During the 1920s, the PCF

²⁸⁵ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 32-50.

included supporters of Leninist ideals, and activists who were anti-Comintern and favoured a moderate approach. While the PCF had a strong following, it was unable immediately to garner working-class support and, Moscow believed, was incapable to raise the French masses to communist ends. Comintern leaders Grigori Zinoviev and Leon Trotsky believed the PCF needed to purge these moderate elements and represent a harder form of socialism to French workers.²⁸⁶ Similarly, Moscow urged the CPGB was urged to pursue a radical line, distinct from the Labour Party.²⁸⁷ However, unlike the PCF, the CPGB failed to arouse any support amongst the British working-class; its support peaked at a membership of 12,000 after the General Strike in 1926 compared to the PCF's inter-war membership high of 330,000 in 1937, which wrecked the party's goals of encouraging revolution in Great Britain. Further, like the PCF, the CPGB occasionally resisted directions from Moscow, stifling the ability of Comintern leaders to plant what they believed were the seeds of revolution.²⁸⁸

The Foreign Office saw domestic communist propaganda as an annoyance, but not a major problem; Northern Department official C.W. Orde wrote in 1926 that propaganda has "encountered a natural resistance where pre-existing conditions of unrest were not present."²⁸⁹ However, propaganda periodically inflamed tensions between those Conservative politicians that wished to terminate relations with Moscow and those who

²⁸⁶ Maxwell Adereth, *The French Communist Party, A Critical History (1920-84) : from Comintern to 'the colours of France'* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), 22-38; Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making, 1914-1924* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), 250-310.

²⁸⁷ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 91.

²⁸⁸ Andrew Thorpe, "Comintern 'Control' of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-43," *English Historical Review* 113, no. 452 (1998), 637-662.

²⁸⁹ Foreign Policy of the USSR (Memorandum by Orde), February 1926, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 671B.

advocated a more tolerant policy.²⁹⁰ It also hampered Anglo-Soviet relations, as British officials repeatedly linked progress in that area to the cessation of propaganda. While the Bolsheviks' political platform did not draw widespread support in Great Britain, its economic benefits were widely espoused. Neither Labour nor the Trades Union Congress supported Bolshevik policy, but they generally did back trade with Soviet Russia as a means to alleviate Britain's post-war economic troubles.²⁹¹

British officials saw propaganda aimed at subverting Britain's colonial possessions in Asia as a more dangerous threat. Since 1918, London knew that India was a primary target of Moscow, and that Afghanistan was being used as a launching pad for subversion in the subcontinent. This threat intensified as the revolution in Europe failed to materialize and the Bolshevik government came to appreciate the revolutionary potential in Asia.²⁹² Both Lenin and Stalin emphasised anti-imperialist, nationalist-based movements of liberation, which the USSR increasingly supported.²⁹³ The Foreign Office knew that Moscow viewed Britain's colonies as the most vulnerable points in the Empire,²⁹⁴ and was expanding its activity there, including funds, propaganda and relations with Indian communists.²⁹⁵ By late 1922, the Foreign Office thought Moscow believed the only way to London was through Calcutta.²⁹⁶ SIS reports indicated that Zinoviev, head of the Comintern, had told its Congress that the body's primary direction

²⁹⁰ Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truce*, 61-63.

²⁹¹ White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 33-52.

²⁹² Ibid., 89-108.

²⁹³ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 51-56.

²⁹⁴ Home Office memorandum, 5 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8170/N9113/123/38.

²⁹⁵ Memorandum by Leeper, 12 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8170/N9302/123/38.

²⁹⁶ Maxse (Zurich) to Curzon, 21 Dec. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8171/N11298/123/38.

now was to paralyse England in the East and organize a new opposition to the Raj.²⁹⁷

Beginning in late 1924, Whitehall increasingly believed that the Soviet government was focusing its subversive efforts at Asia. In late 1925, the CID concluded that Locarno had reduced the opportunities for Soviet exploitation in Europe, prompting Moscow to concentrate on Asia, where it posed serious dangers to British interests.²⁹⁸

Historians view British concerns over their Asian interests as being legitimate. Both Ferris and David Fromkin describe a conglomeration of perceived threats in which Bolshevism occupied a central position. After the First World War, Britain's leaders sought to expand their Asian position by controlling substantial portions of the Ottoman Empire. However, their already taxed military capabilities, combined with animosity with wartime allies, significantly France, prevented the smooth execution of this control. Britain faced a series of disturbances in its Asian and African possessions (Egypt, Iraq and Palestine) or in regions close to them (Afghanistan, Arabia, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan). Both Fromkin and Ferris observe that, to British officials, it appeared as though a maelstrom of forces, including the C.U.P., Germany, pan-Islamism, Bolshevism and traditional Russian aspirations in Central Asia, were combining to strike the reeling British Empire where it was most vulnerable.²⁹⁹ Ferris writes that while these notions have been seen by historians as a chimera, they had substance; especially between 1919 and 1922, several factors created vulnerability for Great Britain in the region. Although

²⁹⁷ SIS report, 20 April 1923, NAUK, FO 371/9334/N3532/44/38.

²⁹⁸ Extension of Soviet Influence in Asia, Dec. 1925, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 655B.

²⁹⁹ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the modern Middle East* (Owl Books: New York, 1989), 415-474.

by late 1922 this multi-faceted threat began to subside, fears of Bolshevik manipulation of Muslim Asia persisted until 1925.³⁰⁰

After Locarno, the Foreign Office closely monitored Bolshevik influence in Asia. As it told the CID in June 1926, Great Britain must constantly watch Russian actions in Central Asia (especially Afghanistan and Chinese Turkestan). The danger was not of a direct attack on Indian territory, but rather the heightening of tensions with Afghanistan and hostile activity by frontier tribes.³⁰¹ The Foreign Office saw propaganda as a primary Soviet means to encourage this activity; British officials never believed that Moscow intended to confront British troops over imperial possessions, but they did fear continual, indirect pressure in Asia.³⁰²

While Soviet propaganda presented a different threat to France than to Britain, it did concern French military intelligence, especially in the early 1920s. Unlike Great Britain, where subversion aimed at British citizens caused unease but not alarm, the activity of Soviet secret agents significantly worried French officials. Olivier Forcade shows that French military counter-intelligence was involved in an all-out offensive against the Soviet government, the Comintern and the PCF starting in 1919. Initially it utilized Russian refugees in Germany, where French officials believed most Soviet subversive activity originated, to identify Soviet agents inside France. However, in 1923, under the direction of Karl Radek, Soviet secret forces were reorganized into the GPU, and its subversive activities in Western Europe became more effective, combining the

³⁰⁰ Ferris, "The Internationalism of Islam," 66-69.

³⁰¹ Imperial Defence Policy, June 1926, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 700 B.

³⁰² Foreign Policy in relation to Russia and Japan, July 1926, NAUK, CAB 4/9, 710 B.

efforts of local communist parties and GPU agents under the cover of commercial missions. French military officials also feared Soviet subversion activities in Eastern Europe, and sought to develop relationships with the secret services of these nascent governments.³⁰³

In 1921, the 2e Bureau outlined the goals, scope and structure of Bolshevik propaganda against foreign states, in order to understand the threats which France could face in the future. It argued that Soviet propaganda aimed to detach the masses from their government, so to isolate public officials and law enforcement during a crisis and to enhance the possibilities for revolution. Propaganda accomplished this aim by exploiting all motifs of public discontent in day-to-day life, including racial/ethnic aspirations, national issues, economic troubles and excessive military obligations. Moscow provided substantial funds to foreign bodies in order to assist in the dissemination of propaganda, through media such as journals, posters, tracts and meetings. Nations that energetically opposed this propaganda realized its effect, which could also be countered by minimizing issues of public discontent while making social reforms, including measures such as financial or taxation reforms, and allowing workers to participate in unions.³⁰⁴

The French General Staff also was interested in the composition of the Comintern. In 1923, the 2e Bureau evaluated the composition, goals and tactics, in order to understand the threat it posed to foreign nations. French military intelligence described the Comintern as having no inviolable principles but rather a series of particular goals

³⁰³ Forcade, 352-358.

³⁰⁴ "Intensification de la propagande bolchevique – Lutte contre cette propagande", Aug. 1921, SHD/DAT, 7N 3130.

depending on regional circumstances. For example, in Europe the body focused on internationalism and the destruction of the state; in Asia, it aligned with nationalistic and xenophobic movements; in the Soviet Federation, it emphasised centralization by eliminating regional particularities. These varying tactics had the common aim of furthering the decisions of the Russian Communist Party (and thereby, Soviet power); like the British Foreign Office, the 2e Bureau saw a direct link between these bodies, and rejected Moscow's protestations that the Comintern had no association with Soviet power. These different goals however, had to some extent promoted confusion that had hindered the international communist movement.³⁰⁵ The 2e Bureau evaluated the results obtained to date by the Comintern, and again, like the Foreign Office, thought the most dangerous potential consequences lay in agitation in Asia. In Europe, the results were negligible, though some success had occurred in Germany, through the Soviet ability simultaneously to pursue the goals of spreading proletarian unrest while aligning with the government against the Western powers. Overall, the 2e Bureau viewed the Comintern as a body that might subvert foreign states, but to date had seen little success in doing so.

V

The Foreign Office and the 2e Bureau evaluated Soviet propaganda and international agitation in different ways. The 2e Bureau took a substantially theoretical view of the threat. It was not particularly concerned with the goals of the Comintern, but rather in understanding this arm of the Russian communist movement so to evaluate its

³⁰⁵ "Synthèse au sujet des services spéciaux Russes et du mouvement Bolchevique en Russie", April 1923, SHD/DAT, 7N 3148.

danger to foreign states. The 2e Bureau did not suggest policy directions, but gathered intelligence and evaluated it for the bodies that made policy.³⁰⁶ By contrast, the Foreign Office was more policy-driven; its function was to evaluate information from all sources, and to offer advice to the Foreign Secretary that he might take to higher levels of government. The Foreign Office acutely understood the threat to British interests posed by Soviet propaganda and subversion in the empire. As such, it viewed Soviet subversion within Great Britain as a nuisance and block to better relations, but not as a threat.

The Foreign Office and the 2e Bureau also had different perspectives on the partnership between Moscow and Berlin. The Foreign Office saw that relationship as a practical question, and wondered primarily how it might affect British intentions for Europe's future. Once London decided to restructure Europe without Soviet participation, the Russian component of the Berlin-Moscow partnership became increasingly unimportant. Conversely, the 2e Bureau agreed that the Soviet-German partnership was not an immediate danger, but could one day endanger French security through actions in Eastern Europe. The 2e Bureau regularly mentioned the *potential* threat of the Berlin-Moscow partnership. It saw many obstacles blocking that partnership, but when the 2e Bureau believed the Red Army was substantially improving, it began to offer more urgent warnings about Soviet-German collaboration.

Despite these differences in view, the Foreign Office and 2e Bureau shared key perceptions about the Soviet Union. First, they believed that the USSR was hostile to the world order and wished to destroy it. They doubted that Moscow could be trusted to

³⁰⁶ Alexander, 293-333.

behave in an acceptable fashion. British, and to a lesser extent, French, officials questioned Moscow's claims to be pursuing a normal foreign policy, that was not rooted in a desire for global communist revolutions. This attitude stemmed from the virulent manifestos propagated by the Comintern even when Moscow began to pursue a policy based on the peaceful coexistence of socialism and capitalism, and to the belief that the USSR simply was waiting to exploit any dissension amongst the Western powers. Especially in the early 1920s, British and French observers held that the Soviet Union gained from the divisions amongst the powers, including the victor nations. This perception declined by mid-decade, as Western European nations settled their differences, but British and French observers continued to believe that the Soviet state could not be trusted, whether in its diplomatic dealings, or its proclamations on disarmament and pacifism.

Second, the Foreign Office and 2e Bureau thought that, given the weakened and chaotic state of the Soviet economic system, the military would take many years to achieve equal footing with the major armies of Europe. Until 1927, the 2e Bureau consistently maintained that the Red Army, while slowly improving, lacked the necessary organization and equipment to mount even the smallest of offensives. This gave French officials confidence in the security of their relations with Poland and the Little Entente. British officials confronted a different type of threat in Soviet ambitions for Central Asia. The Foreign Office could not afford to ignore the ability of the Red Army to impose Soviet intentions on independent states in Asia. However, the CID did not anticipate a direct attack on India but rather the steady application of pressure through propaganda and support for revolutionary bodies. Although they viewed the Soviet Union as a threat

in Asia, British officials did not expect to have to defend India against the Red Army. The true danger, they believed, was that the Soviet government would successfully arouse nationalist emotions among Britain's Asian subjects and create more difficulties for an already strained Empire and its administrators.

Finally, Germany's relations with Soviet Russia played a central role for British and French officials. The Rapallo partnership influenced British desire to reintroduce Germany into the European community by serving as a continual reminder that Berlin could throw in its lot with Moscow if the Western powers failed to table a suitable offer. For French military officials, German-Soviet military collusion raised significant dangers: Soviet co-operation or assistance for Germany in a future war against France, or that a Russian attack on an eastern European state might open the same door to Germany. The Soviet-German partnership also allowed Berlin to circumvent the rearmament stipulations of Versailles. However, during its initial four years, neither the Foreign Office nor the 2e Bureau perceived the Rapallo friendship as a serious threat. Indeed, they were reassured by the fact that Germany appeared to be facing many of the same frustrations in its relations with Moscow encountered by Britain and France. Further, given the disorganized and chaotic nature of the Soviet economy, British and French observers concluded that while Germany might gain from an eventual Russian recovery, at present it derived minimal benefits. Eventually, the two Western powers adopted different views of the Soviet-German relationship. By 1926, the Foreign Office cautiously accepted the Treaty of Berlin, which renewed the alliance, although it reminded them that Britain must ensure that Germany maintained closer ties to its Locarno partners than with Moscow. Conversely, French military officials began to see

the combination of Soviet militarism, Russian economic and industrial recovery and German revanchism as a menace that could create serious strategic problems in eastern Europe.

CHAPTER V

DIVERGENT BRITISH AND FRENCH CONCERNS OVER SOVIET STRATEGY

I

While London and Paris faced common issues in their dealings with Moscow, each also had unique concerns relating to the world's first communist government. These concerns were tied closely to geography. British strategy had two primary geographical areas of concern: Europe and the Empire. While historians emphasise Great Britain's commitments to Europe after the Versailles settlement was reached,³⁰⁷ London also sought to bolster its position as the world's leading colonial power and to maintain a world order that would secure that empire for many years to come.³⁰⁸ Its commitments to Europe effectively halted at the Rhine, which created major differences in perception from France, and a split in policy. As Anita Prazmowska writes, noting British apprehension about French support for precarious Eastern European states, "during the interwar period any concern about the balance of power [in Eastern Europe] tended to be short-term and usually caused by some crisis." While Eastern European leaders saw this lack of sustained concern for the region as a sign of hostility, it actually reflected Britain's desire to see a balanced distribution of territories in Central and Eastern Europe that would satisfy all states, including Germany, and encourage over time lasting peaceful

³⁰⁷ Orde, *Great Britain and International Security*, 2-4; Alan Sharp, "Adapting to a New World? British foreign policy in the 1920s," in Gaynor Johnson, ed., *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2005), 74-75.

³⁰⁸ Ferris, "'The Greatest Power on Earth': Great Britain in the 1920s," *International History Review* 13:4 (Nov. 1991), 730.

relations amongst these states.³⁰⁹ Even though the power of Soviet Russia in the region entailed vigilance by Europe's powers, the Northern Department did not fear, or even substantially discuss, Russian influence over the region or its policies there. British officials realized that Russia affected Eastern Europe, but the region was low in its interests or strategic calculations.

By contrast, for French observers of Soviet Russia, Eastern Europe was a – indeed, the – prominent concern. Of all the major powers of Europe, France had the greatest interest in maintaining a belt of strong and stable states between Germany and Russia.³¹⁰ Paris initially envisioned Eastern Europe as a *cordon sanitaire* of independent countries, then as a military deterrent to any revisionists in Berlin, and ultimately as a second front in any war between France and Germany. The Bureau officials regularly discussed the Soviet threat to Eastern Europe, the often-fractionious relations between the various members of the Polish-Little Entente grouping, as well as their military capabilities, and evaluated whether the alliances with these states should be directed against Berlin or Moscow.

Thus, London and Paris had two unique areas of concern in their relations with Soviet Russia. For London, it was communist influence in eastern and central Asia, and the threat to Britain's interests there. For Paris, it was the Soviet position in Eastern Europe and the danger that a German or Russian action against an Eastern European state would spark a redrawing of the region's map and ultimately of the Versailles settlement

³⁰⁹ Anita J. Prazmowska, *Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 29-32.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

in the west. Although in the 1920s colonial concerns interested French officials and businessmen,³¹¹ Soviet Russia did not significantly threaten them, and so the 2e Bureau ignored Moscow's imperial policies. Similarly, while British officials understood how the USSR caused problems for the new states of Eastern Europe, the Northern Department did not perceive Soviet Russia as a *major* threat to them, at least not one that merited substantial discussion. Russian intentions towards Britain's colonies were the great concern to London, as the Soviet threat to Eastern European stability was to Paris.

II

There was a fundamental dichotomy in British assessments of and concerns with Russia during the 1920s. It was divided into two, largely separate, categories. One issue involved diplomacy with Russia and its place in Europe: these issues were dominated by the Foreign Office, though challenged by politicians, especially during 1926-27. The second was the strategic danger of Soviet subversion and expansion in Asia. Deciphering the nature of that challenge was important to numerous British institutions, including the India and War offices, the Government of India, and the British and Indian armies.³¹² While the Foreign Office too was concerned with the possibility of communist subversion in Britain's Asian Empire, it did not regularly address this issue; that task fell to bodies such as the CID and the Inter-Departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest (IDECU).³¹³ The information that they analyzed was provided by official sources and by

³¹¹ Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), 209-236.

³¹² Ferris, "The British Perception of a Muslim Menace," 68.

³¹³ Andrew, *Secret Service: The making of the British intelligence community* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 277; Ferris, "The British Perception of a Muslim Menace," 66-68.

two secret bodies overseen by the Foreign Office, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), which read foreign communications, and the SIS, which ran agents. The Northern Department was only one player, and not the dominant one, in policy pertaining to the region, but it did offer broad observations about trends in Bolshevik intentions. During late 1922, for example, a report on the anti-British activities of the Soviet government by a Northern Department official, Rex Leeper, noted that reliable and authentic sources showed an expansion of Bolshevik activities in India, including increased funds, propaganda and relations with Indian communists. The report specifically focused on Manabendra N. Roy, an Indian communist whom, the SIS correctly noted, had a “mandate from Moscow” and access to substantial funding via the Comintern. Several of Roy’s agents, who had trained in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and Moscow, were thought to have infiltrated India through Afghanistan.³¹⁴

The Soviet menace to British interests took two different forms. During 1919-23, it worked with every enemy to western or colonial possessions in Asia (especially British), including nationalists and pan-Islamic bodies. This danger was hard to calculate, and by 1923 it collapsed due to its own internal contradictions and the efforts of western intelligence services. Even so, the Soviets took these efforts very seriously, as did the British, and they did mark the international politics of the Middle East, and British imperial policy, for several years. By 1924 this problem vanished, as splits emerged

³¹⁴ Memorandum by Leeper, 12 Oct. 1922, NAUK, FO 371/8170/N9302/123/38.

between the USSR and independent Muslim states. Meanwhile, the government of India imprisoned many of Roy's followers, and halted Bolshevik penetration of India.³¹⁵

Yet Bolshevik designs on this vulnerable point of the British Empire were merely dormant, not defeated. Zinoviev maintained that communist organizations and agents must sustain their focus on this region.³¹⁶ As Michael Howard notes, British officials were fortunate that when Soviet objectives in Central Asia revived in 1926, London had "no immediate problems to face in Europe, and with the gradual revival of Russian power, the Army's main military problem seemed once again to be the defence of India."³¹⁷ At this point, the CID began seriously to scrutinize Soviet activities, particularly in Afghanistan. In December 1925, it noted a comprehensive Bolshevik effort to penetrate Central Asia. Moscow had been persuaded by the stabilisation of Europe to concentrate its energies on Asia, in three primary theatres: the Far East (China/Vladivostok/Mongolia), Central Asia (Turkestan/Afghanistan/Northeast Persia) and Western Asia (Iraq/Northwest Persia). The CID noted varying degrees of Russian success in these regions, and warned that British organisations abroad, and those in London (including intelligence organizations) had limited power to prevent this campaign; while European nations were moving toward disarmament, the Soviet government had increased its army budget by 50 per cent.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 79.

³¹⁶ White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 130.

³¹⁷ Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: the dilemma of British defence policy in the era of the two world wars* (London: Temple Smith, 1972), 90-91.

³¹⁸ Extension of Soviet Influence in Asia, December 1925, 655 B, NAUK, CAB 4/9.

During 1926-28 British officials perceived a considerable Soviet threat in Asia. Three main themes emerge from the discussions on this topic within the CID and a subcommittee on the Defence of India. First, Soviet intentions were primarily subversive, not military. The danger was not direct action against India but rather Soviet moves to promote tension within Afghanistan, or hostile border activity by Indian frontier tribes.³¹⁹ The Soviet government sought political domination over Afghanistan, not its disintegration. Moscow would pursue a policy of gradual domination of that country, which Britain could not easily challenge unless the Afghan government co-operated.³²⁰ Second, the Soviet government was systematically trying to encircle and subvert British interests in Asia. British officials saw the Soviet attempt to control the left wing of the Kuomintang Party and the leader of the movement, Chiang Kai-shek, and their Northern Expedition of 1926 as the first successful communist intervention in a foreign country (its failure, however, soon became apparent). Should the Bolsheviks achieve their intentions in China and Afghanistan, a communist ring would emerge around British India without the Soviets having to fight for it.³²¹ The CID also noted that Moscow had directed efforts towards creating a league of Eastern nations, under Soviet auspices.³²²

Third, the CID maintained that the integrity of Afghanistan was relative, not absolute. Its essential service to Great Britain was not to serve as an inviolable entity, but rather to have sufficient power and willingness to function as a buffer state.³²³ During

³¹⁹ Imperial Defence Policy, June 1926, 700 B, NAUK, CAB 4/9.

³²⁰ Soviet Activities in Central and Eastern Asia, March 1927, 782 B, NAUK, CAB 4/9.

³²¹ Ibid. See also Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 191-197.

³²² Review of the Communist Movement Nov.1925-July 1926, July 1926, 724 B, NAUK, CAB 4/9.

³²³ Memorandum by Birkenhead, 4 March 1927, 149 D, NAUK, CAB 6.

1926-27, a subcommittee on the defence of India concluded that Afghan leaders sought to maintain a balance between Britain and Russia without having to side with either.³²⁴ However, Amir Amanullah of Afghanistan had a limited ability to endure Soviet pressure, and the danger of Bolshevik encroachment might drive him either to side with the power causing him the greatest anxiety (Russia) or else seek British friendship and support. Since British soldiers warned that an armed confrontation between British and Soviet armies in Afghanistan would entail a large demand on soldiers and material,³²⁵ it was recommended that London cultivate influence with the Amir, so to keep him from turning to Moscow.³²⁶ However, the CID also held that Britain could not allow the USSR to annex the three northern Afghan provinces, as this would dislocate the Amir's government so badly that the remainder of the nation, south of the Hindu Kush, would break up, and cease to be a buffer.³²⁷ Hence, under certain circumstances Britain must intervene militarily in Afghanistan against the USSR. Military leaders prepared war plans for these evaluations and were ready to act on them, if necessary. These problems vanished only in 1929-30 with the fall of Amanullah in an internal revolt, his replacement by a strong and traditionalist leader, the collapse of Soviet influence in that country and Moscow's decision to tolerate its defeat there, as it earlier had done in China.

III

The encroachment of Soviet influence in Asia forced British officials to adopt a careful and sometimes precarious policy in order to thwart Soviet efforts to support

³²⁴ Humphreys (Kabul) to Chamberlain, 31 March 1927, 152 D, NAUK, CAB 6.

³²⁵ Chiefs of Staff report, 12 July 1926, 143 D, NAUK, CAB 6.

³²⁶ Memorandum by Birkenhead, 17 June 1926, 141 D, NAUK, CAB 6.

³²⁷ Humphreys (Kabul) to Chamberlain, 31 March 1927, 152 D, NAUK, CAB 6.

revolutionary movements in India, while avoiding the need for military commitments.

By contrast, between 1920-27 (aside from a brief period in 1922), French officials never had to confront the possibility of using force to stop communist encroachment in Eastern Europe. Instead, the French General Staff focused on ensuring that their eastern European alliances were oriented against the German threat, and not against Soviet Russia, as they originally had been intended by their signatories in 1921.

Historians have emphasized the importance to French strategists of Eastern Europe as a second front in a war against Germany. Jordan writes that the strategic function over the long term of France's Eastern alliances was to allow it to fight outside its borders, and primarily through allies. The horrific legacy of trench warfare convinced French planners that any future wars must be fought on foreign (preferably, German) soil. The nations of Eastern Europe offered manpower reserves, natural resources and geographical obstacles that could stop a German sweep through the region. The Eastern European states saw the same value in an alliance with France; for example, "the Poles early saw an interest in integral defence of the Rhineland demilitarisation and arms limitation statutes, causes which would bring confrontation with Germany in the west." Hence, Polish leaders were willing to accept the limited forms of French assistance offered to them in case of German attack on Poland, as they believed Germany would find the greatest frustrations of Versailles lying on its western frontier, where France

would weaken their common enemy because of its pivotal interest in defending the demilitarization of the Rhineland and the arms limitations provisions of Versailles.³²⁸

French strategy in the initial period after Versailles was embodied in Plan P, conceived by military planners in 1920 and implemented in 1921, involving joint Franco-Belgian efforts in the Rhineland and occupation of German industrial regions in the West, while a Polish-Czechoslovak assault would split northern and southern German states. Judith Hughes emphasizes that the Eastern alliances did not represent some morally based imperative to defend the Versailles settlement, but rather a means to induce the states of Eastern Europe to aid France.³²⁹ These alliances also possessed the benefit of separating Bolshevik Russia from Germany though, as Kalervo Hovi argues, this consideration receded into the background in the later 1920s as the imperative of thwarting German ambitions took prominence.³³⁰

The discussions within the 2e Bureau from 1922 certainly validate this assertion. The General Staff repeatedly emphasized the importance of re-orienting the Eastern European alliances away from Russia and towards Germany. The 2e Bureau first mentioned this idea immediately after the Rapallo Treaty. French strategists soon noted that military leaders of the Little Entente appreciated the need to confront the pressing problem of German resurgence and its impact on their region, rather than emphasise the narrower Russo-Hungarian threat on which the alliance had been established.³³¹ The war scare between Poland and Russia after Genoa was dismissed as a remote possibility by

³²⁸ Jordan, 7, 49-52.

³²⁹ Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, 83-86.

³³⁰ Hovi, "Security before Disarmament, or Hegemony?", 121-122.

³³¹ "Note sur la situation générale en Europe", 21 April 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

the 2e Bureau, further indicating that it saw Germany as the focal point of the Eastern alliances.³³² Over the next five years, the 2e Bureau continued to urge that the Eastern European nations direct their focus towards German ambitions. Whether through its persuasion or the changing perceptions of the leaders of these nations, by 1924 Polish and Romanian military officials agreed that the alliances should be directed primarily against Germany, with Russia a secondary consideration.³³³ The 2e Bureau reiterated this position in 1926, in anticipation of a Franco-Yugoslav pact, which would enable military conversations between France and all members of the Polish-Little Entente grouping. It recommended that all the agreements with Poland and the members of the Little Entente should be reoriented against Germany. The accords also needed more of an overall vision or plan, as they had largely been created to meet specific concerns and contingencies, which left a ramshackle base for so imposing an alliance.³³⁴

IV

Russia posed different problems for French and British officials. French observers dealt with considerations that were in the future; the 2e Bureau's advised French leaders to direct the alliances toward German aggression in the east, away from their original purposes of a *cordon sanitaire* against Bolshevik expansion. The 2e Bureau believed that Soviet Russia was a strategic uncertainty in Eastern Europe, but one of secondary concern, which mattered only insofar as it would assist German war efforts. Aside from

³³² "Note sur l'éventualité de prochaines hostilités en Europe Orientale", 17 May 1922, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

³³³ "Conversations avec les Généraux Haller et Floresco", 19 April 1924, SHD/DAT, 7N 3007.

³³⁴ "Note sur les accords existant ou en projet entre la France, la Pologne et les états de la Petite Entente," Dec. 1926, SHD/DAT, 7N 2520.

the brief war scare in 1922, which French military intelligence did not take seriously, Soviet intentions and capabilities in the region had little impact on France's overall strategic vision for Eastern Europe. On this matter and in this area, French diplomacy and strategy essentially were harmonised.

By contrast, from 1919 good intelligence indicated that the Soviet government was seeking to threaten Britain's position in Asia. While they thwarted the first attempt by Moscow-sponsored native communists to infiltrate India, and the Soviet attempt to exploit nationalist and religious movements among Muslims collapsed from its own internal contradictions, by 1926 Bolshevik leaders appeared to have successfully intervened in China and were attempting to destroy Britain's interests in Asia. Officials in London knew that the position of Afghanistan as a buffer was in jeopardy, and believed that the Amir might not be able to withstand pressure from Moscow. Although London saw Soviet subversion as a means to influence foreign powers, the CID and a subcommittee on Indian defence had to consider the possibility of war in Afghanistan. Though this problem never came to pass, the British government in 1926 and 1927 faced the strongest Soviet threat to a foreign state since the Red Army threatened to overtake Warsaw in August 1920, and for several years the USSR was the largest, and a real, threat to direct British interests. However, in both cases Soviet policy failed and throughout this period British diplomacy and strategy toward Russia remained dislocated, in an odd fashion.

CONCLUSION

By 1927, Britain and France established markedly different evaluations of Soviet power. Though the Northern Department was not enthusiastic about the breach of relations that occurred that year, its officials had repeatedly encountered frustrations in their dealings with Moscow, and failed to find means to make its leaders abandon provocations. Thus, when Austen Chamberlain became Foreign Secretary and expressed his determination to solve Europe's problems while ignoring Soviet leaders, the Northern Department became increasingly less reluctant to accept a breach in relations. Although Chamberlain had some trepidation about the renewed Soviet-German relationship in 1926, Whitehall generally saw that as a minor threat to their plans. By this time, Soviet desires – to avoid a scenario which either saw a Franco-German rapprochement, or one in which Germany entered the Versailles system – were apparent to British observers. In this way, the Soviets contributed to their own marginalization. However, the historical writing on this topic has failed to highlight the extent to which Soviet Russia was an afterthought in Great Britain's evaluations of European security. Notably, the Northern Department virtually ignored Moscow in its evaluations of the Treaty of Berlin. The USSR was scarcely mentioned in these assessments, except for passing remarks about how the treaty represented a last bid to upset Locarno, a final attempt at mischief making by a government that had no other way of conducting its business. Chamberlain wrote to D'Abernon that it was "obvious that the Soviet is trying to play on everybody's fears of somebody else. [The] German government should be on its guard against constant

misrepresentation of [the] aims and acts of German policy by [the] Soviet in other quarters.”³³⁵ Even more significant was the context. At precisely this time, the fear of communist encroachment into their colonial empire in Asia was the overriding concern in British evaluations of Soviet power, and a major concern for its strategy. The CID grappled with the possibility of an Anglo-Soviet war over Afghanistan, a territory over which it did not wish to fight but could not lose as a crucial buffer zone between Russia and India. After 1926, however, the Northern Department no longer considered the Soviet Union as having any significant role in the settlement of Europe’s problems.

The 2e Bureau, conversely, based its evaluations of the Soviet threat after Rapallo exclusively on power politics. Due to its nature, the 2e Bureau did not concern itself with the state of Franco-Soviet diplomatic relations. Except for cursory examinations of Soviet propaganda and the aims of the Comintern, French intelligence officials concerned themselves only with Soviet military capabilities and the threat of war in Eastern Europe. It was not the danger of Soviet action in this region itself that worried French officials, but the fact it would enable to Germany to challenge Versailles piecemeal on its eastern borders. This prospect was unacceptable to French leaders, as the bloc of Eastern European nations needed to remain cohesive in order to embody the deterrent that France envisioned when it first supported these nations. Not until the Red Army had substantially improved its equipment and training did the 2e Bureau suddenly sound the alarm about Bolshevik ambitions and governmental preoccupation with increasing the army’s capabilities. This is not to say that the 2e Bureau incorrectly assessed the Red

³³⁵ Chamberlain to D’Abernon, 24 April 1926, NAUK, FO 371/11792/N1880/718/38.

Army between 1922-26: during this period the Soviet military was a shambles and could not embark on a serious offensive if it wished to do so. However, the 2e Bureau's power political approach left French diplomats and leaders without the full scope of information they needed to understand and assess the Bolshevik government. This is one explanation for the fact that during the 1920s, as Carley notes, "French policy toward the USSR languished in passive hostility." Not until 1931 did the Quai d'Orsay consider a non-aggression pact with Moscow, something the Soviet government had sought since 1926. This initial attempt succumbed to French internal politics; it was not until 1933, with Hitler in power, Germany resurgent, Great Britain and the United States unwilling to consider an anti-German coalition, and the Little Entente incapable of deterring Germany, that France reluctantly turned to Italy and Russia as the only powers that offered hope to maintain the eroding façade of Versailles.³³⁶

Meanwhile, the Northern Department and the 2e Bureau shared many perceptions about Soviet power. The key bond in these evaluations was Germany. By 1926, the Foreign Office felt confident enough in its ability to keep Germany in the Western European orbit that they could, albeit reluctantly, afford a breach with the Soviet government. Locarno had met the primary security needs of Great Britain. While it understood the priority that German leaders placed on their relationship with Russia, British leaders believed that the prospect of improved relations with the Western Powers ultimately would be more enticing to Germany than the limited benefits provided by the German-Soviet relationship. By bringing Germany into the European order, Britain

³³⁶ Carley, "Prelude to Defeat", 173.

hoped to bring about a peaceful revision of Versailles that would satisfy Berlin and stabilise Europe.

By contrast, during 1926 French military officials were alarmed by the prospect of resurgent Soviet power, based on a recovering Red Army, doubly so because of the knowledge, shady and uncertain for many years but finally clear by 1926, that Germany was utilizing the Red Army to manufacture armaments outside the provisions of Versailles. Again, Germany was the central concern for French planners; the Soviet Union was an aggravating factor, albeit an unpredictable one. French leaders had diametrically different attitudes to Germany than did British ones. French leaders were painfully aware of their nation's shortcomings compared to Germany and wished to maintain the Versailles system as a whole, yet feared their ultimate inability to prevent Germany from revising the terms of Versailles, by force if necessary.

These events cast a long shadow. The relations between London and Paris and the new government in Moscow in the 1920s is crucial to understanding the diplomatic missteps of the 1930s that ultimately thrust Berlin and Moscow together in their most dangerous partnership, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939. British leaders set out to resolve Europe's outstanding security issues in the mid-1920s exclusive of Russian participation, even though some British observers, including Northern Department officials, warned that Europe's peace would not be complete until it involved the Soviet Union. Having established an acceptable solution at Locarno, British leaders, somewhat complacently, believed they could maintain Germany's loyalty to the Western Powers and the Versailles order, despite the fact that Russia would one day recover and represent its own enticements to Germany. Similarly, French military intelligence evaluated Soviet

power through a straightforward, power political approach. It did not fully emphasize the quiet, yet persistent warnings that Germany, in establishing a viable relationship with Moscow, was laying the foundation that would allow it to reap the benefits once the Soviet Union again become a great power. French observers took comfort in the fact that the Soviet-German partnership struggled mightily in its initial years and that Berlin started to accrue benefits only after painstaking efforts and slow recovery in Russia.

For its part, Soviet persistence in pursuing a policy that both alienated the Western Powers and demanded their assistance and support meant that in fact neither goal could be reached. The USSR's need for capital and technology presupposed a stable capitalist system, but the simultaneous desire to overthrow this order was less likely to occur while it was stable. Further, access to capital required that Soviet leaders play by the political rules established by the west. This included the willingness to address Tsarist debts, and to behave both at home and abroad. Soviet refusal to do either crippled their ability to conclude comprehensive settlements with the post-war powers. As Jacobson writes, "the ideological isolation into which their commitment to global revolution put the Bolsheviks posed a formidable obstacle to Soviet diplomacy in its efforts to establish normal relations with Europe and America." Negotiations were repeatedly at impasse, and allowed virulent anti-Communist factions in both Britain and France to push relations to a crisis point by 1927.³³⁷

Both Great Britain and France turned to Russia in the 1930s, seeking at first to deter Nazi Germany, and later to buy time to rearm for the inevitable war. By that time,

³³⁷ Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, 274-277.

the distrust and animosity that had built steadily since 1917 prevented any lasting foundation that could stave off a second World War. As Carley concludes in his examination of the failed Anglo-French-Soviet relationship in 1939:

The cold war began in 1917 and . . . persisted throughout the interwar years, contributing early on to the failure of Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Soviet negotiations in the 1920s. . . . The early cold war, or whatever one prefers to call it – had an important effect on international relations during the inter-war years. In obstructing the formation of an anti-Nazi alliance in the late 1930s, it contributed much to the causes of World War II.³³⁸

³³⁸ Carley, "Down a Blind Alley," 171-172.

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