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# The Secret Dossier of Finnish Marshal C.G.E. Mannerheim: On the Diplomatic Prelude of World War II

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## Abstract

*In addition to oral tradition, the knowledge and understanding of history is based on written sources. Therefore it is highly significant when research is able to introduce hitherto unknown material that can shed new light on inveterate truths. This was the case with the study "Finland at the Epicentre of the Storm" by Finnish historian Erkki Hautamäki. The study dealt with the diplomatic prelude to World War II, and was based on a secret dossier by Marshal C. G. E. Mannerheim. The dossier was transferred to President J. K. Paasikivi after the war, and then disappeared from public eye. Fortunately, its main items were either copied or a synopsis was made on the request of the Marshal by his long-time trustee, Vilho Tahvanainen. On the basis of these copies, Hautamäki was able to propose an entirely new view of the diplomatic manoeuvring which led to the outbreak of WWII.*

## Key Words

World War II, Nazi-Soviet relations, Winter War, Eastern Front, Allies' Diplomacy, the Baltic Countries, British-Soviet Relations.

## Introduction

The standard historical presentation of WWII can be epitomised as a narrative about a clash between good and evil in which victory is rightfully won by the good. That standard was cast into serious doubt in 2005 by Finnish historian Erkki Hautamäki, whose research was based on documents originating from secret dossier S-32 of Finnish Marshal, Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim.<sup>1</sup> The documents of the dossier originated from the two different sources. First, they represented the documents of German officials, including a personal letter by *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish armed forces C. G. E. Mannerheim. Enclosed as well was a photo-copy of a Soviet-British secret military agreement which was signed by Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. The agreement was furnished with detailed plans of its implementation. Second, the dossier contained information given by *Oberst* Paul Grassmann to Vilho Tahvanainen.

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Grassmann served as Hitler's secret interpreter and secretary after 1935, and was promoted to the military rank of colonel in 1938. Despite his official position he was not a member of the Nazi party. He later fell into disfavour and left Germany for Finland in 1944.

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In the absence of the original documents the question of reliability of Hautamäki's sources inevitably rises. All the more because they offer some pivotally important information for the existing understanding of the diplomatic prelude of WWII. Perhaps the most startling allegation of his study is that on 15 October 1939 a British-Soviet secret agreement was signed about military cooperation against Germany. That was less than two months after the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Germany and the Soviets, which opened the gates for the war in Europe. According to Hautamäki, the agreement entitled the Soviets to

occupy Finland, the Baltic countries and a part of Sweden and Norway.<sup>2</sup> If this statement were proven to be true, our current understanding of the causes and respective roles of the principal participants of WW II would need to be corrected with all the political, legal and moral consequences ensuing from it. Naturally, the text of the original agreement was not at Hautamäki's disposal. The original text of the agreement, if it really exists, has most likely been hidden in the secret archives of Russia and Great Britain. Considering the alleged content of such an agreement, it is no wonder why "the watchdogs are barking and howling around it",<sup>3</sup> making the agreement inaccessible for impartial researchers. However, even well kept secrets like the long denied existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact's secret protocol or the actual perpetrators of the Katyn mass murder tend to become public sooner or later.

The customary narrative of the causes of the WWII goes as follows. With Hitler's rise to power in Germany the risk of a new war in Europe was becoming more of a reality. The reason for that was the Nazis' overt intention to restore Germany's former great-power position in Europe. After the failure of the Disarmament Conference and departure from the League of Nations in October 1933, Germany conclusively took the course to rearmament. Hitler's

policy abruptly surfaced in 1935 with the introduction of compulsory military service and conclusion of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. From then on the policy of Western democracies towards Germany did not go much beyond reactions to Hitler's leverage of German military and economic might and, of course, to start to prepare for the worst.

The Soviet version of the story looks at the developments in Germany through the prism of Marxism-Leninism. From the Bolshevik perspective, war was the essence of fascism from the outset and thus needed to be contested both in the internal and international arenas. However, in the turbulent German politics of the late 1920s and early 1930s, up to the decisive victory of the Nazis in the *Reichstag* elections of 1932, Communists (with the benign support of the Soviets) and Nazis repeatedly united forces against the democratically pitched parties in Germany.

National socialism or, in customary terms, fascism, due to its relative standing in the political balance of Germany in the early 1930s, did not pose a bigger menace or challenge to the Soviet political and security interests in Europe than social democracy or any bourgeois political force from liberals to conservatives. Notwithstanding its theoretical position with respect to fascism, the

Soviet Union had concluded a Treaty of Friendship, Non-Aggression and Neutrality with the formally fascist Italy already in autumn 1926. The official manual of Soviet foreign policy, the "Diplomatic Dictionary" (Moscow 1973, 1986),<sup>4</sup> does not also reveal anything that would support the theoretical axioms of the Soviet foreign policy. The often repeated Soviet thesis of their miscarried policy of collective security against the Nazis remains in practice without corroboration. Even an attempt to forge such an alliance in 1939 ended up with a deal with the Nazis.

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A more customary approach to international politics, however, looks at it through the prism of national interests. The national interests of Germany in the 1920s and 1930s were determined

by what was set out in the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty summarized the political and economic results of World War I (WWI), condemned Germany as the sole culprit of the war, and declared Emperor Wilhelm II a war criminal. The treaty deprived Germany of 70.6 thousand square kilometres of her former territory, as well as 7.3 million people living on the lost territories, including a considerable part of her economic potential. A number of German speaking citizens found themselves living in new nation states. They had lost their former position and experienced all the usual inconveniences of being national minorities. The peace treaty reduced the pre-war European great power into a second-rate international actor that was not allowed to muster an army over 100,000 men or hold heavy weaponry. The most burdensome obligation was undoubtedly the liability to pay huge reparations: the initial magnitude of the indemnity was 223 billion gold marks.

The national interests of the Soviet Union in that period, on the other hand, were officially manifested as a building up of socialism in the country. For that purpose it was vital to maintain a peaceful international environment and, if necessary, to prop it up with the system of collective security in Europe. The actual Soviet policy, however, did not offer much

support to such a conception. Even when the trilateral negotiations started between the Soviet Union, Britain and France in the summer of 1939, their failure was caused by the Soviet demand to recognise her right to take her armies into the territories of neighbouring neutral countries to counter the *Wehrmacht*. If recognition of this right had been secondary for the Soviet Union, the difficulties which thwarted the agreement would not have arisen. The representatives of the Western Allies were evidently ready to conclude an agreement in which the problems of the potential battle contact of the Soviets with the *Wehrmacht* were left open or settled in some other and less costly way for the Soviet Union. Otherwise they would not have sent their representatives to Moscow at all. So the primary motive of the Soviets' foreign policy in the 1930s was not the fight against fascism but rather the recovery of the territories lost during the revolution and civil war to the new-born national states, i.e. a *raison d'État*. The real content of the Soviet national interests was revealed by the territorial clauses of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The conclusion of a non-aggression pact with Germany revealed that the Soviets' position was not ideologically determined but entirely pragmatic. Despite certain antagonism and suspicion about the

aims of the Nazi policy in Eastern Europe, Soviet-German relations in the summer of 1939 were definitely not of the kind that could make Stalin fear an imminent German assault on the Soviets.

## Relations in the “Concert of Europe”

The “Diplomatic Dictionary” offers an interesting overview of the diplomatic relations and political co-operation of the Soviets with major European countries in the 1920s. For example, with regard to British-Soviet relations there was only the trade agreement of 1921 worth mentioning for the whole decade. In the case of France the “Dictionary” refers only to the non-aggression treaty of 1932. On the other hand, relations with Germany were much more intensive. In addition to the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, the Soviets concluded five agreements with Germany in the first post-war decade: (i) the temporary agreement of the exchange of prisoners of war and establishment of consular relations (1921); (ii) the Rapallo Treaty (1922), which restored diplomatic relations between the two countries to the full, and reciprocally renounced the compensation for war damages; (iii) a new agreement concluded in 1925, which replaced the earlier provisional one, and touched upon economic,

navigational and legal relations; (iv) in 1926 a non-aggression and neutrality agreement was signed, and (v) in 1929 a convention of arbitration procedure was signed.<sup>5</sup>

Existing Soviet scholarship and official Russian accounts maintain that the Kremlin’s relations with Germany deteriorated after Hitler came to power. However, Hitler was initially rather careful in his utterances about the Soviet Union. Receiving the Soviet ambassador Hinchuk, he stressed his desire to establish solid and friendly relations between the two countries. Furthermore, the Nazi official gazette *Völkischer Beobachter* originally portrayed the Soviets in quite a friendly strain.<sup>6</sup> Also, Hitler ratified the complimented non-aggression and neutrality treaty which was drawn up in May 1931, but had been set aside by the previous governments.<sup>7</sup> So the introduction of the Nazi government did not necessarily forebode a deterioration of earlier good-neighbourly Soviet-German relations.

In fact, Soviet-German relations started to deteriorate after the conclusion of the German-Polish non-aggression pact in January 1934.<sup>8</sup> That treaty put the Soviet Union into a situation that was in store for Britain and France five years later, when the Soviets signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. The revival of the Polish

state, annihilated by her neighbours at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had occurred in an armed conflict with the Soviets. After the Peace Treaty of Riga in 1921, Polish-Soviet relations had remained strained because of the mutual territorial pretensions. Although in 1932 a non-aggression pact was signed (and prolonged in May 1934), it evidently did not create trust between the two countries. The non-aggression treaty with Germany ensured Poland's back in a possible conflict with the Soviet Union. The Soviets inevitably had to think therefore how to neutralise the eventual danger emanating from a state, like Poland, aspiring to the position of European great power.

The German-Polish non-aggression treaty was evidently not the sole reason for deteriorating Soviet-German relations in the mid-1930s. At that time the Soviets had perceived the danger that was lurking in the rising German economic and military potential. Hitler had stabilised the German economy, set about restoring its armed forces, and concluded the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, which gave him the right to build a navy one third the size of that of British tonnage. This was a challenge to supremacy in the Baltic Sea and clearly brushed against the Soviet interests there. All this compelled the Soviet Union to look for possibilities to improve her political and security position. It was perhaps expected then

in this context to see the decision of the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Comintern in 1935, which set aside the Soviet's earlier hostile attitude to social democracy and replaced it with the slogan of a Popular Front against fascism. Such a decision was a definite turn against the political regime in Germany. It was perhaps equally understandable therefore why Hitler's New Year Address of 1936 was pitched so furiously against the Soviet Union<sup>9</sup>.

A possibility to neutralise the potential dangers that the German-Polish non-aggression pact presented to the Soviets was bound up with a chance to restore the constructive relations with Germany that had been damaged by the Comintern's decision. For one thing, friendly relations between them would have diluted the potential dangers emanating from the German-Polish non-aggression pact for the Soviets by forcing the Poles to take into account good-neighbourly relations of the Soviets with Germany behind the Polish backs. Secondly, such a scheme would have made Germany a partner and diminished the possibility of a conflict with a potentially more dangerous adversary than Poland. At the same time, it would have reduced the chances that the German military resurrection might turn against the Soviet Union. After all, the former close cooperation between the two countries, and the fact that Germany and the

Soviet Union had similar grudges against Poland spoke well for such a policy. Indeed, the latter had seized and incorporated territories that both the Soviets and Germany considered belonging to them.

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Such a political logic corresponds well with what Grassmann told Mannerheim's trustee, Tahvanainen, in 1944. He maintained that after the death of Polish leader Piłsudski, Stalin had made a proposal to Hitler that a secret meeting would be convened in order to discuss the relations between their respective countries and co-operation against British-French supremacy in the world.<sup>10</sup> The proposal started up three rounds of negotiations. The German delegation, headed by Marshal W. von Blomberg, had arrived through Latvia into the Soviet Union on November 21<sup>st</sup> 1935. The first meeting lasted five days and

took place in a coach on an isolated and guarded railway line near Novgorod. Grassmann acted as an interpreter for the German delegation. The following meetings were called in Prague and Moscow. Stalin participated in the conversations on some sessions. The attained agreement was signed in Berlin at the end of February 1936.<sup>11</sup> The essential part of the understanding included the following points;

- Poland will be divided along the Curzon line,
- The Soviet Union and Germany consider the Polish-German non-aggression pact null and void,
- Czechoslovakia belongs to Germany's sphere of interests,
- Germany will support the Soviet endeavours to have free rein to check the area between the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea and in respect of the Dardanelles,
- Germany will support the Soviet claim to have military and naval bases in the Baltic countries to open up passage to the Baltic Sea,
- Germany will not interfere with the Soviet request to have a mainland connection to her military bases in the Baltic countries,
- Both parties are in agreement that the Treaty of Versailles is unfair to

Germany and that it is impossible to carry it out,

- The Soviet Union accepts the German policy which aims at the introduction of compulsory military service and is also expressed in the Anglo-German Naval Agreement,
- The Soviet Union supports Germany when she starts a policy to abrogate the Treaty of Versailles,
- The Soviet Union promises Germany tangible help to recover the surrendered territories,
- The Soviet-Czech non-aggression and mutual assistance agreement is not a hindrance to German pursuits to merge Czech areas with the German population,
- Germany promises that after the recovery of the surrendered territories, including colonies, she has no more territorial pretensions to anybody.<sup>12</sup>

The substance of that agreement does not differ much from what became later evident from the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and what we know from actual political development in Europe at the end of the 1930s. Nor does it differ in essence from what the Soviets demanded from the Western allies in August 1939 as a prerequisite for co-operation against Hitler. A tangible help that had been

promised to Germany by the attempt to recover her Eastern territories can be seen in the Soviet participation in the partition of Poland in September 1939. As regards to Czechoslovakia, the “Dictionary” tells the reader of the repeated Soviet offers of help in her critical situation, even “of the condemnation of this disgraceful deal” of München.<sup>13</sup> But when Germany some months later occupied the formally still independent Czechoslovakia, this act of aggression did not deserve any notice in the “Diplomatic Dictionary”. The Soviets did not protest but questioned the correctness of the German arguments of their action.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the clause about unconstrained hand in the area between the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea and the Dardanelles had been one of the focuses of Russian foreign policy for centuries. In the mid-1930s similar endeavours were exposed at the conference of Montreux in June-July 1936, where the Soviets pursued absolute freedom of passage but Britain and France tried to exclude the Soviet navy from the Mediterranean.<sup>15</sup>

According to Hautamäki, the first flaw in the German-Soviet accord sprang up during the Czech crisis and was caused by the Soviet position. For the Western powers, it remained incomprehensible why the Soviets, despite the valid mutual assistance pact with Czechoslovakia, did not take up arms in the crisis whilst all

the other powers were mobilising.<sup>16</sup> In the light of Grassmann's information, the Soviets had landed in a pitfall because the agreement with Hitler had stipulated Czechoslovakia to Germany's sphere of interests. In order to save face, the Soviets had to warn Germany not to open hostilities against Czechoslovakia. This was, however, plainly at variance with the secret Soviet-German agreement from February 1936. As to Hautamäki, Hitler warned that if the Soviet stance persisted, Germany would renounce the secret agreement of 1936 and in the case of a Soviet-Polish war, they would stand by Poland.<sup>17</sup> That would have meant for the Soviet Union that her territorial ambitions, safeguarded by the secret agreement of 1936, had been discarded. The abrogation of agreement would not only have revived the constellation of the Polish-German co-operation but considerably exacerbated the situation for the Soviets by arousing German distrust. In order to repair the damage, negotiations were called in November 1938 on the initiative of Stalin, who insisted that the secret agreement should be implemented.<sup>18</sup> For the sake of her own territorial interests, the Soviets had to reckon also with the respective German interests. That did not create any big problems because Czechoslovakia had never belonged to the Russian empire. Giving assent to the inclusion

of Czechoslovakia into the German sphere of influence, the Soviets could not know Hitler's timetable. Therefore the Munich agreement placed Moscow in an untenable position and forced the Soviets to find some way to save face.

## Growing Complications

Despite the advantages of co-operating with Germany, the Soviets could not disregard the rapid German economic and military growth, which was effectively becoming a threat. That made her first to re-assess their earlier lenient policies towards the Nazis and look for counterpoise options in German internal politics. The re-orientation took place in the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Comintern in 1935. The shift towards the left-wing Popular Front definitely alienated the Soviets from previous co-operation with the German government, and was evidently the reason that provoked Hitler's enraged reaction in his New Year message of 1936. On the other hand, Germany's fast and unchecked upsurge caused the Soviets to also search for possibilities for international co-operation with the Western powers for contingencies with Germany. The Comintern's decision and the Soviet policy in the Czechoslovakian crisis inevitably engendered Germany's suspicions about the Soviet aims. The Soviet leadership had to understand

this in full. Therefore, German pressure in early 1939 on Lithuania to detach the Lithuanian district of Memel, populated with ethnic Germans, could have set in motion the Soviet attempt to fathom out the willingness of the Western powers to unite forces to check Nazi policies. The Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov made a suggestion on 18 March to convene a conference of six powers in Bucharest and ponder the possibilities to set limits on the Nazis' expansionist policies. That was the first overt step in this direction.<sup>19</sup> However, it seems that the Soviet leadership had not yet passed their final judgement. Despite Stalin's support (otherwise Litvinov could not have come out with his proposal) the Defence Minister Kliment Voroshilov considered it expedient to continue the co-operation with Germany.<sup>20</sup> In the early days of May, the final decision was evidently taken, because Litvinov was dismissed from his post and replaced by Vyacheslav Molotov. It is justified to consider that by exchanging Litvinov for Molotov (who was not implicated in Litvinov's initiative for co-operation with the West) the Soviets called forth an ambiguous situation. First, with the ousting of Litvinov, the Soviets hinted to the Nazis that despite Litvinov's flirtation with the West the Soviets were still ready to do business with Germany. Second, by presenting the radical minimum requirements for

co-operation to the Western allies Molotov made an attempt to extort the same that the co-operation with Germany had hitherto given.<sup>21</sup> In August 1939 the Soviets definitely knew that a few days remained until the outbreak of war. Since there was still no consent of the Western allies to the forceful intrusion of the Soviets into the territories of neighbouring neutral countries the decision had to be made under pressure of time.<sup>22</sup> If Soviet territorial aspirations were ever to be realised, Germany was a safer option in the prevailing situation. On the other hand, despite having much closer political, economic and diplomatic ties with Germany<sup>23</sup> compared to Britain or France, it could not have been the best policy option for the Soviets to stand by Germany (even passively) in the prospect of a major war in Europe. Firstly because of the Soviet endeavours to expand the communist system and influence in Europe, and, secondly, considering the plausible outcomes of the European war. The support to Germany by concluding the non-aggression pact in August 1939 primarily served a sole purpose - moving the Eastern border of the Soviet Union to the West and settling her territorial pretensions, at the same time avoiding a conflict with Germany. In the second article of the treaty of border and friendship, concluded after the annihilation of Poland, it

was stipulated that “both contracting parties recognise...the boundary of their respective interests as the final and preclude any outside intervention in this decision”.<sup>24</sup>

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As regards the plausible outcome of the possible war in Europe, a German victory was by no means guaranteed. It might have been thinkable in the case of the Soviets joining in on the side of Germany. Perhaps Germans even entertained such hopes. Otherwise they would not have acquainted the Soviets with and sold them modern German equipment and weaponry in an already ongoing war.<sup>25</sup> The Soviets certainly did not have such an idea. Already the ideological rationale of the Soviet policy excluded such a possibility. Germany's victory would have disposed a much more formidable neighbour next to the Soviets than Poland, with whom one had to deal with much more cautiously. That possibility would also have excluded all hopes of the expansion of communism into Western Europe. On

the other hand, Soviet neutrality in the war would certainly have diminished her chances to participate and influence the post-war international politics in Europe, irrespective of which side was going to win the game. A certain opportunity lay in the possibility that both sides would be weakened in the war, so that the Soviets could dictate them her will. But taking into account the fact that behind Britain and France there were also the United States as their potential ally, it was more probable that the Western allies would gain the upper hand in the war. By joining forces with Germany, the Soviets would come into conflict with the United States. That had to be avoided, because the Soviet Union had had a very advantageous trade agreement with the USA after 1937. The agreement had to be renewed every year up to 1942, when the lend-lease agreement was signed.<sup>26</sup> Taking into consideration the character and volume of the economic and trade relations between both countries, American historian Anthony Sutton has even maintained that the formation of the eventual anti-Hitler coalition had actually taken effect at the beginning of 1938.<sup>27</sup> The USA supplied the Soviets with strategic materials and participated in the construction of Soviet submarines etc. Viktor Suvorov also confirms that the British arms shipments to the Soviets had already started before the German

invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June, 1941.<sup>28</sup> Even leaving these facts aside, political logic speaks strongly for an assumption that if the Soviets had wished to have a strong position in post-war Europe and at the same time create favourable conditions for the expansion of communism, they inevitably would have had to invest into the war effort of the Western allies. The fact that the Western allies wavered to recognise Soviet rights in the territory of the smaller neutral states in Eastern Europe was of secondary importance. That right was ascribed to the Soviets by Hitler. Going to war with Germany, the Western allies needed the Soviets' assistance themselves. Their chances to change the territorial *fait accompli* afterwards were negligible.

## Interest Clusters

The papers of Mannerheim's secret dossier strongly support the above sketched political logic. First, through his personal intelligence network, C. G. E. Mannerheim learned in November 1939 that the Soviet Union had concluded a secret agreement with Britain against Germany on 15 October, 1939. That information was confirmed by Göring's trustee, lieutenant colonel Josef Veltjens, who came to inform Mannerheim about the same subject in February 1940. Moreover, according to Hautamäki, the

Germans had managed to intercept the secret British documents from which came evidence that the Admiralty had endorsed the secret military agreement with the Soviet Union on 28 January 1940. Churchill's reply to Stalin's letter from 28 January 1940 was among the captured documents. In Stalin's letter, he had declared that all Finnish territory, including the islands, would be conquered by no later than 15 May 1940. In his reply, Churchill presented a detailed plan of the co-ordinated actions of Britain, France and the Soviet Union against Germany. For setting up the Northern front, British marines were to land on agreed regions of Norway and occupy Denmark on the nights of 14 and 15 May.<sup>29</sup> The hostilities towards Germany were to start with a simultaneous attack from four different directions.<sup>30</sup> It should be remembered that at the moment of signing the British-Soviet secret agreement, the Soviets had extorted military bases in the Baltic States, extended their territory to the West on account of Poland, and were preparing a decisive onslaught on Finland in the Winter War, which began on 1 February. In other words, the starting base for a co-ordinated assault on Germany, which was to be engaged by May 15<sup>th</sup>, was very nearly taken by the Soviets.

Whatever the risks were of Hitler's expansive external policy towards the

Soviet Union, Britain and France were already jeopardised by these policies in the first place. These countries had forced upon Germany the Treaty of Versailles, and their prestige and security was threatened by German actions in the first place. After all, due to their guarantees to Poland, they first entered into the war with Germany. Therefore, it was believed that after crushing Poland Hitler cast an eye over these countries in order to prepare the plan to defeat France. The plan to defeat France (operation “*Gelb*”) was ready at the end of October 1939, but before the campaign could begin, Hitler gave his high command, *OKW*, another order (January 27, 1940) to prepare a new plan (the “*Fall Weserübung*”) for occupying Denmark and Norway.<sup>31</sup> In the strategic sense, the occupation of these countries was not of paramount importance in the campaign against France. This could have been the case if the conflict with the Western allies had the dimension of a world war. The captured records of Hitler’s conferences reveal that in early 1940 he still considered “the maintenance of Norway’s neutrality to be the best course for Germany”. However, in February he maintained that “the English intend to land there and I want to be there before them.”<sup>32</sup> Operation “*Fall Weserübung*” began on 9 April and resulted in a swift subjugation of these small countries. The British sent their

troops in to help on 14 April but that was of little avail for Norway. It should be noted that for drawing up a plan, preparing and starting the operation against Norway Hitler needed more than two months. The Allied response to the German move was almost immediate. Hence the readiness of their troops was at a level that could give warrant to Churchill’s promise to Stalin that the British troops would land in Norway on 15 May to take a base for co-ordinated assault on Germany.

If the reliability of Hautamäki’s research is to be evaluated on the basis of what has been said above, the following has to be noted. First, knowing the massive troop concentration against the meagre and exhausted Finnish lines in the Winter War, Stalin could indeed believe that the whole of Finland would be entirely conquered on 15 May, and notify Churchill that a co-ordinated action against Germany could start from then on. Second, after the Soviet assault had been launched in February, Finland desperately sought a possibility to initiate peace talks with the Soviets but Molotov bluntly refused to discuss that issue.<sup>33</sup> Keeping in view the Soviet stance, a question arises why Stalin went for peace talks at the moment when the Finnish resistance was practically broken? Hautamäki offers the following explanation: there was an unexpected change in German

attitudes in early February, 1940. Hitler, being indifferent to the fate of Finland until then, came up with a demand that the Soviets stop hostilities on 4 March at the latest, otherwise he would intervene on behalf of Finland.<sup>34</sup> The Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maiski, received instructions from Moscow on 22 February to forward the Soviet peace terms to Britain. The peace treaty was concluded on 12 March, 1940. Such a solution evidently did not satisfy Stalin; von Ribbentrop informed Mannerheim that Stalin had expressed his interest in occupying Finland on the same day. The case was recapitulated two days later also by Molotov. Hitler had turned down both appeals. Still the Finnish question was raised once more on Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940.

The continuing Soviet pressure on Finland, and possibly the new knowledge illuminating the Soviet aims (obtained either from the intercepted documents or by other means) forced Hitler to change his earlier position towards Finland. As a result, Göring obtained the warrant to deliver German arms to Finland in August 1940, and his trustee, Josef Veltjens, asked for the passage licence for the German anti-aircraft defence and logistic detachments as well as for the military material to their troops in northern Norway. In his talks in Berlin with Hitler, Molotov declared

that the Soviet Union considered the treaty concluded a year earlier, i.e. the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was accomplished, save one clause, that of Finland.<sup>35</sup> In his reply Hitler said that Germany had informed the Soviets of her actions, gave an official explanation of the movement of troops, and assured of its temporary character caused by the war and with the purpose of averting the extension of warfare to the area of the Baltic Sea as well as because of the substantial German economic interests in Finland. In this context Hitler asked Molotov point-blank whether the Soviets were intending to go to war with Finland. According to the record of the talks, Molotov's answer was elusive.<sup>36</sup> Summing up Hitler declared "Germany has no political interests in Finland whatsoever and she accepts entirely the fact that this country belongs to the sphere of interests of Russia"<sup>37</sup>. An interesting detail in the record of the talks is a reference to a certain earlier undated letter of Stalin's, in which he told that he, i.e. Stalin, was not against the prospect of learning the principal chances of co-operation between the Soviets, Germany, Italy, and Japan.<sup>38</sup> May it be Stalin's letter of 12 April, 1940 to which Hautamäki has referred to? The nitty-gritty of the talks was rounded-up in a flash-telegram by the German Ambassador to Moscow, von Schulenburg, of 26 November, which said "The Soviet

government is ready to accept the draft of the pact of four countries [Germany, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union] which was outlined by the German foreign minister in a meeting on 13 November ... on the following conditions: (1) on presumption that German troops leave Finland immediately ...”.<sup>39</sup>

Reading the records of Molotov’s visit to Berlin, one must not forget that in the light of Hautamäki’s account, Hitler had to know about the existence of the Soviet-British secret agreement. Also, one should remember that at the same time the German war plans against the Soviets, i.e. “*Weisung No 21: Fall Barbarossa*” were practically complete, since Hitler was to sign them on 18 December, 1940. Considering the efficiency and scope of Soviet intelligence it is also not excluded that these preparations were in turn known to Stalin. As V. Suvorov observed, with regard to the later years, Hitler’s plans of operations came to Stalin’s table even before the commanding German generals could study them.

In the present context, Molotov’s visit to Berlin may be summarised as follows. The attempt of the Soviet Union to achieve the German assent which would give her military control over Finland, failed. The growing pressure on Finland after the conclusion of the Moscow peace treaty in the first place, then the pursuit to end immediately

the German war material and troop transit through Finland, and, last but not least, an evasive answer to Hitler’s direct question about whether the Soviets intended to go to war with Finland - all these indices point to such a Soviet objective. On the backdrop of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which turned Finland over to the Soviet sphere of interests, (i) there was no formal reason for Germany to be rigid at this point and (ii) for the Soviets, no obvious reason to put pressure on Germany for the immediate cessation of their military transit through Finland. All the more, because Hitler had assured Molotov that he did not challenge Finland belonging to the Soviet Union’s sphere of interests. But in the prevailing military situation Hitler was certainly interested that Finland would not be dragged into another war into which the Western allies might intervene. That would have considerably aggravated Germany’s overall strategic situation. To Hitler’s blunt question whether the Soviets would declare war on the USA if the Americans intervened in a new war in Finland, Molotov answered that the question was beyond the schedule of current negotiations. Such an answer showed that Molotov was avoiding discussing the broader strategic perspectives of the war but he listened with interest to what Hitler told about breaking down the British Empire

and “agreed with anything that he understood”.

Suvorov maintains that “Stalin’s decisions of 19 August, 1939 (to reach an agreement with Germany) were such which could not be changed afterwards and did not leave him other opportunity than war”.<sup>40</sup> Ensuing from the pact, the Soviets joined the war in substance as an ally of Germany two weeks later. The invasion of Poland had to start simultaneously with Germany on 1 September.<sup>41</sup> In effect the Soviets started their march on 17 September when the Polish resistance was broken. If the data introduced by Hautamäki is correct, the Soviets concluded their pact with Ribbentrop with the sole purpose of satisfying their territorial ambitions but at the same time leaving their hands free for future military development.

After concluding a mutually advantageous project the usual practice is to draft the ways for further productive co-operation. That was what Ribbentrop did in Berlin and Molotov, in his own words, listened to with interest. However, as it appears from the flash-telegram of von Schulenburg, the Finnish question, which was secondary in the grandiose plans of Ribbentrop, turned out to be the primary interest for the Soviet Union. An immediate shutdown of the German military transit in Finland was the Soviets’

objective. Was it because the Soviets wanted to remove a hindrance from future useful co-operation with Germany, including military, or for some other reason? Why did the Soviet Union need the rapid departure of the German troops (her ally by the division of Poland) from Finland, why was she not ready to wait a bit longer? Germany had accepted the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States without a grumble. The local German population of these states had been evacuated in the framework of *Umsiedlung* in order to avoid possible conflicts with the Soviets. In the Winter War, Germany did not support Finland with the deeply needed armaments but rather obstructed others’ help. What might be the reasons to suspect that with respect to Finland she would balk at her obligations under the pact?

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Invading Poland more than two weeks after the German assault let Stalin escape the charge that his policies were tied together with those of Hitler’s. Assault on Poland made Hitler an aggressor. Stalin, on the contrary, could

acclaim himself a liberator of Western Ukraine and Byelorussia, the one who unified these nations. Essentially, it was the first indicator bearing witness that in the military co-operation, parties were drifting apart. The co-operation with Germany had allowed the Soviets to satisfy their territorial ambitions; but what was to follow depended on who was going to win the war. Betting on Germany was a dubious option. Besides, the German victory would have made her a dangerous neighbour for the Soviets. It would also have meant complicated relations with the Western world.

In fact, the Soviet Union started to mobilize before Germany ever launched her attack on Poland. Starting secretly a general mobilisation in the situation where the Soviets themselves were not directly endangered but had in essence an agreement of alliance with Germany might be considered either as a preventive measure of self-defence for contingencies or a preparation for active intervention in the European war. Taking account of the scale of mobilization,<sup>42</sup> its economic cost, but also the probability that as an onlooker the Soviets would ordain themselves a much more secluded position in the European and world politics than they had had after WWI, it seems more plausible that the Soviets planned an active intervention on the side of the Western Allies. In such a case it was desirable to have timely agreement

with them. The failed negotiations in Moscow in August, 1939 were a fitting preparation for a new round of talks. Besides, the problem with the third countries, which was a stumbling block for agreement in August 1939, was removed with the help of Germany. Thus, looking from the position of the Soviets, Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940 might have been an attempt to sound out possible leaks (either from internal sources or by the lost confidentiality of documents),<sup>43</sup> which might have evoked Hitler's suspicions about the Soviet policy. For that purpose it was appropriate to fathom Hitler's position with respect to Finland. If Hitler had been ready to discuss and seek for compromise, he would have probably had no suspicions about the conformity of the Soviet policy with the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. That would have opened, with Hitler's consent, a way to move into a strategic position which had been foreseen in the secret British-Soviet military agreement of January 28<sup>th</sup> but was thwarted by the tenacity of the Finnish defences in the Winter War. An indirect corroboration of the existence of the secret British-Soviet agreement, which also affected Scandinavia and the Baltic countries, can be found in the memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. He remembers that in the days of the German offensive against France 'I was occasionally in Moscow...I saw that Stalin was very much worried about the development

on the Western front. But he did not speak out about that and expressed no opinion....Suddenly came news that Germans had entered Paris and the French army had capitulated. Now Stalin broke his silence and cursed very nervously the British and French governments....The easy triumph without a serious effort of Germans over British and French armies frightened him even more...he himself started to drink more and compelled others to drink and get drunk".<sup>44</sup> It is probable that Stalin's demeanour was caused by the anticipation that his conspiracy with Britain would come to light with the French defeat and then he would be Hitler's next target and would have to face German might completely alone. Otherwise there was not much to worry about since he had a non-aggression pact and a border and friendship treaty with Hitler and was virtually complicit with Germany in rearrangement of the European political map.

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## Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper suggests that there is little room for doubt that the transcripts Hautamäki used in his study reflect the authentic documents of Mannerheim's secret dossier. His treatise undermines the lofty moral claims of victorious powers of WW II about their motives, and reduces the alleged aims of fighting Nazism to a simple Machiavellian calculation.

Indeed, in the light of these transcripts it is easier to understand why Hitler, before eventually knocking France out of the war, considered it indispensable to occupy first Denmark and Norway, or why Stalin, initially refusing even to consider the possibility of peace, ended up making peace with Finland when her last defences were virtually broken; or why Hitler, comprehending well the catastrophic perspectives of the two-front war for Germany, still attacked the Soviet Union before ending the war in the West. First, in the light of the secret documents that fell into German hands about the British-Soviet agreement, the occupation of Denmark and Norway became a strategic necessity and military priority for Germany despite the fact that her campaign against France was not ended. Second, the Soviets were forced to conclude the peace with Finland because otherwise Hitler threatened to

intervene on Finnish side; and third, despite the risk of two-front war Hitler attacked the Soviets in order to forestall the imminent Soviet attack. In summer 1942, on Mannerheim's 75th birthday, Hitler made an unexpected visit to Mannerheim. A Finnish author, Veijo Meri, writes about that visit as follows: "instead of a vociferate demagogue with foaming mouth arrived a discreet ... quite an ordinary man confessing sensibly his mistakes and repenting."<sup>45</sup> He confessed his ignorance about the huge military preparations of the Soviets and of their war potential, which became evident only in the course of the war. But he added "that even if he had known it before he would have made the decision of invasion nevertheless because it was inevitable."<sup>46</sup> Russian historians Viktor Suvorov and Mark Solonin and others had also convincingly substantiated that the Soviet plans to attack Germany existed in reality. Solonin, basing his claim on extensive archival research, even maintained that Stalin's attack was to be launched on 22 June, 1941. In

such a case Hitler forestalled him only by a day. According to Suvorov – the campaign was to start in early July.

Hitler's preventive strike saved Germany from what the Soviet Union would experience in the first period of the war. The losses of the Red Army through German attack during the first months of the war were enormous: 85% of their ammunition stock was lost because it was concentrated in the border-zone in order to secure supplies for the assault troops which were to invade Germany. It can only be speculated what would have happened if Stalin had forestalled Hitler in the first strike. But one thing is fairly certain: the capitulation of Germany would have been a problem of, probably, a couple of months, not of five years.

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## Endnotes

1. Erkki Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä. Marsalka C. G. E. Mannerheimin kansion S-32 salajaiset asjakirjat vuosilta 1932 – 1949. (Marshal C. G. E. Mannerheim's secret dossier from 1932-49)* Osa I, Argo Kirjastus, s.a.
2. Ibid., p. 327.
3. Viktor Suvorov, *Enesetapp (The Suicide)*. Olion, Tallinn, 2001, p. 13; the British Foreign Office admits that it has a secret archive which nobody has access to. "Eesti Päevaleht" www.delfi.ee 22 October 2013.
4. *Diplomatitseskii slovarj v trjoh tomah (Diplomatic Dictionary in 3 volumes)*. Izdatelstvo polititseskoi literaturõ, Gl redaktor A.A. Gromõko, Moskva, 1971-1973; 1984-1986.
5. *Diplomatitseskii slovarj*, 1973, pp. 238-240, 359, 259-260.
6. Walter (Uolter) Laker, *Rossija i Germanija. Nastavniki Gitlera. Perevod s angliiskkogo (Russia and Germany. Teachers of Hitler. Translation from English)*. Washington, 1991, pp. 208-211.
7. Ibid, p. 212.
8. Eberhard Aleff, *Das Dritte Reich (The Third Reich)*. Edition Zeitgeschehen. Fabelträger 23 Aufl., 1970, pp. 43-44.
9. Laker, *Rossija I Germanija*, p.220.
10. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä.*, pp.42-43.
11. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä*, pp. 43-44; Germany and the Soviet Union concluded a credit agreement in 1936 in order to facilitate Germany the access to Soviet natural resources and the Soviets access to German industrial production and equipment. The agreement was to run up to 1939 but both parties prolonged its validity. John Plowright, *The Causes and Outcomes of World War II*. Palgrave, 2007, pp. 65-66.
12. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä.*, pp. 44-46.
13. *Diplomatitseskii slovarj II*, 1986, pp. 258-259.
14. *Diplomatitseskii slovarj III*, 1986, pp. 141-145.
15. Mihhail Meltjuhov, *Stalini käestlastud võimalus. Nõukogude Liit ja võitlus Euroopa pärast 1939-1941 (The missed opportunity of Stalin. The Soviet Union and the Fight for Europe 1939-1941)*. KVÕ, 2005, p. 40; James C. F. Wang, *Handbook on Ocean Politics and Law*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992, p. 88.

16. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä*, p. 57.
17. Ibid., p. 61.
18. Ibid., p. 74.
19. Michael Jabera Carley, M. J., Low, Dishonest Decade: Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939” – *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 45, No 2, 1993, p. 315.
20. Ibid., p. 315.
21. Carley, End of the “Low, Dishonest Decade: 321; M. Pankrašova, Anglo-frankosovetskije peregovorō (British-French-Soviet negotiations)– *Meždunarodnaja žižnj*, No 8, 1989, pp. 28-39.
22. Pankrašova, Anglo-franko-sovetskije peregovorō, pp. 28-39.
23. That was also true in respect to economic relations. The volume of the Soviet trade with Germany (especially in imports) in the second half of the 1920s was almost 1.6 times higher than that with Britain.
24. *Molotovi-Ribbentropi paktist baaside lepinguni. Dokumente ja materjale. Toimetanud Heino Arumäe (From the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact to the agreement on military bases. Documents and materials. Ed: Heino Arumäe)*, Perioodika, Tallinn, 1989, p. 105.
25. Viktor Suvorov, *Denj M. Kogda natsjalasj vtoraja mirovaja voina? (Day M. When wa the Second World War started?)*, “AO “Vsjo dlja Vas”, Moskva, 1994, p.38.
26. *Diplomatitseskii slovarj*, T. 3, 1973, pp. 232-234.
27. Lembo Tanning, *Euroopa probleem... Teine maailmasõda (The European problem... World War II)*, OÜ Infotruk Tallinn, 2006, pp. 126-127.
28. Viktor Suvorov, *Viimane vabariik (The Last Republic)*, Olion, 1999, p. 126.
29. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrsaakyn silmässä*, pp. 129, 173.
30. Ibid., p. 327.
31. Aleff, *Das Dritte Reich*, p. 182. Another possible reason for revising Hitler’s objective was bad luck which forced the revoking of the “*Gelb*” plan. The plan fell into the hands of the allies when the aircraft with couriers was intercepted and compelled to land in Belgium on January 9, 1940. A new plan, “*Sichelschnitt*,” was drawn up and put into operation on May 10, 1940.

32. Andrew Roberts, *Hitler and Churchill. Secrets of leadership*. Phoenix, 2003, p. 84.
33. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä*, p. 152.
34. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä*, pp. 165, 170, 173; Douglas Clark, *Liittoutuneet lähteivät Talvisodan. Englannin ja Ranskan Suomen-politiikka 1939-1940. (British and French Finland Politics in 1939-1940)*, Helsinki, 1967, p. 187.
35. <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/HitlerMolotov%20Meetings.htm>, p. 11.
36. Ibid., p. 13.
37. Ibid., p. 15.
38. Ibid., p. 23.
39. Ibid., p. 28.
40. Suvorov, *Denj M. Kogda natsalasz vtoraaja mirovaja voina?*, p. 131.
41. Hautamäki, *Suomi myrskyn silmässä*, p. 326.
42. The manpower of the Red Army grew from 1.5m in 1938 to 4.2m by January 1, 1941 and to 5.5m by June 21, 1941. In addition to the Red Army there were various and numerous military formations for internal services; see Suvorov, *Denj M. Kogda natsalasz vtoraaja mirovaja voina?*, p. 154.
43. The sensitive foreign policy information could possibly leak from the Cliveden Set which comprised a number of high ranking FO officials who were known by their lenient attitudes towards Germany. In any case it has been alleged that the Germans had received excellent intelligence on British intentions, see Roberts, *Hitler and Churchill. Secrets of Leadership*, p.85.
44. Nikita Hruštšov, *Mälestused. I osa (Memoirs, Vol I)*. Perona, 1993, pp. 206-207, 226.
45. Veijo Meri, *Soome marssal C. G. Mannerheim. (Finnish Marshal Mannerheim)*. Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, Tallinn, 1997, p. 328.
46. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8raDPASvq0->