THE POLISH “SICKNESS” AND FRANCO-SOVIEIT
RELATIONS, 1934-1939

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on the Documents Diplomatiques Français and is an examination of Franco-Soviet-Polish relations between 1934 and 1939. Poland, precariously wedged between Germany and the Soviet Union, was integral to the Franco-Soviet relationship because Soviet military support for France was only possible if Poland permitted the Red Army to travel through its territory. Polish Marshal Pilsudski and Foreign Minister Beck categorically refused to contemplate such a concession, fearful that passage would result in Soviet infiltration. Pilsudski proposed a “policy of balance” which aimed at good relations with both Germany and the Soviet Union, but subservience to neither. Despite the Franco-Polish alliance of 1921, the persistent French calls for Soviet-Polish understanding failed to soften Poland’s obstinate attitudes towards Soviet Russia. Pilsudski and Beck did not interpret Nazi Germany’s revisionism as a threat to Poland, but rather regarded it as an opportunity to bolster Poland’s prestige and increase its territories in Eastern Europe. Polish leaders remained confident that their non-military agreements with Germany and the USSR protected them from aggression. Consequently, Beck’s foreign policy contradicted French and Soviet attempts to contain Hitler. This thesis begins with the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of January 1934, examining the impotence of the Franco-Polish relationship, the failure of collective security, Western anti-Soviet sentiments and Poland’s “independent” and aggressive policy directions. It concludes with the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Despite Poland's reinstatement as an independent entity at the end of the Great War, its existence was never secure. Created in 1919 out of German and Russian territories, Poland found itself precariously wedged between two daunting neighbours. The confused historical background of Poland's political frontiers and the intermingling of languages and nationalities further complicated the state's boundaries. Poland's very existence was threatened if Germany and the Soviet Union regained their strength and pursued a policy of cooperation. Thus, Poland's statehood essentially depended on German and Russian weakness, as was the case in the 1920s, or on German-Soviet hostility, as in the mid-1930s. Poland, however, had no control over these conditions.¹

This thesis is an examination of Franco-Soviet-Polish relations between 1934 and 1939. During these years, Józef Beck, Polish Foreign Minister, Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and various French foreign ministers attempted to secure their respective states within a Europe that included Nazi Germany. French hopes that Poland would act as France's "junior partner" or at least its "appreciative follower" were dashed as Józef Pilsudski, de facto dictator since 1926, and Beck administered foreign policy independent of French interests.² Warsaw's fundamental concern to protect its

political and territorial integrity from both the USSR and Germany paralyzed French and Soviet attempts at a collective security pact. Thus, as Hitler's position in Europe grew stronger, Poland's unaltered assessment that Stalin was the greatest danger to Poland, compounded by the French apprehension of dealing with the Soviets, precluded any chance of securing these states against German aggression. It is the intricacies of this ultimately spineless relationship in the years directly preceding the Fourth Partition of Poland that is the focus of the present work.

A resentment and belief that France had been cheated out of the rewards rightfully owed to her pervaded post-war French society. Physically and economically depleted by the Great War, France's persistent fear of a German resurgence translated into a policy of containment and an "alliance system". Thus, in an attempt to further secure itself, France looked to Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and the Little Entente, to create an eastern cordon sanitaire against both Germany and Soviet Russia. In February 1921, France and Poland signed a defensive pact with a secret military convention. A second treaty, based on the principles of the League of Nations, was signed on 16 October 1925. The military component, not repeated in any other French Eastern alliance, was crucial, as it intimately linked Polish security to the French. Both states agreed to reinforce preparations, extend effective aid, and act in common accord in the event that Germany threatened the peace.

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4 France signed treaties with Czechoslovakia in 1924 and 1925; with Romania in 1926; with Yugoslavia in 1927.
Polish officials maintained throughout the interwar period that this 1921 military agreement was the foundation of the Franco-Polish alliance, while many French, fearful of the military implications, increasingly returned to the 1925 League-sponsored treaty.\textsuperscript{6} This military alliance, however, did not result in staff talks until May 1939. France, weakened by government and financial instability, wanted to avoid war, especially a war for Polish interests.

The French alliance system was troubled from the beginning. There was a growing belief in Eastern Europe that France was moving away from the \textit{status quo} of Versailles, so carefully maintained in the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{7} The Locarno Treaty of 1925, which protected France's boundaries but not Poland's, reinforced suspicions of France's dedication to its Eastern European alliances.\textsuperscript{8} Locarno divided Europe into two categories of frontiers, and in Beck's opinion, Germany "was thereby solemnly invited to attack to the East for the price of gaining peace in the West."\textsuperscript{9} The resentment of Locarno was bolstered by the Four Power Pact in 1933, which marked the return to the traditional concept of "Great Power" diplomacy.\textsuperscript{10} Pilsudski's slogan "Nothing about us without

\textsuperscript{6} A. Adamthwaite, \textit{France and the Coming of the Second World War 1936-1939}, (London: Frank Cass, 1971), pp. 23-24. While advocates of the Franco-Polish alliance were many, there was notable French opposition. In February 1921, General Weygand and Marshal Foch were against the military convention, arguing that Poland had not yet stabilized. And as early as 1927, France attempted to dilute the military agreement with Poland, however Pilsudski refused. See Wandycz, \textit{Twilight of French Eastern Alliances}, p. 8 and pp. 214-215.


\textsuperscript{8} Adamthwaite notes that Locarno resulted in a "deadlock" of French policy, because any offensive against Germany in support of either Poland or Czechoslovakia would have deprived France of the Locarno guarantee. While this could have been fixed by a strong British guarantee to the Eastern alliances, Britain maintained its position of non-involvement in Eastern Europe. See Adamthwaite, \textit{France and the Coming of the Second World War}, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{9} Roberts, "The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck", pp. 587-588. Referring to Locarno, Pilsudski stated that "every good Pole spits with disgust at the name."

\textsuperscript{10} Radice, \textit{Prelude to Appeasement}, p. 4.
us" reflected the Marshal’s indignation that the Great Powers menaced the rights of the smaller powers. However, Poland’s anti-League position and its refusal to admit the benefits of “Great Power paternalism” left it in a predicament. For if both concepts were rejected, as they were by Beck, “what alternatives remained for a state which was neither so situated nor so powerful as to be able to stand in splendid isolation?”

The Bolshevik revolution profoundly changed Russia’s place in the European balance of power. Finally breaking its diplomatic isolation in the early 1920s, the Soviet Union steadily worked to protect its frontiers and safeguard its neutrality in any future capitalist wars. Litvinov, who became Geneva’s strongest voice for collective security, worked diligently throughout the interwar years to establish and maintain relations with the West. However, the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs never recovered from the ideological prejudice exercised against it by the West. The fear of Communism and consequent mistrust of the USSR hindered all Soviet-Western diplomacy throughout the interwar period.

For Poland, the terrific challenge of foreign relations was geography. Pilsudski’s solution to Poland’s precarious situation was normalized political and economic relations with both the Soviet Union and Germany, but subservience to neither. This “policy of

13 Notably, Soviet Russia’s first major agreement was signed with Germany on 16 April 1922. This Rapallo Treaty manifested Western fears of Soviet-German collusion which could only threaten the West and remained a concern throughout the interwar period.
15 Working for the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs throughout the majority of the 1920s, Litvinov served as de facto Commissar for several years before officially replacing Georgii Chicherin in 1930.
balance” was the foundation of Polish foreign policy in the 1930s, and was an attempt to protect Poland from being “merely a tool of other powers.”\textsuperscript{16} The German-Polish Declaration of Non-Aggression in 1934 made perfect sense to the Poles, as it re-established the equilibrium which had been altered by the Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1932. However, with Hitler in command of Germany, the German-Polish agreement had greater implications than mere balance.

Poland’s defiant refusals to participate in any agreement aimed against Germany frustrated French and Soviet attempts to solidify a security network in the East. Beck repeatedly argued that Poland’s participation in a collective scheme would be interpreted by Hitler as an anti-German move, thus disturbing the equilibrium. Compounding this was the unwavering Polish belief that the Soviet Union was the greater threat to Poland’s security. Maintaining that the Non-Aggression Pacts with the USSR and Germany and the Franco-Polish military agreement were adequate protection against aggression, Poland saw no reason to deal with the Soviet devil. Beck, often tipping the proverbial scales in favour of Germany, frustrated any attempts at collective action.

The key issue was passage. Not having a common boundary, Soviet forces could only attack Germany by crossing through Poland.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, any collective agreement which included the Soviet Union needed Polish adherence and permission for passage. History made all Poles leery about foreign troops on their soil, especially the Red Army.\textsuperscript{18} In April 1934, Pilsudski told his top men that while Germany and the USSR


\textsuperscript{17} The Baltic states were unsuitable for the deployment of large armies and Romania was separated from Germany by Hungary. Poland, however, directly linked Germany and Russia.

\textsuperscript{18} The eighteenth century saw three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795.
were both enemies of Poland, Russia was the greater threat. He argued that while Poland would probably confront Germany with the help of other countries, it would more than likely have to face Russia alone.\textsuperscript{19} This assessment did not die with the Marshal, and rather became the foundation of Beck’s policies. Litvinov’s hopes that the French could influence the Poles to reconsider such a policy were dashed, as France failed to convince Poland that granting passage to the Red Army was in its best interests. Consequently, the Polish refusal to grant Soviet passage in 1934 was upheld by Beck throughout the 1930s, despite the evolving international situation. Even during the August crisis in 1939, when passage was requisite to the West reaching an agreement with the USSR, Poland refused to discuss the issue.

Yet despite the weaknesses of the Franco-Polish alliance and Poland’s marked leanings towards Germany, France refused to abandon or subordinate its relationship with Poland for an alliance with the Soviet Union. The French maintained that any reduction in the Franco-Polish alliance would result in an improvement of Polish-German relations. Not wanting to lose the Soviet Union’s good favour, however, the French kept their relations with the Soviets low-key. Any proposals for a strong Franco-Soviet alliance with military implications were readily squashed. With the exception of a few French statesmen, who recognized the importance of Soviet participation in maintaining European peace, the French were hopeful for an agreement with Germany. Very much influenced by a fear of Communism and a negative perception of Soviet military forces

\textsuperscript{19} Wandycz, \textit{Twilight of French Eastern Alliances}, p. 326.
and intentions, the French shuddered at the thought of a close relationship with the USSR.

A.J.P. Taylor’s maverick work *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961) remains a catalyst for historiographical debate. Research of new and old documents and the opening of various archives, especially the Soviet, contributes to the continuing fascination with the interwar years. For our present purposes, the main schools of thought regarding the Soviet Union, France and Poland in the 1930s are briefly summarized. In addition, the key works dealing with relations between the three states are noted. This study contributes to the present historiographical gap concerning the specific connections between France, Poland and the USSR during the final years of peace. By ignoring Poland’s pivotal role in the relationship between France and the Soviet Union, historians have missed an important key to understanding interwar diplomacy.

The unforgiving judgements of French policy in the interwar years, manifested by J.B. Duroselle’s *La Décadence* (1979), have not yet been nullified. Arguing that French political instability and ineptitude precluded a coherent and evolving foreign policy, and that statesmen, soldiers and civil servants alike lacked “a sense of international morality”, this school of thought places blame on the men of the 1930s. In one historian’s words: “The perception of French power, among all decision-makers, was based on a strong sense of impotence. Decay was in the air. They were preparing for defeat.”

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More recent work has re-evaluated the ‘decadence thesis’ and sought to show France in a more positive light.\textsuperscript{22} While older arguments judge the military leaders as either doddering incompetents or merely unlucky, historians such as Jeffery Gunsberg see French politicians and military leaders as conscientious and diligent problem-solvers.\textsuperscript{23} This re-interpretation, furthered by historians such as Martin Alexander, argues that constant material shortages, problems with deployment and General Gamelin’s misinterpretation of the kind of war to be fought contributed to the fall of France more than the pacifism of the French Left or incompetent leadership.\textsuperscript{24} Despite this scholarship, historian Robert Young concludes that it will take “a debunker of Taylor’s talent and stature to overturn all the dismal verdicts that have been pronounced on the failures of interwar France.”\textsuperscript{25}

The nature and aims of Soviet foreign policy throughout the 1930s have spawned many interpretations. The officially sanctioned Soviet perspective that Moscow’s policy was noble, sincere and undeviating, seems over-the-top. Litvinov, contrary to legend, was not pursuing an “altruistic or otherwise morally superior brand of Soviet foreign policy”.\textsuperscript{26} Historians such as Jonathan Haslam argue that collective security was the only option for the Kremlin, given Nazi Germany’s hostility towards it.\textsuperscript{27} These historians argue that Stalin’s main concern was security against aggression, and when the West

\textsuperscript{22} For a more comprehensive survey of these interpretations see Young, “The Problem with France”, pp. 111-113.
\textsuperscript{23} Alexander, “The Fall of France”, p. 14 and Young, “The Problem with France”, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{25} Young, “The Problem with France”, p. 110.
repeatedly stonewalled Soviet calls for collective action, a deal with Germany was necessary.

Others judge the Kremlin harshly, arguing that collective security was a decoy to Stalin’s true objective - a rapprochement with Hitler. Robert Tucker advances a particularly radical argument, stating that as early as 1928 Stalin supported Hitler’s rise to power. A more reasonable argument is made by Gerhard Weinberg, who argues that collective security was a far second to Stalin’s preference to a Soviet-German agreement. A major problem with this interpretation is that it is based almost entirely on German documents and it assumes that the Soviet Union put so much of its diplomatic energy into a policy that officially it did not want. This seems unlikely.28

Polish foreign policy during the interwar period has not been analyzed to the extent that French or Soviet have, at least in Western scholarship. In his overview of Polish historiography, Piotr Wandycz notes that the successful Communist efforts to paint Polish twentieth-century history negatively have provoked a nationalist academic reaction which is characterized by uncritical glorification of interwar Poland and its leading personalities. While Wandycz warns against this, Western historians have done this also, however in the opposite direction. Polish statesmen, notably Józef Beck, have received a minimal amount of sympathy.29 In his article “The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck”, H.L. Roberts places the Foreign Minister in a more reasonable light, explaining pointedly the complexities of Polish foreign policy.

There is yet to be a comprehensive study of Franco-Soviet-Polish relations and most works that concentrate on the larger players tend to subordinate Poland’s position, reducing its foreign policy to merely frustrating greater achievements. There are, however, some notable exceptions. William Scott’s *Alliance Against Hitler: The Origins of the Franco-Soviet Pact* (1962) and Bohdan Budurowczyz’s *Polish-Soviet Relations 1932-1939* (1963), although somewhat dated, are excellent bilateral studies examining the nature and challenges of each relationship. Anna Cienciala’s study *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939* (1968) concentrates on Poland’s relationship with France during the later years under study, while Piotr Wandycz’s *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-1936* (1988) chronicles the difficulties of the Franco-Czechoslovak-Polish relationship from the Locarno Pact to the remilitarization of the Rhineland. Lisanne Radice’s *Prelude to Appeasement* (1981) is a concentrated analysis of the Eastern Pact of 1934 and its subsequent failure. Other relevant works are noted in the various footnotes.

This study is based upon the French *Documents diplomatiques français*, the DDF. The correspondence between the Quai d’Orsay and the various French diplomats in Poland, the Soviet Union, Britain and Germany offer insight into the diplomatic challenges of the Franco-Polish, Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Polish relationships. The points of interconnectedness amongst the three states are evident and richly detailed. In addition, the *Documents on British Foreign Policy* were utilized, as well as the available Soviet documents, in such compilations as Jane Degras’ *Soviet Foreign Policy*...
Documents (1953). Other materials such as published autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries of various participants were also used.

As a result of space limitations, many interesting facets to this story had to be alluded to, or omitted altogether. Such issues are the German-Polish relationship centering around Danzig, the evolution of Anglo-French relations, the Franco-Polish economic relationship, French domestic politics, and the German-Soviet relationship. Likewise, such events as the remilitarization of the Rhineland and the Munich crisis are dealt with tangentially, only as far as they affected the Franco-Soviet-Polish relationship.

This study opens in 1934, when Poland signed its Non-Aggression Pact with Germany. This diplomatic tremor led Louis Barthou, French Foreign Minister, and Litvinov to push for the Eastern Pact. Maintaining his policy of balance, however, Pilsudski refused to adhere to the plan arguing that Polish security would not be enhanced by joining a collective agreement aimed against Germany. The third chapter, covering the years 1935 to 1938, chronicles Hitler’s steady movement towards the realization of Lebensraum. While France and the USSR were terrified at Hitler’s exploits, Poland saw Germany’s intransigence as a way to strengthen its position and influence in Eastern Europe. Moving on Lithuania and then Czechoslovakia in 1938, Beck took advantage of circumstances to bolster Poland’s status. The fourth chapter examines 1939 and the failure of the West to reach an agreement with the USSR. Poland’s refusal to enter into any direct agreement with the Soviet Union during peacetime was a major contributing factor to the 1939 crisis. Beck’s unaltering policy of refusing Soviet passage, driven by
the haunting possibility of the Red Army never leaving Polish soil, was natural given Poland’s history, but impracticable given the circumstances.
CHAPTER TWO

PERSISTENCE, DEFIANCE AND “STUPID DREAMS”: POLAND AND THE EASTERN PACT, 1934

Writing in the Soviet press during the war, Maxim Litvinov “blasted Poland for basing its policy in the 1930s on “stupid dreams” of reviving Poland as it had existed in the eighteenth century.”¹ The “stupidity” of such dreams is a matter of perspective, and certainly most, if not all, of the French diplomats working in the 1930s would have agreed with the Soviet Commissar. Polish foreign policy was defiant and selfishly ambitious in the face of French and Soviet initiatives for a collective security system. Poland’s refusal to adhere to the Eastern Pact in 1934 contributed to Franco-Soviet rapprochement, the deterioration of Franco-Polish relations, and ultimately the failure of the Barthou-Litvinov initiative. Pilsudski saw the rise of Hitler as an opportunity to bolster Poland’s position in Europe rather than as a threat. Thus, at the crucial time when Polish participation in the Eastern Pact offered a chance to contain Hitler, Pilsudski only saw an opportunity to increase Poland’s influence and prestige.

The 1934 diplomatic year essentially began on 26 January with the shocking announcement of the German-Polish Declaration of Non-Aggression.² The French were

especially surprised, as they had not been informed of the negotiations. The Declaration meant that the German and Polish governments would not use force to settle mutual issues. Pilsudski believed that the agreement proved to France and other states that Polish-German relations were not a threat to European peace and illustrated that Poland was strong enough to secure its own borders.

In his long conversation with an eager French Ambassador, Pilsudski calmly assured Jules Laroche that the Declaration did not alter any of Poland’s former engagements, especially Poland’s alliance with France and its adherence to the League of Nations. The Marshal stated that France’s unstable political situation and her recent habit of following the British lead in the issue of armaments were chief reasons why he signed the accord. Pilsudski interpreted French policy as “going farther and farther” away from the basis of France’s treaties and consequently felt he had to take steps to protect Poland. Thus, Pilsudski seized the opportunity to make a deal with Hitler, a policy which was contrary to French diplomacy. The German-Polish Pact indicated that

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3 Laroche to Laval, 30 Oct. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 557. The text of the 26 January German-Polish Pact had not been officially given to the French, however it would be false to say that the French were completely ignorant of the accord. On 30 November 1933, Beck told Laroche about talks between Pilsudski and the Germans. Also Paul-Boncour, then French Foreign Minister, was told 25 January 1934 that Beck had an important announcement to make regarding German-Polish relations. See Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, pp. 307-310.

4 Laroche to Barthou, 15 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 7.

5 Laroche to Paul-Boncour, 29 Jan. 1934, DDF, ser. I, V, no. 288. When asked if Poland would retain policy freedom in the case where Franco-German talks failed, and France opposed German rearmament, Pilsudski answered that Poland’s freedom remained.


7 Laroche to Paul-Boncour, 29 Jan. 1934, DDF, ser. I, V, no. 288. // At a meeting on 7 March with Beck and several former Prime Ministers, Pilsudski remarked that the alliance with France “did not bring sufficient strength, and it was necessary to make sacrifices.” See Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, p. 325.

8 While French desires for a deal with Hitler were constant throughout the 1930s, at the beginning of 1934 the direction of French diplomacy aimed at international methods of containing Hitler, rather than bilateral solutions.
the French Eastern alliance system was weakening, France’s role as defender of the status quo was being challenged and Poland no longer had to “rely on the goodwill of her French ally” for security.\(^9\)

Without denying Poland’s right to protect itself, Laroche stressed that such protection should not work against French attempts to organize European security. The French considered the agreement premature because of the encouragement it gave Hitler, allowing Germany to break the diplomatic isolation that ensued following its departure from the Disarmament Conference and the League.\(^10\) André François-Poncet, French Ambassador to Germany, irked by the secrecy which surrounded the negotiations, noted that the French, unlike the Poles, had always been very open about their relationship with Germany.\(^11\) In essence, Poland had “observed the letter though not the spirit of the treaty with France.”\(^12\) Despite feelings of betrayal, the French did not reproach Poland for bettering her relationship with Germany. The French were more upset because Poland had acted without prior consultation and the implications of the treaty remained unknown. Laroche speculated that the Polish leadership did not fully understand the repercussions of its actions. For example, it seemed that the recent treaty replaced the German-Polish Arbitration and Conciliation Treaty of 16 October 1925. Because France was obligated to help Poland under the 1925 treaty, if the recent German-Polish

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\(^9\) Radice, Prelude to Appeasement, pp. 31-32.
\(^12\) Erskine to Simon, 30 Jan. 1934, DBFP, ser. II, VI, no. 237.
agreement nullified the former, then the Franco-Polish alliance would be radically altered.13

The French were concerned about the “independent politics of Poland” that were manifested by the German-Polish Declaration.14 Poland seemed to be “diverging from the politics of collaboration and international solidarity that France and other countries consider(ed) important for securing peace.” It appeared that Poland had “broke(n) the unity” of a struggling coalition aimed at making the Reich adopt “a policy of international solidarity.” Not only did Poland’s actions towards Hitler diminish the authority of the League, they also lessened the scope of possible action for containing Germany.15

Laroche reported several reasons for Poland’s new foreign policy attitudes including suspicion of the Four Power Pact, jealousy of the Little Entente’s influence at international meetings, doubt in France’s ability and willingness to help Poland and sympathy for the dictatorial German regime. Laroche also noted the Polish belief, perhaps unconscious, that tension between France and Germany would increase Poland’s diplomatic freedom, allowing it to “assume a role of arbitrator in Eastern Europe.”16

Pilsudski recognized that Nazi Germany created an opportunity for Poland to increase its

13 Note of the Political Director, 17 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 17. // Another problem that the French saw with the January Declaration was that it did not pertain to internal affairs. Thus, if the Corridor, that never-ending sore point between Germany and Poland, was considered an interior affair, force could be used. In this case, the Declaration would not help Poland.
14 Beck’s comments in the Polish press such as “the working methods in Geneva have to be sacrificed”, “the international organizations are not sufficient any more”, and that “some geographical and political groups have to be made”, undoubtedly unnerved the French. See Note of the Political Director, 17 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 17.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
influence in Eastern Europe. This improved Polish position could only come from an independent foreign policy that flirted with Hitler, and consequently ran counter to French goals.

For Poland, the agreement with Germany meant that it had defined relations with its two largest neighbours, and had done this, importantly, without any additional Polish commitments. Pilsudski's supposed ‘policy of balance’ sought to ensure good relations with both Russia and Germany without compromising Polish freedom. The Marshal believed that this was the only way to stop Poland from becoming a satellite state. The obvious problem, however, was that Poland had no means of enforcing its respective agreements with Germany or the Soviet Union. Here lies the inherent weakness of Polish foreign policy in the 1930s. If Germany and/or the Soviet Union chose to ignore its agreement with Poland, the Polish state would be seriously compromised. Words are not always mightier than the sword. This tenuous equilibrium depended on the integrity of Hitler and Stalin, which hardly constituted a solid foundation for a security system. Pilsudski recognized this precarious situation when he said “we are sitting on two stools that cannot last long. We must know which one we shall fall off first and when.”

While recognizing this danger, Pilsudski refused throughout 1934 to further secure his state in a collective agreement.

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17 Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, p. 325. Pilsudski argued that the German-Polish Declaration mirrored the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, signed 25 July 1932.
18 A. Cienciala, “The Significance of the Declaration of Non-Aggression”, p. 2. This policy of "equilibrium" between Poland and Russia had also been the aim of August Zaleski, Poland’s Foreign Minister, 15 May 1926 - 2 Nov. 1932.
Although Litvinov noted a definite cooling in relations with Poland after the signing of the January accord, the Soviets did not oppose the German-Polish Pact. The Soviet Union had itself recently completed a series of non-aggression pacts, most notably with Poland. The major difference however was that all the Soviet agreements included a “clause which made them...immediately denounced in the case of aggression by one of the contracting powers against a third power.” This protected the USSR from being dragged into a conflict. The absence of such a clause in the January Declaration worried the Soviets, as they had hoped that Poland would act as a “barrier” to Germany’s Eastern expansion. The Soviets feared that Poland would play the role of mediator between France and Germany, possibly in opposition to the Soviet Union.

The German-Polish Pact was symbolic. For France, it removed Poland from an anti-German coalition and confirmed that Poland was following its own foreign policy. France, which had previously been very timid in its relations with the USSR because of its Polish ally, now felt relieved of any moral scruples when it came to seriously negotiating with the Soviets. For the Soviet Union, the Declaration confirmed Hitler’s hostility towards it, as Polish antipathy had always been “a touchstone” in German-Russian relations. This confirmation pushed the Soviet Union towards France and the

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20 Alphand to Daladier, 3 Feb. 1934, DDF, ser. I, V, no. 318. In his conversation with Barthou in May 1934, Litvinov noted that Polish-Soviet relations had been going well before the January Declaration, and in fact there was talk of a military accord between the two states. See Conversation between Barthou and Litvinov, secret, 18 May 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 221.


22 Alphand to Barthou, secret, 24 April 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 136.

23 Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 162.

24 Ibid., p. 158.
policy of collective security.\textsuperscript{25} For Poland, it illustrated that it was able to secure its own borders without French tutelage. Having agreements with both neighbours, Poland felt it could maintain the balance that was thought to be so crucial to Polish security. The problem remained, however, that Poland had no way of enforcing these agreements. For Germany, the Declaration allowed it to break its diplomatic isolation. Also, Hitler hoped to alienate France from Poland and secure Germany in the East.\textsuperscript{26}

Rumours following the Declaration, which alleged that Poland had made secret agreements with Germany, compounded the French embarrassment of not being informed of the negotiations.\textsuperscript{27} Polish denials were met with French suspicion. After all, Pilsudski had agreed to the German requests not to mention the League or the Locarno Treaty in the 26 January text and had negotiated the agreement in secret.\textsuperscript{28} As for the Soviets, Litvinov believed the rumours of collusion to be true.\textsuperscript{29} The French maintained that “unless the Poles were the most magnificent liars”, the rumours were unfounded.\textsuperscript{30} Litvinov was not swayed.

\textsuperscript{25} Assertions often made by Soviet historians that Litvinov and the Soviet leadership adopted collective security on a moral basis seem impossible to support. Rather, the ultimate issue for Moscow was the security of the Soviet Union and the best way to achieve it. In 1933-35, this was seen as moving closer to France and participating in the Eastern Pact. Thus, the Franco-Soviet hostility that had been a “byword” in European diplomacy momentarily subsided as the two nations decided to work together for peace and state security. See Phillips, \textit{Between the Revolution and the West}, p. 130 and p. 213, footnote #25.

\textsuperscript{26} Cienciala, “The Significance of the Declaration of Non-Aggression”, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{27} It was rumoured that Poland had agreed to lose interest in Austria, would refuse to sign a military accord with Czechoslovakia and would support the German disarmament stand in return for German abstention regarding the Corridor. For details of the rumours, see Alphand to Barthou, very secret, 20 April 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 119.

\textsuperscript{28} Note to the Political Director, 17 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 17.

\textsuperscript{29} Conversation between Barthou and Litvinov, secret, 18 May, 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 221. Litvinov asked Barthou to find out if there was any truth to the rumours that secret letters between Hitler and Pilsudski had been exchanged in April. The communication ends by acknowledging the “common interest” that France and the USSR had in relations with Poland, as they were a condition to strengthening the Franco-Soviet relationship. See Alphand to Barthou, 20 April 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 119.

\textsuperscript{30} Patteson to Simon, 19 May 1934, DBFP, ser. II, VI, no. 428.
The German-Polish Pact was barely ten days old when the French domestic crisis reached its climax. As a result of the 6 February riots, Louis Barthou was appointed head of the Quai d’Orsay. Perhaps the last great man of the Clemenceau and Poincaré generation, Barthou gave French diplomacy a new vigour and firmness. Upon taking office, the seventy-two year old made pointed moves to improve Franco-Polish relations by informing Poland of France’s policy positions and stressing his personal opposition to the Four Power Pact. By the end of the first week in March, Barthou had accepted an official invitation to visit Poland in April.

Maintaining the policy of balance, Józef Beck went to Moscow 13-15 February. As the first Polish Foreign Minister to travel to the Soviet Union, Beck was proud that the Polish national anthem was played on several occasions, always accompanied by applause. Despite the ceremony and supposed warm relations, in reality the Soviets were very concerned about Poland’s relations with Germany. On 27 February, Charles Alphand, French Ambassador in Moscow, reported that despite Beck’s claims that the visit was a success, nothing had resulted. Litvinov had had intentions of discussing a Soviet-Polish alliance in case of German attack to the East, however Beck began his conversation by announcing that Hitler was a pacifist. This cut short any discussion of an

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31 These right-wing riots were triggered by the Stavisky scandal, however were indicative of the turmoil of French domestic politics.
33 The Four Power Pact was the source of much Polish anger and resentment. That France, its ally, would negotiate without including Poland was a constant sore point. See J. Beck, *Final Report*, (New York: Speller, 1957), pp. 35-37.
Beck, proud of his recent deal with Hitler, stressed that the Nazis understood that Poland was not a weak, young state and asserted that the Reich presented no immediate danger to Europe. The Commissar did not agree with this analysis. Litvinov believed Nazi Germany to be a "mad dog that [could not] be trusted, with whom no agreements [could] be made, and whose ambition [could] only be checked by a ring of determined neighbours." Beck was content with the temporary security provided by the German-Polish Declaration and scolded Litvinov for "looking too far into the future". Poland’s policy refused to recognize the probability of German aggression and settled for a tenuous security, based on paper agreements that Poland could not militarily enforce.

In the middle of March, Laroche commented on the “psychological reasons and circumstances” that guided Polish politics. He stated that Poland was concerned about its prestige and questioned France’s commitment to the alliance. Moreover, Poland had never understood the Locarno system and simply looked at it as a division between Eastern and Western security, a failure of France to protect its Eastern ally. Laroche reported that Pilsudski “leads a very selfish foreign policy, full of national pride. He probably admires Germany. He esteems France but does not understand us.” Laroche continued:

\[^{37}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{38}\text{Phillips, Between the Revolution and the West, p. 140.}\]
\[^{39}\text{M. Carley, “Prelude to Defeat: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1919-1939”, Historical Reflections, 1996, 22 (1), pp. 175-176. Litvinov was quick to recognize the threat of Nazi Germany and cautioned at the beginning of 1934 that Hitler’s book, Mein Kampf, had just come out in an unchanged edition of one million copies. See Phillips, Between the Revolution and the West, p. 141.}\]
\[^{40}\text{Phillips, Between the Revolution and the West, p. 141.}\]
\[^{41}\text{Laroche to Barthou, 15 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 7. Laroche claimed that it was for these same psychological reasons that Poland did not understand France’s position regarding disarmament.}\]
\[^{42}\text{Laroche to Barthou, confidential, 21 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 27.}\]
To sum up, the Polish government has a policy of prestige, but not exclusively. It profits from exceptional circumstances to conclude pacific agreements with Russia and Germany. It thinks that the difficulties of these two countries will make these agreements last. It wants to be seen as a big power.\footnote{Laroche to Barthou, 15 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 7.}

Laroche advised Barthou that when dealing with Poland, France must be firm, yet gentle. Improvement of Polish relations with either or both of its great neighbours should be encouraged, as long as it strengthened the French-Polish alliance.\footnote{Ibid. Laroche wrote of the Polish leaders: “We have to dissipate their fear, but not accept their reproaches. We have to be firm but be careful about their susceptibility....”}

Even though there were institutional limitations on how far France could ally itself with the Soviet Union,\footnote{These limitations stemmed mostly from the Locarno Agreement of 1925. Under this treaty, in the case of German aggression against Russia (not a member of the League of Nations), France would not be able to assist because it was bound by Locarno.} the French saw potential in a Soviet-Polish relationship. In the middle of April, it was noted that Poland and the Soviet Union could, especially because of geography, sign a mutual assistance pact. France could best help Poland if it was linked to the USSR.\footnote{Note of Political Direction – Origins of the Franco-Soviet Rapprochement, 16 April 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 100.} The Poles however were very much against an agreement with the Soviets. In early April, Pilsudski asked his top men where they thought the primary threat to Poland lay, with Germany or Russia. While the majority thought Germany posed the greater threat, Pilsudski considered Russia his mortal enemy.\footnote{Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, p. 326. See also Beck, Final Report, pp. 60-61 and Waclaw Jedrzejewicz, Pilsudski: A Life For Poland, (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1982), p. 306.} Poland’s policy of balance supposedly did not allow for a Soviet-Polish agreement, even if it increased Polish security.
Barthou’s trip to Warsaw on 22 April was very important because, unlike Czechoslovakia, there were strong doubts regarding Poland’s dedication to France. During conversations with the French delegation, Pilsudski made it very clear that the policy of balance was the only approach that Poland was interested in pursuing, and the main reason for this was his belief that “the French were too weak in Eastern Europe...to be relied on as effective allies.” The Marshal stressed that Poland’s position was much more difficult than France’s, which had only two potentially aggressive neighbours, as opposed to Poland’s five or six. Notably, Barthou did not feel comfortable breaching the topic of the Eastern Pact with Pilsudski at this time.

As Soviet relations with Germany and Poland remained dubious, Litvinov worked diligently to better relations with France. The Commissar stressed to his chargé d’affaires in Paris that his task was to convince Barthou of the Soviet desire to work with the French for European peace, even if the original offer for rapprochement in 1933 was withdrawn “as a result of Poland’s position.”

48 Radice, Prelude to Appeasement, p. 39. Beck, answering an event in September 1933, did not meet the French delegation at the train station. This “calculated incivility” was ignored by Barthou. Beck’s action was meant to illustrate the equality of the two states. See Beck, Final Report, p. 54.
49 Radice, Prelude to Appeasement, p. 41.
50 Ibid., p. 41. This exclusion is notable because it had been identified as a topic for discussion in the French memorandum to the Polish Government on 13 April 1934.
51 Soviet-German relations had been dealt a blow at the end of April when Germany refused to sign a Soviet-initiated treaty that secured the independence of the Baltic states. This refusal confirmed Litvinov’s fears about Hitler’s intentions and solidified his dedication to the collective security policy. Poland also refused to sign such an agreement. Litvinov stated that this was a test for both Poland and Germany which they had failed. See Alphand to Barthou, 27 April 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 146 and X. Eudin and R. Slusser, Soviet Foreign Policy 1928-1934: Documents and Materials, Vol. II, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), pp. 614-618.
52 Phillips, Between the Revolution and the West, p. 142 and Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 169. The Soviet proposal for a bilateral alliance with France in 1933 failed because French Foreign Minister Paul-Boncour had insisted that the Franco-Soviet agreement be “co-ordinated” with the Franco-Polish alliance. Countering this condition, the Soviets had insisted on the Baltic states and Finland being included. Using this framework as a platform for negotiations, it was decided in 1934 that the participating countries in the Eastern Pact would be Russia, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic states and possibly Finland.
French were successful in late April, when Barthou decided “to grasp the Russian alliance.”\textsuperscript{53} Barthou’s decision to deal with the Soviets was not an easy one. He feared Communist infiltration in France and realized that the move would not be popular in Warsaw or London. Despite these concerns, the French Foreign Minister knew that if a French-German conflict occurred, France would need allies, “not just moral support.” Litvinov was offering what France needed - an alliance which included assistance.\textsuperscript{54}

The May League of Nations session was important for two reasons. First, Barthou’s frustration with Poland became obvious when he scowled “There are great powers...and Poland” during a formal luncheon. “Poland we all know because we have been told it is a great power...a very, very great power.” This “studied insult” only exacerbated Franco-Polish relations.\textsuperscript{55} Second, this Geneva session allowed Barthou and Litvinov to meet. During a long conversation on 18 May, the preliminary foundations for a mutual assistance pact in Eastern Europe were set.\textsuperscript{56} As the policy of disarmament

\textsuperscript{53} Scott, \textit{Alliance Against Hitler}, p. 167. // This change in French foreign policy was confirmed at the end of May at the Disarmament Conference when Litvinov told assembled delegates that the failure of disarmament should be accepted and other possible guarantees of peace, for example regional pacts of mutual assistance, should be considered. The following day, Sir John Simon defended the disarmament solution, and thus British diplomacy in general. Barthou answered Simon in an unprecedented bitter attack on British foreign policy that essentially killed disarmament. See Radice, \textit{Prelude to Appeasement}, pp. 54-55.

\textsuperscript{54} Phillips, \textit{Between the Revolution and the West}, p. 142. // Upon taking office, Barthou stated “I am an old-fashioned Frenchman. That is, I belong to the generation of good horse-sense. All these League of Nations fancies...I’d soon put an end to them if I were in power...it’s alliances which count.” See R. Young, \textit{In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940}, (USA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 64.

\textsuperscript{55} Young, \textit{In Command of France}, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{56} Conversation between Barthou and Litvinov, secret, 18 May 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 221. During this extensive conversation, Litvinov asked Barthou several questions about Poland’s connections to Germany, what Poland knew of Franco-Soviet relations and what its opinion was regarding Soviet entry into the League. Another important discussion concerned the inclusion of Germany in the Eastern Pact. Barthou and Litvinov felt that by asking Germany to join, Poland would be more likely to adhere to the Pact.
died, this Eastern Pact gained momentum and became the diplomatic buzz of the summer of 1934.

Upon his return from Geneva, Barthou outlined his conversations with Litvinov to the French Cabinet. He stressed that the Commissar was anxious to negotiate a European Pact and had agreed that the Soviet Union should join the League of Nations, even though the Soviet government was divided on the subject.57 Barthou made a pointed effort to ensure that Poland was kept informed of the conversations and treated as one of France’s “oldest and most cherished allies.” Historian Lisanne Radice argues that this was a skilful diplomatic move given the probable Polish intransigence regarding both the Eastern Pact and Soviet entry into the League.58 Polish support for this French policy line was pivotal to its success. Hitler was getting stronger and an arrangement such as the Eastern Pact offered the most likely way to contain him.

The draft of the Eastern Pact contained two treaties because France was not part of Eastern Europe. The first was a pact of mutual assistance to be signed by the Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic states and Finland.59 A separate Franco-Soviet treaty would guarantee this mutual assistance pact and would provide direct assistance between the two states in the event of a war. The draft stated that France would aid Soviet Russia as if she was a signatory of the first part of the Eastern Pact, while the USSR would assist France as if she was part of the Locarno agreement. The Soviet Union also agreed to join the League of Nations.60

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57 Radice, Prelude to Appeasement, p. 50.
58 Ibid., p. 51.
59 Note of Political Direction - Mutual Assistance in Eastern Europe, 30 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 54.
60 Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 171.
The French Cabinet approved Barthou’s plan on 5 June, the only hostile resistance coming from Pierre Laval, who declared himself categorically in favour of “an accord with Germany and hostile to a rapprochement with Russia which would bring [France] the International and the red flag.”\(^61\) This was the first time that the French government as a whole committed itself to an agreement with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Pact.\(^62\)

Important for future events, the Cabinet stipulated that the Soviet Union was to be an integral part of the Eastern project and not an alternative to it. Thus, Barthou had no mandate to pursue a bilateral pact with the USSR.\(^63\)

The Eastern Pact was not a treaty of frontier guarantees. Rather, it was an instrument of stabilization. It added to the basic bilateral treaty formula a sanction of assistance which included reciprocity. Its proponents regarded it as the evolution from the simple regional pact (Locarno) to an organization of states truly directed at peace.\(^64\) Such a system would deter any state from intransigence because the reactions to such aggression would be swift and united. While it was true that participation in the Eastern Pact would result in Poland being pulled towards the East, the Pact offered Poland military guarantees that its paper agreements with Hitler and Stalin did not. In the case of German aggression against Poland, France, the USSR and other member states would

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\(^61\) Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West*, p. 145.

\(^62\) Scott, *Alliance Against Hitler*, p. 172. The French Cabinet was usually not informed of negotiations with the Soviets. // Piotr Wandycz notes that the French political spectrum was far from united when it came to ally ing with the Soviet Union. The extreme Right feared Bolshevism, the moderate Right advocated rapprochement but no alliance, others opposed both. Many military leaders, while appreciative of Soviet military power, had doubts about the Red Army’s offensive capabilities. Thus, they favoured an alliance without a military convention. Despite these opinions, Barthou received support. See Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, p. 361.

\(^63\) Young, *In Command of France*, p. 68.

\(^64\) Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 2 August 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 45.
give assistance. The same support would be forthcoming if Soviet Russia or any other member state attacked Poland, thus creating a kind of Eastern Locarno.

There were several important details that the Barthou-Litvinov plan did not address. For example, there were no diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Poland; Finland and Poland were very much against the passage of Soviet troops through their territory, and Estonia and Latvia were very much afraid of it; Polish-Czech relations were strained and there was no indication that they would improve; and finally, Germany would not participate in the Pact because all the potential members were included in Hitler's Lebensraum. It was thought that these issues could be worked out later if the Pact was accepted in principle. On 21 June, Barthou stressed to Laroche the importance of Polish adhesion and also the need for a Polish declaration admitting the value of such an arrangement under the auspices of the League. Poland was the key, for if Warsaw agreed to the idea, then Berlin could not refuse without revealing its hostile agenda.

Barthou's "pactomania" had a cool reception in Warsaw. Even though the French considered the Eastern Pact the perfect opportunity for Poland to join "the politics of international security", Poland was the unsure factor. Nazi Germany was not regarded by Pilsudski as a threat or even a menace, but rather as an opportunity for

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66 Barthou to Laroche, reserved, 21 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 363. Barthou stressed that the Eastern Pact was an opportunity for Poland to "destroy the ambiguity" of its foreign policy and secure itself firmly in the quest for peace. See Note of Political Direction - Mutual Assistance in Eastern Europe, 30 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 54.
67 Alphand to Barthou, reserved, 23 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 376.
69 Note of Political Direction - Mutual Assistance in Eastern Europe, 30 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 54.
Poland to assume her rightful place amongst the great powers of Europe. Fear of being lost in the grandiose French-Soviet scheme haunted Pilsudski, who preferred his politics of “sacred egotism”, which considered only Poland’s immediate needs.\textsuperscript{70} Thus, the French responsibility for convincing Poland of the advantages of the Eastern Locarno was a great one. Litvinov believed that France’s influence in Poland was strong enough to complete the necessary task.\textsuperscript{71} However, the Soviet Commissar was wrong, and during the summer months of 1934, the diplomatic correspondence between France and Poland is characterized with increasing French frustration and Polish defiance.

In a meeting with Beck near the end of June, Laroche stressed that the Eastern Pact was in Poland’s best interests, as adherence would secure its position of balance between Germany and the Soviet Union. Laroche warned that if Poland failed to join, France “would not refuse such an offer of collaboration from the USSR.”\textsuperscript{72} Beck maintained his non-committal position. It was not likely that Pilsudski would sign the Eastern Pact, partly because of France’s “clumsy action” of threatening him with a Franco-Soviet alliance. Sir William Erskine, the British Ambassador in Warsaw, reported, “I can imagine nothing more calculated to exasperate the Marshal than putting a pistol to his head in this manner.”\textsuperscript{73} In the beginning of July, Laroche reported that Polish

\textsuperscript{70} Barthou to Laroche, 22 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 373.

\textsuperscript{71} Alphand to Barthou, reserved, 13 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 466. See also Alphand to Barthou, reserved, 23 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 376 and Noël to Barthou, confidential, reserved, 29 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 403.

\textsuperscript{72} Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 25 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 384.

\textsuperscript{73} Erskine to Simon, 3 July 1934, DBFP, ser. II, VI, no. 479.
officials wanted to refrain from giving an answer to the Eastern Pact, hoping that a German refusal would exempt them from taking responsibility for its failure.74

The French became extremely annoyed with the Polish government during the months of July and August. Differences of opinion were to be expected between allies, but the French considered the idea of the Eastern Pact a basic foundation to which both Poland and France should be dedicated.75 The Polish government refused to give a concrete answer to the proposal, stating repeatedly that the importance of the Pact required more examination. The French communications and representations to Warsaw were constantly answered with Beck's strategy of raising difficulties and using stall tactics. An increasing feeling of exasperation permeated the Barthou-Laroche correspondence and the press in the respective countries became increasingly hostile.76 A cartoon in a Polish satirical journal showed Barthou as captain of a ship called "Eastern Locarno" and Beck standing on a desert island with two life preservers, one labelled 'Non-Aggression Pact with Germany' and the other 'Non-Aggression Pact with the USSR'. Barthou calls out, "It's safer on board." Beck replies, "I will wait."77

Poland did not trust the "pacific tendencies" of the Soviet government and feared that the Eastern Pact was a Russian idea which would ultimately only serve the Soviets.78

74 Laroche to Barthou, 5 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 431. See also Erskine to Simon, 6 July 1934, DBFP, ser. II, VI, no. 484 and Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 13 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 464.
75 Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 2 August 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 45.
76 Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, p. 364. Laroche told Beck that he was "astonished" that certain Polish newspapers claimed that France had demanded that Poland give a response to the Eastern Pact which had not been adequately explained. Beck stated that the press was simply responding to articles in the French press which claimed that Poland had already accepted the Pact. See Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 2 August 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 45.
77 Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, p. 366.
78 Kammerer to Barthou, reserved, 5 Sept. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 238. // Polish leaders were not the only ones who doubted the validity of Russian offers. Signor Quaroni of Italy was surprised the French believed the Soviets, claiming that "to count on the effective support of a Russian army...was to count on
Laroche reported that Poland did not trust Germany more than it used to, but did trust Russia less.\(^7⁹\) Barthou interpreted the foundation of Polish dissatisfaction as a fear that the conclusion of the Eastern Pact would mark the return of Russia to the foreground of European politics and/or would reduce the apparent role of Poland.\(^8⁰\) The French Foreign Minister appreciated these concerns, however did not understand how political abstention with regards to Soviet power was a better way to limit the Russian influence in Europe. The return of Russian power was inevitable. The challenge presented to Poland and France, however, was how to use the Soviet presence for the profit of European peace.\(^8¹\)

Pilsudski feared a loss of prestige in Eastern Europe the most, as this was the area where Poland had the most potential. Despite Beck’s efforts to gain Baltic support, both Estonia and Latvia declared that they were in favour of the Pact at the end of July. On 2 August, Lithuania declared its support. The latter was expected, but Estonia’s and Latvia’s positions wounded Polish pride.\(^8²\) These announcements only reinforced the fear that Russia would replace Poland as the leading force in Eastern Europe.\(^8³\)

Linked to the dread of diminished prestige was the possibility that the Franco-Polish alliance would be weakened or “drowned” by the Eastern Pact and/or the Franco-Soviet rapprochement.\(^8⁴\) Laroche repeatedly denied that this was a possibility. Not only

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\(^7⁹\) Laroche to Barthou, very confidential, 16 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 473.
\(^8⁰\) Barthou to Laroche, 31 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 32.
\(^8¹\) Ibid.
\(^8²\) Scott, *Alliance Against Hitler*, p. 187.
\(^8³\) Note of the Assistant Director of Europe -- The Eastern Regional Pact, 9 August 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 87.
\(^8⁴\) Note of the French Ambassador in Warsaw -- Conversation with Beck, 22 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 491.
did France value its relationship with Poland, it remained outside the Eastern Pact. Thus, its alliance with Poland and Czechoslovakia remained distinct and intact.\textsuperscript{85} Laroche cautioned that the Franco-Polish alliance had been weakened by Poland's recent movement towards bilateral agreements.\textsuperscript{86} This tension could be eliminated by Poland embracing the Barthou-Litvinov plan.

A major Polish concern was the transit of foreign troops over Polish territory. Poland questioned what advantages France would gain from the Eastern Pact since Russia could not assist France directly because the two states did not share a border. If a counterweight was needed in the East, only Poland could legitimately fill the role.\textsuperscript{87} It was clear that the Poles were hostile to any agreement which could result in German or Russian troops, even as allies, on their territory.\textsuperscript{88} Barthou noted that this problem of geography would not be changed by the existence or absence of the Pact.\textsuperscript{89} In the case of a German-Russian conflict, France would support Poland. However, if a German-Polish war erupted, would Russian aid be so bad?\textsuperscript{90} Barthou recognized that transit would be a problem and had placed the Eastern Pact under the auspices of the League of Nations in the hope of lessening Polish resistance.\textsuperscript{91} Barthou also stressed that mutual assistance did

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{85} Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 2 August 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no 45.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Barthou to Laroche, 31 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Kammerer to Barthou, reserved, 5 Sept. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 238.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Laroche to Barthou, very confidential, 16 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 473. See also Erskine to Simon, 21 July 1934, DBFP, ser. II, VI, no. 519. Erskine noted that Soviet or German troops on Polish territory would "be repellent to every Pole", even if the problems of transit had been worked out and the offer of assistance was sincere.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Barthou to Laroche, 31 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{90} \textit{ibid.} Laroche noted that such assistance would also be helpful to France, as it was obligated to help Poland. See Laroche to Barthou, reserved, 2 August 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Scott, \textit{Alliance Against Hitler}, p. 176. Thus, Articles 10 and 16 of the League Covenant were in force. Article 16, paragraph 3 of the Covenant states: "The Members of the League agree...that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League." // Radice notes, however, that the Eastern
not only include troops requiring transit. For example, by adhering to the Pact, Poland would have access to much needed Soviet war materials.92

For some Poles, the military agreement with France made an alliance with the Soviets unnecessary.93 This must have sent chills through Barthou and indeed other Frenchmen, for not only were the French unprepared to fight a defensive war on Poland’s behalf, the majority were unwilling. Since 1926, and especially since March 1934, the French had wanted to renegotiate the Franco-Polish military convention of 1921. Arguing that the agreement was outdated and many of the stipulations obsolete, the French offered to revise the treaty.94 The Poles, however, refused to alter their relationship with France in any way for fear of losing the French connection.

The expanded military responsibilities were another Polish concern. From a military point of view, the Eastern Pact would increase Poland’s obligations, forcing it to grant assistance to states such as Czechoslovakia. The spirit of the Polish army, however, was set on defending Poland only.95 Where the Barthou-Litvinov project meant security for eight states at one time, Poland’s present position meant obligations of assistance to only two states—France and Romania. With so many states included in the Eastern Pact, the future implications of participation were hard to predict.96 Józef Lipski, the Polish Ambassador to Germany, who was in close contact with Beck, stressed that if

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92 Barthou to Laroche, 31 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 32.
93 Laroche to Barthou, very confidential, 16 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 473.
94 Note of the Department, 24 March 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 37. See also General Dobeney’s Mission in Poland, 25 June 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 385.
95 Erskine to Simon, 21 July 1934, DBFP, ser. II, VI, no. 519.
it was only a question of the consultation and non-aggression components of the Eastern Pact, Poland would have less of a problem accepting the proposals.97 But without mutual assistance, the Eastern Pact would be a frail association of states, too weak to deter aggression.

In a confidential communique to Barthou on 5 September, Laroche complained that the objections to the Eastern Pact were not sufficient to justify Poland’s delayed response. Laroche continued in this vein, claiming that if Poland had a friendly disposition towards France, it would have accepted the Eastern Pact in principle months ago, leaving the perfecting of the text until later.98 This negative impression of Polish foreign policy was reinforced in Geneva.

Although Soviet membership in the League of Nations had always been a French condition for alliance, Litvinov had made renewed initiatives immediately after the attempted Nazi putsch in Austria on 25 July.99 It was not until 15 September, however, that the Soviet Union received the requisite invitation, and three days later was formally accepted into the League of Nations.100 Poland had stated early on that if the USSR was granted a permanent seat on the League Council, it would demand the same. This concerned the French because even though Pilsudski was ruling Poland as if it was a

97 Ibid. This had been a concern of Litvinov’s since early July. See Alphand to Barthou, reserved, 13 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 466.
100 Final vote was thirty-nine states in favour of Soviet admission, three against, and seven abstained. See D. Dunn, “Maksim Litvinov: Commissar of Contradiction”, Journal of Contemporary History, 1988, 23 (2), pp. 21-35 for contradictions of the Soviet Union being involved with the League.
great power, Polish acquisition of a Council seat was absurd.\(^{101}\) When it came down to the Polish response regarding Soviet admission, Beck stated that he had no objection to entry or the permanent seat, and made no mention of a Polish Council seat.\(^{102}\) However, on 13 September, two days before the proposal for Soviet entry was forwarded, Beck denounced the 1919 Minorities Treaty and announced that in the future Poland would deal with her minority issues herself, independent of any tutelage.\(^{103}\) Beck claimed that the Polish move tarnished Soviet entry into the League of Nations.\(^{104}\) But Laroche reported that Beck’s actions were undoubtedly related to prestige and stated that recent diplomatic events, such as the Franco-Soviet rapprochement and Soviet entry into the League, had lessened Poland’s diplomatic achievements and weakened its position.\(^{105}\)

Germany officially rejected the Eastern Locarno proposals on 10 September, and Poland followed seventeen days later. Beck remarked in his memoirs, “We had to play the ungrateful part of the spoil sport partner.”\(^{106}\) Beck’s response stated that he did not understand how the Eastern Pact would further Polish security. Having said this, the Polish government would embrace the Pact if three conditions were met: first, it had to be clearly stated that the Eastern Pact would not replace/void the German-Polish

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\(^{101}\) Payart to Barthou, reserved, 24 July 1934, DDF, ser. I, VI, no. 495.

\(^{102}\) Barthou to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, very confidential, reserved, 7 Sept. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 264. Notes were exchanged between Moscow and Warsaw on 10 September which guaranteed the validity of existing agreements between the two Governments. See Charles to Simon, 25 Sept. 1934, DBFP, ser. II, XII, no. 111.

\(^{103}\) Radice, Prelude to Appeasement, p. 89. // The 1919 Minorities Treaty had always irritated the Poles as an infringement of national sovereignty. Warsaw, fearful of conflicts with Moscow over the fate of Ukrainian and Belorussian minorities in Poland, was afraid that the Soviet Union would “wield the minorities weapon against Poland as the Germans had done before the Nazi regime. See Cannistraro, “Polish Foreign Policy”, p. 74.

\(^{104}\) Beck, Final Report, p. 66.

\(^{105}\) Laroche to Barthou, 14 Sept. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 314.

\(^{106}\) Beck, Final Report, p. 69.
Declaration of January 1934; second, Poland would under no circumstances be asked to sign anything having to do with Lithuania; and finally, Czechoslovakia would remain outside the Pact.\textsuperscript{107} Barthou, understandably disappointed, responded that the Polish conditions emptied the Pact of the majority of its substance.\textsuperscript{108} Barthou failed to realize that Germany’s negative attitude to the Eastern Pact had only encouraged Polish intransigence.\textsuperscript{109}

After the Polish refusal, Franco-Polish relations remained tense. The alliance seemed void of any common sentiment. The now well-known Polish complaints were repeated: fear of the Franco-Soviet rapprochement, decreased importance of the Polish state, the issue of passage, and resentment at how France had treated Poland as an ally. Laroche reported that Poland was more afraid of what it perceived to be true than reality. He continued, complaining that the Polish grievances were childish and characteristic of a new power trying to become great.\textsuperscript{110}

Litvinov returned to Moscow at the beginning of October depressed. The Soviets were now members of the League, but the Eastern Pact was dead. The Commissar’s melancholy was magnified with the tragic assassination of Louis Barthou on 9 October.\textsuperscript{111} In the words of French historian J.B. Duroselle, Barthou’s death “marked the

\textsuperscript{107} Barthou to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, very confidential, reserved, 7 Sept. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 264.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. After receiving the Polish refusal, Barthou asked Beck what he thought of a Franco-Soviet alliance. He answered “That concerns you. You are free.” Barthou replied, “No, it concerns you too. Firstly because one does not sign a treaty without informing an ally, and secondly, because you are directly affected.”
\textsuperscript{109} Radice, Prelude to Appeasement, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{110} Alphand to Barthou, 26 Sept. 1934, DDF, ser. I, VII, no. 375.
\textsuperscript{111} For an interesting and entertaining exposé on Barthou’s life and death, see R. Young’s “A Talent for All Seasons: The Life and Times of Louis Barthou”, Queen’s Quarterly, 1991, 98 (4), pp. 846-864. Also see B. Kovrig’s “Mediation by Obfuscation”.
end of a great policy, the only one which could still have saved France from war and aggression." Anthony Eden later recalled that the shots that killed King Alexander and Barthou were the first shots of the Second World War. To add salt to Litvinov’s wounded hopes, Pierre Laval, the self-professed anti-Soviet and pro-German, was named the new French Foreign Minister.

Pilsudski saw the rise of Hitler not as a threat, but as an opportunity to enhance Polish influence, if not actual power, in Europe. Barthou and Litvinov saw the European situation very differently. To them, it was obvious that Hitler had evil intentions and nothing short of collective action could stop him. Thus, France and the Soviet Union agreed on two things in 1934 -- Hitler had to be stopped and Poland was a nuisance. Poland held the crucial position with regards to the Eastern Pact, because if it agreed to the plan, Hitler would be forced either to adhere also or reveal his aggressive intentions. Pilsudski, however, was content with his respective agreements with Hitler and Stalin, even though he had no way of militarily enforcing either. Just as Barthou had not understood the direction of Polish policy, Pilsudski had not appreciated the value of the Eastern Pact. By October 1934, the idea of an Eastern Pact had fizzled out, but Hitler continued to grow stronger.

112 Adamthwaite, Grandeur and Misery, p. 194. [quoting Duroselle’s La Décadence, p. 101.]
CHAPTER THREE
BECK’S “POLICY OF A SEEWSAW”: KEEPING POLAND’S OPTIONS OPEN

During the years 1935-1938, Hitler almost totally reversed the territorial boundaries of the Versailles system without firing a shot. The reoccupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss and Munich occurred in swift succession. Yet despite these Nazi triumphs, Beck remained confident that Hitler had no ill intentions towards Poland. In fact, Poland’s foreign policy was also aggressive, as Beck seized opportunities presented to him in the wake of Hitler’s conquests. By interpreting the Franco-Polish alliance as bilateral in nature, and thus rejecting any sense of obligation to France’s other allies, Beck avoided closer relations with the Soviet Union. By this “double game” of maintaining cordial relations with France and the USSR, and constantly flirting with Germany, Beck was able to exploit events for immediate benefits, however not without betraying Pilsudski’s alliance system.

Pierre Laval’s foreign policy was defined by a rapprochement with Italy, an understanding with Germany and bettered Franco-Polish relations.¹ In early 1935 Franco-Polish relations remained strained because of the Eastern Pact,² while Poland’s

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² Laroche to Laval, 26 Jan. 1935, DDF, ser. I, IX, no. 85. Other reasons for a stressed Franco-Polish relationship were the tense Soviet-Polish relationship and the Polish parallelism of German principles, for example the preference for bilateral accords. These conflicts worried the French and also some Poles. See Laroche to Laval, secret, 6 Feb. 1935, DDF, ser. I, IX, no. 166.
relationship with Germany seemed to improve, as did France’s relationship with the
Soviet Union.³ Laroche complained that the German-Polish rapprochement, which had
allowed Poland to give itself “the allusion of independence”, had gone far enough.⁴ He
reasoned that it was the security provided by the alliance with France that permitted
Poland to administer its foreign policy of balance. Thus, the French hoped that Pilsudski
would remain faithful to France and that the Franco-Polish alliance would not be
sacrificed for a more definite entente with Germany.⁵

On 16 March 1935, Hitler announced conscription.⁶ The Polish, French and
Soviet reaction to the German announcement was one of grave concern. The Soviets
knew well that the Germans had been researching tank and aviation technology for years.⁷
French and Polish fears were compounded by embarrassment.⁸ Despite the concern
throughout Europe, nothing substantial was done to punish Germany for breaking the

1935, DDF, ser. I, IX, no. 97. Signed on 5 December 1934, the Franco-Soviet Declaration marked the
mutual determination to continue their collaboration even if the Eastern Pact failed. In addition, this Joint
Protocol stated that neither signatory would enter into negotiations with future members of the Eastern Pact
and each side would inform the other if it received proposals for such negotiations. See J. Degras, ed.,
⁴ Laroche to Laval, secret, 6 Feb. 1935, DDF, ser. I, IX, no. 166.
⁵ Ibid. A major concern was that the Polish press would show that France had abandoned Poland and thus
Poland’s subsequent leaning towards Germany was France’s fault. See Laroche to Laval, confidential, 14
⁶ Hitler’s announcement meant that the German army would soon be comprised of 36 divisions and about
600,000 men. The Treaty of Versailles supposedly limited Germany to 7 divisions and a total of 100,000
men. This increase meant that only the Red Army, recently increased to almost one million men, would
outnumber the German. The German announcement came after the British announcement of rearmament
(March 4) and the French announcement of two-year military service (March 15). See Scott, Alliance
Against Hitler, pp. 116-132.
⁷ Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 232. The Russians had abetted the Germans with secret training stations
from 1926 until 1933.
⁸ France was embarrassed because Laval’s policy had preached an understanding with Hitler. Similarly,
while talking to the English ambassador at the end of March, Beck admitted that German rearmament had
placed Poland, and indeed Europe, in an embarrassing situation. See Laroche to Laval, 29 March 1935,
DDF, ser. I, X, no. 66.
Versailles Treaty. Laval's overtly pro-German policy, however, was abandoned and it was decided closer relations with the Soviet Union should be pursued.9

It was the inertia of Barthou's policy that led the French to conclude the Franco-Soviet Pact on 2 May 1935.10 The Soviet desire for an "automatic" pact, which would "leave no time for delay and no loophole to escape from obligation," was squashed by Laval.11 Laval stated "I have extracted the most dangerous things from (the Pact). I do not trust the Russians."12 Rather, a more relaxed agreement which would not contradict the League Covenant, the Franco-Polish alliance, or the Locarno Treaty was signed.13

The heart of the Pact was Article II which stated that in the case of an unprovoked attack by a European state which met the criteria specified in Article 15, paragraph 7 of the League Covenant, the Soviet Union, and reciprocally France, would immediately give each other aid and assistance. By linking the Pact to the League of Nations, the

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9 Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 231. Litvinov invited Laval on 19 March to a meeting and Laval himself apparently suggested that the invitation be accepted at the 20 March Cabinet meeting. // Another impetus to deal with the Soviets was the German-Soviet commercial accord signed 9 April 1935. Although supposedly it had no political implications, the fear of Rapallo intensified. See Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 240.

10 Carley, "Prelude To Defeat", p. 176. The Pact consisted of a Treaty of Mutual Assistance and a Protocol of Signature. The pact would be initiated by ratification by the respective countries and if not denounced after five years, would remain in effect indefinitely. The Franco-Soviet Pact was followed by the Soviet-Czech Non-Aggression Pact on 16 May. Importantly, Soviet assistance would only be forthcoming if France aided Czechoslovakia first. Geography should also be kept in mind, as the Soviet Union did not have a common frontier with Germany or Czechoslovakia.

11 Alphand to Laval, 9 April 1935, DDF, ser. I, X, no. 158 and Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 239. // Georges Bonnet, French Foreign Minister from April 1938 to September 1939, would later complain that France should not have signed anything with the Soviets or immediately negotiated a military convention. This would have avoided the incompatibility of the Franco-Soviet Treaty with France's other obligations, namely its treaty with Poland. See G. Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay, (Isle of Man: Times Press, 1965), p. 131. // J. Dreifort, Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973), p. 107. // In his memoirs, Paul Reynaud quotes V. P. Potemkin, then Soviet Ambassador to Paris, that French negotiators were instructed to "give the future Franco-Soviet Pact a purely formal character. Thus, they endeavoured to divorce it from everything that could instil into it the vigour of an effective instrument for peace." See P. Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight 1930-1945, trans. J. Lambert, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 41.

12 Scott, Alliance Against Hitler, p. 239. The latter was the most important because the French feared that if France assisted Russia by invading Germany, the British might aid Germany.
“immediate” aid would only be forthcoming if the League unanimously agreed that the circumstances were such that the Franco-Soviet Treaty should be invoked.14 This connection to the League, indeed “a cogwheel intended to jam the works”,15 disappointed the Soviets and convinced them that the French were not committed to the alliance.16

Poland was the primary French concern when contemplating the Franco-Soviet Treaty and in an effort to regain Poland’s confidence, France kept Poland informed of the negotiations.17 Beck was not necessarily opposed to mutual assistance pacts including other states, as long as Polish interests were not compromised.18 Concerned that a Franco-Soviet agreement would push Poland into the arms of Hitler,19 the French General Staff felt that the Polish alliance must not be jeopardized for a Soviet alliance, unless there was no question that Poland’s sympathies lay with Germany.20 Beck appreciated the bilateral and limited nature of the Franco-Soviet agreement and requested that the French indicate that the existence of the Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Pact had contributed to the recent Franco-Soviet understanding. Laroche advised doing this for Beck, as it would give the impression that good relations between Poland and the Soviet Union had permitted France, allied with Poland, to better its relationship with Russia.21

15 Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight, p. 41.
16 Haslam, The Struggle for Collective Security, pp. 80-82. // Robert Coulondre, French Ambassador in Moscow, admitted in October 1938 that the Franco-Soviet Treaty neither protected France against German-Soviet collusion nor against an intensification of Comintern activity in France. See Bonnet, Quai d’Orsay, p. 132.
17 Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, p. 396.
20 Ibid.
21 Laroche to Laval, 8 May 1935, DDF, ser. I, X, no. 324 and Laroche to Laval, 8 May 1935, DDF, ser. I, X, no. 321. // Poland maintained its allegiance to France but made it clear that its relationship with the
With Pilsudski’s death on 12 May 1935, Beck became “not merely the chief executor but also the principal architect” of foreign policy. The aim of Polish policy continued to be to protect Polish territory from becoming a Russian-German battlefield and prevent a German-Soviet rapprochement. Poland “would be seriously endangered if German-Russian relations deteriorated too far, and even more seriously if they became too intimate.” It was obvious early on that Beck was more pro-German than the old Marshal, however the French hoped that certain Polish personalities, such as Edward Rydz-Smigly, would strengthen the Franco-Polish alliance. Beck’s position was not as secure now that Pilsudski was gone.

Soviet disappointment with France’s persistent flirtation with Germany was compounded by the rapid decline of Soviet-Polish relations in the latter half of 1935 and 1936. As Poland complained of Comintern activities, the Soviets were fearful that Poland was involved in an anti-Soviet Polish-German bloc. The conviction that the Soviet Union only wanted friendly relations with Poland was growing in the West, much

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26 Events complicating Soviet-Polish relations were Beck’s visit to Berlin in July and the expulsion from Russia of Jan Otman-Berson, the Moscow correspondent of *Gazeta Polska* for his alleged spreading of “malicious and slanderous information about the USSR, bordering in its form and tone of political hooliganism.” The most dramatic illustration of the tensions took place in Geneva when Beck, responding to Litvinov’s remarks, launched a personal attack on the Soviet Commissar. See Budurowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations*, pp. 75 - 82.
27 Ibid., p. 75.
to the chagrin of Beck. This belief “seriously handicapped” Beck’s efforts to win understanding and sympathy for Warsaw’s wary attitude towards Moscow.28

Germany’s strength was confirmed when 22,000 German troops marched into the demilitarized Rhineland on 7 March 1936, violating the Versailles and Locarno treaties.29 The reoccupation caused great emotion in France and affected the general order of Europe.30 Hitler’s gamble that Italy and Britain, the guarantors of Locarno, would not mobilize, and that France would not act alone, proved correct.31 French inaction carried a definite message to its Eastern allies. France’s inability and/or unwillingness to defend its own borders seriously compromised the probability of French support in the case of German aggression in the East.32

France hoped that the Rhineland crisis would convince Poland that Hitler “looked above all to have free hands in the East” and thus result in a reconsideration of the German-Polish relationship.33 Beck responded to the German move by stating that Poland’s relationship with Germany was not of the same calibre as its alliance with

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28 Ibid., p. 79.
30 Noël to Flandin, 8 March 1936, DDF, ser. II, I, no. 324. The Soviet reaction was a call for collective opposition and a termination of the commercial accord negotiations with Germany. See Corbin to Flandin, 10 March 1936, DDF, ser. II, I, no. 366 // However, on 29 April 1936, a new Soviet-German trade agreement was concluded, renewing the 200 millions Deutsche Mark credit obtained in 1935. See Haslam, The Struggle for Collective Security, p. 103.
31 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 37. // Polish General Rydz-Smigly later regretted that the French had not defended the Rhineland because, according to him, Germany was unprepared for war. See Noël to Flandin, secret, 14 May 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 214.
32 Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, p. 434. // Adamthwaite argues that the Rhineland was a turning point which marked “the beginning of the end for the eastern allies.” However he also notes that the Eastern alliances were more important to France after 7 March, as the French military realized that they could not hold their own against Germany. Consequently, the general staff re-emphasized the Polish and Czech alliances. See Adamthwaite, Grandeur and Misery, pp. 204-205, Lukasiewicz, Diplomat in Paris, pp. 4-5 and Young, In Command of France, p. 142. Young argues that this lack of confidence in France as an ally further led Poland to attempt to reach an understanding with revisionist Germany.
33 Noël to Flandin, 23 March 1936, DDF, ser. II, I, no. 490.
France and that renewed “contact and collaboration” was necessary between France and Poland. Beck, also assuming that France would not mobilize against Germany, informed Paris on 7 March that Poland would aid France in whatever it decided to do. However, Beck’s pledges of solidarity were questioned when a statement, published 8 March, appeared to justify the German reoccupation. The Iskra publication stated that Polish-German relations were regulated bilaterally and the German move primarily affected the Locarno Pact of which Poland was not a part. Nevertheless, Poland could not ignore the German action, for it affected “the system of political relations in Europe toward which the Polish government, despite its restrained foreign policy, could not remain indifferent.” This ambiguous message contributed to Beck’s personal assurances being met with reserve by the French and indeed illustrated Beck’s elaborate “double game” of maintaining good relations with both France and Germany.

The incoherency of the French alliance system was manifested by Beck’s interpretation of the Franco-Polish alliance. Beck considered the military alliance of 1921 as the foundation, whereas the French stressed the League-inspired 1925 treaty.

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34 Noël to Flandin, 7 March 1936, DDF, ser. II, I, no. 303. // The Poles were concerned about the loss of the Rhineland, which now allowed Hitler to build a network of fortifications on the Rhine which could hinder retaliation against German aggression. See Noël to Flandin, secret, 14 May 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 214.

35 Polonsky, Politics in Independent Poland, p. 473.

36 Wandycz, Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, pp. 439-440. The statement was published in Gazeta Polska under the guise of the semi-official news agency Iskra.

37 Flandin to Noël, 23 March 1936, DDF, ser. II, I, no. 488 and Polonsky, Politics in Independent Poland, p. 473.

38 Note of the Direction of Political Affairs - French Security, very confidential, 30 June 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 372. France constituted the only political bond between the five allied countries (France, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia).


40 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 24. See Lukasiewicz, Diplomat in Paris, p. 7 for text of General Smigly-Rydz’s 1936 declaration to Gamelin which pledged Poland’s dedication to the 1921 agreement.
By looking at the Franco-Polish alliance through "bilateral lenses", Beck maintained that Poland was only obligated to act in the case where France was attacked. Outside of this, Poland retained its freedom and had absolutely no obligations to France’s other allies, and thus was not linked in any way to a general solidarity. This interpretation allowed Beck to practise his “policy of a seesaw” - that is, dealing with the West and Germany independently and concurrently.

Just as France considered its alliance with Poland necessary, the main reason for the Franco-Soviet alliance was to ensure that the USSR remained an ally. Nevertheless, Franco-Soviet relations did not improve as much as some hoped. French ratification of the Pact proved difficult because the domestic balance of political influence forbade a closer rapprochement with the Soviets. It was not until after the Rhineland reoccupation that the French Parliament unenthusiastically ratified the agreement. Whereas Franco-Soviet relations had previously been hindered by the debt question, they were now troubled by ideological agitation. Reinforced by the Spanish Civil War, the

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42 Noël to Delbos, secret, reserved, 3 May 1937, DDF, ser. II, V, no. 389. This belief was manifested in Beck’s terms “political independence” and the “politics of bilateral accords.”
43 Noël to Delbos, very confidential, 21 Sept. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 271.
44 Laroche to Laval, confidential, 14 Jan. 1935, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 213. There was a strong belief in France that if its alliance with Poland did not exist, then Germany would establish itself in Poland.
45 Alphand to Flandin, 7 April 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 35.
48 Coulondre to Delbos, 12 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 472 and Coulondre to Delbos, 16 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 497. // On 4 June 1936, the Popular Front, a coalition of Socialists, Radical Socialists and Communists formed the government under Léon Blum, with Yvon Delbos as his Foreign Minister. In the fall of 1936, Blum was noticeably upset at the wave of strikes in France and shied away from the
French bitterness towards Communism again resurfaced and pushed the German danger into the background. It was Stalin, not Hitler, that was considered Europe's enemy.\(^{50}\) The failure to improve Franco-Soviet relations despite the Pact, and the dismal state of Soviet-Polish relations, inevitably led to a resurgence of Soviet isolationism, as it appeared that the USSR would have to rely on itself for security.\(^{51}\)

André François-Poncet, the French Ambassador in Berlin, reported 2 July 1936 that the avoidance of all polemics and public discussion on outstanding issues between Poland and Germany had created "an unnatural atmosphere of confidence."\(^{52}\) Danzig illustrated this. Beck, in his attempt to maintain close relations with Hitler, chose not to oppose the methodical Nazi takeover of the Free City.\(^{53}\) In early July, François-Poncet had this to say of Poland:

Poland flatters itself, without doubt, with the hope that it will produce a neighbour [Germany] to which its friendship is precious. Soon, however, if it continues to slide on the slope where it puts itself, it is Poland that, in order to guard its friendship with Germany, will submit to its wishes.\(^{54}\)

Thus, Germany was able to control Poland not by treaties, but rather by unresolved issues and the fear of complications.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{49}\) Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 45. See also Haslam, The Struggle for Collective Security, pp. 107-128 and Young, In Command of France, pp. 136-140.

\(^{50}\) Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 46.


\(^{52}\) François-Poncet to Delbos, 2 July 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 382.


\(^{54}\) François-Poncet to Delbos, 8 July 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 410.

\(^{55}\) François-Poncet to Delbos, 2 July 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 382.
The remilitarization of the Rhineland showed the insufficient state of preparedness of the Polish army and its need for armaments. Despite several German offers to supply it with war materials, Poland looked to France for an agreement. The Rambouillet Accord, which outlined French armaments assistance to Poland, was signed on 6 September 1936. This Accord created an atmosphere in which Polish public opinion was able, without reserve, to show its dedication to France. However, as Robert Young notes, the Poles seemingly “got off scot free” because the two billion franc loan in money and material was negotiated without a Polish promise to co-operate with the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia.

The bettered French-Polish relationship that resulted from the Rambouillet Accord produced a “very strong jealousy” in Moscow. Frustrated that there was no significant progress in Soviet-Polish relations, the Soviets argued that the renewed declarations of the Franco-Polish alliance would only have merit if they were paralleled

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56 Noël to Flandin, confidential, reserved, 24 May 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 238 and Noël to Delbos, 13 August 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 139.
57 Noël to Flandin, confidential, reserved, 24 June 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 349. For several months Germany had offered Poland war materials in exchange for transit over the Corridor. Although Poland had avoided such negotiations, such a deal was possible. // Noël reported in mid-August 1936 that Poland would be “profoundly disappointed” if France did not supply the war materials it so desperately needed. See Noël to Delbos, 13 August 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 139.
59 Young, In Command of France, p. 143.
60 Noël to Delbos, very confidential, reserved, 16 August 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 153. Gamelin, Chief of the General Staff, visited Warsaw and his reception was much better than the German officials’. The Poles were hyped for the execution of an armament program. See Noël to Delbos, 17 August 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 159.
61 Coulondre to Delbos, 28 Dec. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 218. // It seemed to the Soviets that the recent political events favoured Germany’s desire to isolate Russia and that French passivity and Polish duplicity were helping Hitler. See Payart to Delbos, 29 Sept. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 298. // The Soviets were also annoyed at the Polish press, inspired by Beck, which worked with “tireless zeal” to depict Litvinov’s actions in Geneva as contrary to French objectives. See Noël to Delbos, 14 Oct. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 353.
by a marked improvement in Poland’s relations with France’s allies. Litvinov complained bitterly that Beck was and would remain a man of Germany and that his anti-League convictions were harmful. Robert Coulondre, the French Ambassador to the USSR, cautioned Litvinov that it was a political mistake to extend to the Polish nation the grievances of Beck’s personal politics. Coulondre stressed that the three states faced a common danger, and must work together “to round the angles, not accentuate the frictions.” However, the French were increasingly concerned that the tightening of the Franco-Polish bond, without improvement in Polish-Soviet relations, would only serve to push the Soviet Union towards isolation.

The “essential key” to Polish politics and the reason why the Poles would always favour Germany over the USSR was a fear of Communism. Noel believed that Poland would wage war if a Soviet soldier crossed onto its territory, but would grant a German army passage to attack the Soviet Union. The Poles considered the Germans “men of order”, however the Russians as barbarians, “with which all contact would be perilous, all

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62 Payart to Delbos, 29 Sept. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 298. // Coulondre stressed that Moscow should welcome closer Franco-Polish relations, for they would lead to better relations between all three states. See Coulondre to Delbos, 28 Dec. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 218.
63 Coulondre to Delbos, 28 Dec. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 218.
64 Ibid. Coulondre informed Litvinov that Poland was turning away from Germany and stressed that the Soviet Union should favour this movement “rather than harden the Polish state by attacking it through a man.”
65 Ibid.
66 François-Poncet to Delbos, 4 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 441. See also Coulondre to Delbos, 27 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 49. // Delbos complained that the “fertile collaboration” between France and Poland could not accommodate Poland leading action against the League or against other French allies or helping governments that threaten France or French interests. See Delbos to Noël, reserved, 30 April 1937, DDF, ser. II, V, no. 369.
67 Noël to Flandin, 25 May 1936, DDF, ser. II, II, no. 242. // The French never wanted to force the Poles to choose between Germany or the Soviet Union, because their choice was unclear, and probably Germany. See Noël to Bonnet, secret, 31 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 495.
compromise mortal." Waclaw Grzybowski, the Polish Ambassador to the USSR, would tell Noël in May 1938 that "the Germans and Russians are equally our adversaries. But the Russians, if we allow them to act, will take our soul." Here was the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of French diplomacy.

The end of 1936 saw Polish-German intimacy peak and begin to decrease, leading Noël to report that dreams of restoring Poland to its sixteenth century status had been aborted and all of Poland's forces concentrated on safeguarding the borders of 1919 and 1920. It seemed that Hitler had committed a "psychological error" in his politics. The Führer had assumed incorrectly that his anti-Soviet declarations would not cause concern in Poland. However, Polish horror of Russia and Bolshevism had not stopped the growing apprehension of a conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union, or even worse, a possible accord between Moscow and Berlin. François-Poncet hypothesized that Hitler would eventually blackmail Poland by offering an agreement in which the fear of Rapallo and Bolshevism would be pacified by Germany's constant arbitrage over Poland.

The Franco-Soviet Pact had served to diminish, however not eradicate, the pro-German current in the Soviet Union. Litvinov and his policy depended on the success of

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69 Noël to Bonnet, secret, 31 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 495.
70 Ibid.
71 Noël to Delbos, confidential, 2 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, III, no. 433. // Since the 26 January 1934 accord, the Polish press had been restricted from publishing negative things about Germany's interior politics. But now Polish newspapers resumed a critical eye. See Noël to Delbos, confidential, 22 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 18.
72 Noël to Delbos, 4 Dec. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 96.
73 Noël to Delbos, confidential, 22 Nov. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 18. Thus the "defensive value" of Russia was being realized by Poland. See Noël to Delbos, 4 Dec. 1936, DDF, ser. II, IV, no. 96.
Western-Soviet collaboration. Litvinov complained throughout 1937 and 1938 that France was moving away from the policy of collective security and speculated that the growing Anglo-French entente would allow France to abandon its alliance with the USSR. Yvon Delbos, French Foreign Minister, assured Litvinov that France had no intention of changing its foreign policy and stressed that collaboration between France and the Soviet Union was only possible if both partners had respect for the other. Such assurances were, however, taken with a grain of salt, as Delbos failed to stop in Moscow on his tour of Eastern Europe in December 1937.

The French were very apprehensive about signing a military accord with the Soviet Union, and thus giving the Franco-Soviet Pact true value. Poland was a main concern. It was reasoned that any Franco-Soviet military collaboration would be accompanied by a parallel deterioration in Franco-Polish relations. This risk of Franco-Polish dislocation was compounded by the fear of a German-Polish collaboration which

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75 Note of the Department - On the Subject of the Value for France of Soviet Collaboration, 24 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 228.


78 Haslam, The Struggle for Collective Security, pp. 152-153. Delbos met with Neurath on 3 December which further upset the Soviets, for the trip was interpreted as a mission for a rapprochement with Germany.

79 The Soviets had attempted on various occasions, beginning with Stalin's offer in May 1935, to engage the French in military negotiations, but to no avail. The Deuxième Bureau was against it for diplomatic, not military, reasons. See P. Buffotot, "The French High Command and the Franco-Soviet Alliance 1933-1939", Journal of Strategic Studies, 1982, 5 (4), pp. 549-551. A main reason for the doubt in the Soviet Union's military capabilities was French General Schweisingh's report in October 1936, in which he concluded, among other negative things, that the Red Army was inadequately prepared for war and the Soviet Government wanted to avoid a conflict at all costs. Schweisingh's report read: "The USSR much prefers that the storm should break over France's head, and at the present time this is the card she is betting on." Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay, p. 146 and Young, In Command of France, pp. 145-149.
would create a bloc in central Europe of 100 million people which could only work to the benefit of Germany. Thus, it was concluded that the risk of Polish defection was more important than a military agreement with the Soviet Union.

Inspired by General Gamelin, Franco-Soviet military talks took place in January 1937. While the Soviets clearly and quickly presented their position, the French negotiators had instructions to drag things out. The talks predictably ended in a stalemate, the French “caught as always between the fear of Russia and the fear of losing it.” The Stalinist purges of the Red Army served as a “convenient excuse” for the French to avoid staff talks with the Soviet Union. Jonathan Haslam argues that the 1937 terror confirmed, rather than initiated, doubts regarding the effectiveness of the Soviet Union as an ally. The purges also affected the balance of power in Eastern Europe. It seemed that the smaller countries bordering the Soviet Union were no longer wedged between two great powers, as the equilibrium had shifted to the German

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80 Note of the State Major of the Army - On the Possibility of Franco-Soviet Military Contact, secret, 9 June 1937, DDF, ser. II, VI, no. 35. See also Dreifort, “The French Popular Front”, p. 228.
81 Note of the State Major of the Army - On the Possibility of Franco-Soviet Military Contact, secret, 9 June 1937, DDF, ser. II, VI, no. 35. // The French General Staff considered Poland’s military forces superior to those of the Soviet Union, except perhaps in aviation. See Dreifort, “The French Popular Front”, p. 220.
82 Young, In Command of France, pp. 148-149. // Suspicion of the Soviet Union was supposedly confirmed when Blum was warned by Czechoslovakian President Benes to exercise “great precautions” in talks with the Soviets, as Czech intelligence had reported that Soviet military leaders were having “suspicious relations” with the Germans. See Dreifort, “The French Popular Front”, pp. 221-222.
83 de Lacroix to Delbos, reserved, 23 Dec. 1937, DDF, ser. II, VII, no. 381. After many reports that the Soviet army had been destroyed, the Czech Secretary General for Foreign Affairs reported that the Red Army was strong and had excellent materials. Thus, it was estimated that the truth lay somewhere between these two polarized accounts. // Krofta, Czech Foreign Minister, would later comment that even if the Red Army was severely weakened, it was in French and Czech interests to report the contrary. See de Lacroix to Paul-Boncour, 21 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 6.
84 Haslam, The Struggle for Collective Security, p. 140. // Notably, by the end of 1937, British and French intelligence concluded that the USSR had superiority over the Third Reich. However even this was not enough to result in serious negotiations with the Soviets. Young, In Command of France, p. 162. // For effects of the purges on the diplomatic core, see T. Uldricks, “The Impact of the Great Purges on the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs”, Slavic Review, 1977, 36 (2), pp. 187-204.
advantage.\textsuperscript{85} While this fact contributed to Beck’s maintenance of the French connection,\textsuperscript{86} it did not inspire the Polish Foreign Minister to re-evaluate Pilsudski’s policy of balance.

The Rambouillet Accord, initiated to improve Franco-Polish relations, served only to increase tensions when the French discovered that they were unable to meet their obligations.\textsuperscript{87} Noël warned that the Poles were not happy and the political benefits of Rambouillet were in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{88} There was a fear that if France did not fulfil the Accord, Germany and Italy would seize the opportunity.\textsuperscript{89} Gamelin, quite disappointed that Polish requests for armaments could not be met, argued that the political order had an obligation to Poland.\textsuperscript{90} The issue of Rambouillet remained pressing.

Beck thrived on the huge patriotic pride of the Polish nation and wanted to inflate his role as the “great” Foreign Minister of a “great” state.\textsuperscript{91} By acting this way, Beck was able to do two things: first, depict himself as the defender of Pilsudski’s ideas and the dignity of Poland; and second, represent another policy which was more or less favourable to Germany, but hostile to the League of Nations.\textsuperscript{92} After his meeting with Hitler in January 1938, Beck was convinced that the Führer had nothing but peaceful intentions towards Poland, although Austria’s situation was different.\textsuperscript{93} Beck believed

\textsuperscript{85} François-Poncet to Delbos, 24 Nov. 1937, DDF, ser. II, VII, no. 266.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Daladier to Auriol, secret, 5 May 1937, DDF, ser. II, V, no. 405. Daladier warned that if the French reneged, it would have a grave effect on the development of the Polish army and result in “some angry repercussions” for military collaboration.
\textsuperscript{88} Noël to Delbos, secret, reserved, 20 Jan. 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 11.
\textsuperscript{89} Note of the Department - Furnishing War Materials to Poland, 31 Jan. 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 77.
\textsuperscript{90} Note of the French Service to the League of Nations, 18 Feb. 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 205.
\textsuperscript{91} Laroche to Delbos, 12 July 1937, DDF, ser. II, VI, no. 218.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
that Austria would fulfill Hitler’s desires, and not “whet his appetite for an eastward expansion.” Consequently, as Europe watched the German troops march unchallenged into Austria on 11-12 March 1938, Beck considered the Anschluss a “useful event” for Poland as it would concentrate the Reich’s actions southward. Beck, hoping to define the Baltic as Poland’s “sphere of influence”, looked to profit from Hitler’s successes.

The Anschluss confirmed for France’s allies what the reoccupation of the Rhineland had indicated - the ‘protector’ of Eastern Europe was defunct. Although France technically did not have any obligations to Austria, French passivity further weakened the value attached to its support. The Soviets complained that the French had abandoned their position at a critical moment and warned that if France wanted to avoid losing Czechoslovakia, and thus its influence in Central Europe, it would have to make it clear that German aggression towards Czechoslovakia would not be tolerated.

Riding the emotion created by the Anschluss and judging the Soviet Union momentarily impotent, Poland moved on Lithuania. Responding to the death of a

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94 Ibid., pp. 352-353. The French stressed to Beck that his attitude of disinterest in the Austrian affair was dangerous, as the disappearance of Austria would have grave economic and security ramifications for Poland.

95 Noël to Delbos, reserved, 2 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 298. This cavalier attitude was not shared by all in Poland, as some began to realize the danger Germany posed to Poland. See Noël to Delbos, confidential, reserved, 2 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 300. If some Polish leaders had reassured themselves that Poland was third or fourth on the German list of places to expand to, they watched with great concern the speed with which the first on the list was removed. See Noël to Delbos, 2 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 305.


97 de Lacroix to Paul-Boncour, reserved, 23 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 28. Italy, France and Britain had pledged their support of an independent Austria at the Stresa Conference (April 11-14 1935), however France was not bound by treaty to defend Austria. The “diplomatic flourishes” made by the French to the British regarding the protection of Austria were, Adamthwaite argues, presented purely for domestic political reasons, and nothing substantial was intended. See Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 79.

98 de la Blanchetai to Paul-Boncour, 25 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 50.

99 Noël to Paul-Boncour, confidential, 19 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 507. Soviet interior difficulties and absence of a Soviet reaction in the Far East gave the Poles the impression that the Soviet
Polish soldier, Poland sent Lithuania a 48-hour ultimatum on 17 March demanding that “normal and direct” diplomatic relations between the two countries be re-established by the end of March. The ultimatum was accompanied by anti-Lithuanian demonstrations in several cities and Polish military movement on the Lithuanian frontier. The Polish press, influenced by the Foreign Ministry, threatened Lithuania with “dire consequences” if the ultimatum was not adhered to. Polish opinion approved the move because Poland was finally able to play the role of aggressor. The French and Soviets, the latter warning against Polish aggression, urged Lithuania to accept the ultimatum. Having little choice in the matter, Lithuania concurred.

As Poland profited from Hitler’s aggression against Austria, the Franco-Polish alliance seemed worthless. While Poland remained ‘faithful’ to France, Beck maintained that the Franco-Polish alliance was a bilateral relationship and thus claimed

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Union was no longer a factor. See François-Poncet to Paul-Boncour, 17 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 477.

100 On 11 March 1938, notably the eve of the Anschluss, at Transkas, a Polish soldier was shot by a Lithuanian policeman at a border crossing.

101 Budowicz, Polish-Soviet Relations, pp. 109-110. // Lithuania was part of Beck’s ‘Baltic policy’ which was defined by a Polish-Baltic-Scandinavian bloc, free of Germany and Soviet influence. See Cienciala, Poland and the Western Powers, p. 49.


104 Noël to Paul-Boncour, 21 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 9.


106 Haslam, The Struggle for Collective Security, pp. 161-62. // Many Poles regretted that the ultimatum was accepted because it was too limiting. See Noël to Paul-Boncour, 20 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, VIII, no. 522.

full freedom of action.\textsuperscript{108} After successfully bullying Lithuania, Beck looked to profit from German-Czech difficulties by reclaiming the rights of the Polish minority in Teschen.\textsuperscript{109} Furthermore, Poland remained suspicious of the Soviet Union and had a strong desire to sustain close relations with Germany.\textsuperscript{110} Beck maintained the Franco-Polish alliance as a point of tradition important to his compatriots, and also because it formed the foundation of his diplomatic action towards Germany. Unlike France's broad understanding of the alliance, however, Beck's interpretation was literal.\textsuperscript{111} Thus, Poland had no obligations towards Czechoslovakia.

The issue of passage continued to paralyze potential Soviet support. By virtue of Article 16 of the League Covenant, Poland and Romania would have to allow Soviet troops transit if the Soviet Union was involved in a League approved collective action.\textsuperscript{112} However, it was speculated that if the League met concerning Czechoslovakia, Poland would spoil the necessary unanimity needed to invoke Article 16.\textsuperscript{113} Trying to solicit

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\textsuperscript{108} Note to the Department, 5 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 112 and Note of the Assistant Director of Europe on the Exterior Politics of Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, 26 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 246.

\textsuperscript{109} Note of the Assistant Director of Europe on the Exterior Politics of Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, 26 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 246. // Polish-Czech relations had been marred after the Great War by territorial disputes and different foreign policy strategies. The territorial dispute principally concerned Teschen, an area economically important because of its coal production. In 1918, the Poles and Czechs decided to divide the territory on ethnographic lines, but in 1919, Czech forces occupied the Polish region. The matter was adjudicated in July 1920 at the Spa Conference, in which Poland agreed to accept the decisions of the Great Powers on the Danzig and Teschen questions in return for the promise of allied aid against Soviet Russia. The affair was deeply resented in Poland. See Cienciala, \textit{Poland and the Western Powers}, pp. 12-13.

\textsuperscript{110} Note of the Assistant Director of Europe on the Exterior Politics of Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, 26 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 246.

\textsuperscript{111} Noël to Bonnet, secret, 31 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 495.

\textsuperscript{112} Note to the Department - Soviet Engagement of Assistance Regarding Czechoslovakia, 22 March 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 17.

\textsuperscript{113} Note to the Department, 5 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 112. // Beck travelled to Sweden to get a precise interpretation of Article 16. His argument that because the League was not universal, "each state should have the freedom to make its own decision according to its own interests" received some support.
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Poland's permission, the French argued that Poland could profit from Soviet primary materials\(^\text{114}\) and pledged that if Poland was on side, France would work to diminish the Soviet threat felt by Poland.\(^\text{115}\) Despite these attempts at reasoning, Poland continued to interpret Russia as its primary enemy and remained "resolutely closed" to the passage of Soviet troops.\(^\text{116}\)

Beck kept his options open throughout 1938 arguing that the division of Czechoslovakia was inevitable and would occur peacefully.\(^\text{117}\) The Polish Foreign Minister insisted that any concessions extended to German minorities in Czechoslovakia had to be also extended to the Polish minority.\(^\text{118}\) Beck hoped to use the Czech crisis to improve Poland's strategic position by extending its influence in Eastern Europe.\(^\text{119}\) Beck was frank about his intentions of securing the area of Teschen and his willingness to use force.\(^\text{120}\) Beck argued that Hitler was the "motor" of aggression.\(^\text{121}\) He justified his position by stating that Czechoslovakia's intimacy with the Soviet Union constituted a danger for Poland and inaction would indicate Polish passivity to Hitler.\(^\text{122}\)

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\(^\text{114}\) Note of the Audience of the Minister, 22 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 418. Also see Lukasiewicz, *Diplomat in Paris*, p. 93 and p. 96.

\(^\text{115}\) Note of the Audience of the Minister, 22 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 418.

\(^\text{116}\) Noel to Bonnet, 26 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 454.

\(^\text{117}\) Noel to Bonnet, 8 June 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 525.

\(^\text{118}\) Noel to Paul-Boncour, 20 April 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 212.


\(^\text{120}\) Francois-Poncet to Bonnet, 22 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 297. See also Halifax to Kennard, 16 Sept. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 5.

\(^\text{121}\) Musse to Daladier, secret, 10 June 1938, DDF, ser. II, X, no. 12.

\(^\text{122}\) Noel to Bonnet, reserved, 10 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 307 and Noel to Bonnet, reserved, 23 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 423. // Poland feared that Germany might allow Czechoslovakia a "theoretical independence", but take over its entire political and economic situation. For this reason, Poland preferred the total dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. See Noel to Bonnet, 26 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 454.
arguments did not wash in France. At the end of May 1938, Noël wrote Georges Bonnet, then Foreign Minister:

If the Poles of our time remain politically romantic by the extent of their ambitions...the Pilsudskian school, of which Beck is - at least in this regard - the most characteristic representative, pushes the positive mind to perfect cynicism.\(^{123}\)

Despite the problems and contradictions with the Polish alliance, Noël concluded that it should not be abandoned, for this would force Poland into the arms of Hitler.\(^{124}\) However, Marshal Rydz-Smigly’s refusal at the beginning of June to repeat his 1936 pledge that Poland would never find itself against France illustrated just how far Franco-Polish relations had deteriorated.\(^{125}\) The Poles considered their position towards Teschen as “perfectly compatible” with the Franco-Polish alliance.\(^{126}\) As the events crescendoed towards Munich, Noël concluded “We cannot count on Poland.”\(^{127}\)

The Soviet-Czechoslovakian Mutual Assistance Pact of 1935 was operative only if France first militarily aided Czechoslovakia. However France, now largely subservient to British policy,\(^{128}\) made no pointed efforts to discuss potential military alternatives until

\(^{123}\) Noël to Bonnet, secret, 31 May 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 495.

\(^{124}\) Ibid. Reasons for keeping the Polish alliance ranged from Poland’s geographic position to the Polish attachment to France and the military tradition between the two countries. Thus, instead of deserting Poland, Noël suggested a “restrained” interpretation of the Franco-Polish alliance which favoured the French position and treated Poland as they treated France, “without complaisance and illusion.”

\(^{125}\) Noël to Bonnet, secret, 3 June 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 511. // In the beginning of July, France attempted to better Franco-Polish relations, however Poland refused to exchange notes, confirming the strained Franco-Polish relations. See Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 12 July 1938, DDF, ser. II, X, no. 158. See also Lukasiewicz, Diplomat in Paris, pp. 115-117.

\(^{126}\) General Musse to Daladier, secret, 10 June 1938, DDF, ser. II, X, no. 12.

\(^{127}\) Noël to Bonnet, secret, 3 June 1938, DDF, ser. II, IX, no. 511.

\(^{128}\) For a contrary view, see Young, In Command of France, pp. 158-159 where Young argues that France did not simply bow to Britain.
the end of August.129 Thus, the impotence of the Franco-Soviet alliance continued during the Czech crisis. The mutual mistrust and fear of being unsupported while aiding Czechoslovakia continued to paralyze any concerted effort. As the Soviets resented the French refusals to discuss a military accord,130 the French suspected Moscow of using League approval as a way to justify Soviet abstention from their obligations.131 The Soviet Union maintained its “determination” to fulfil “together with France, all its obligations as laid down in the Soviet-Czech Pact.”132 However, this dedication was easy to claim when passage through Polish territory was not forthcoming.133 Litvinov concluded after the League’s September meeting that Czechoslovakia would be betrayed.134

By the middle of September, it was clear that if Germany moved into the Sudetenland, Poland would take Teschen and then remain neutral. This neutrality would be broken if the Red Army attempted to cross Polish territory.135 Poland’s pledge to defend itself against Soviet encroachment deepened resentment regarding Poland’s policy

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131 Note of the Minister, Conversation with Litvinov, 11 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 95.
133 Note of Political Direction - Implementation of a Possible Soviet-Czech Pact, 6 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 29. // This point was made again in October when Bonnet told Phipps that Litvinov’s incensed reaction to the Munich Agreement was coloured by the USSR’s geographic position. While Germany, Italy, and Spain were all neighbours of France, Russia judged “from a safe and respectable distance from the scene of hostilities.” See Phipps to Halifax, 1 Oct. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 100.
134 Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, p. 88.
135 Noël to Minister of Foreign Affairs, very confidential, reserved, 11 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 90.
If France and the USSR defended Czechoslovakia, and the Soviets met Polish resistance, then Poland would find itself opposing France. While recognizing this "absurd" situation, Polish General Stachiewicz maintained that even though Germany was regarded an enemy, Soviet troops could never be permitted to penetrate Polish territory.137

Czechoslovakia's agreement that the predominantly German areas should be ceded to the Reich without a plebiscite led Beck to make a parallel demand for the Polish interests in Teschen.138 On 20 September, Noël reported that Beck's "tone, attitude and hesitations" indicated that he was considering military action.139 The next day, Poland publicly denounced the Polish-Czech National Minorities Convention of 1925 and Kazimierz Papée, the Polish Ambassador in Prague, formally demanded cession of the Teschen district.140

On 23 September, Polish troops concentrated on the Teschen border. The Soviets reacted by stating that any Polish penetration of Czech territory would result in the

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136 Bonnet to Payart, secret, reserved, 31 August 1938, DDF, ser. II, X, no. 511. See for Poland's statement that it would use force against the Soviet Union.
138 Karski, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 214. // Beck's instructions to Lukasiewicz were sent 15 - 16 September and Lukasiewicz carried them out on 17 September, stating that "...I presented a formal declaration to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that we (Poland) demand a plebiscite and that any discrimination in treating the Polish minority in comparison with the German will cause immediate serious tension between Poland and Czechoslovakia." See Lukasiewicz, Diplomat in Paris, pp. 127-129, note 94.
139 Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 20 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 233. // This was echoed by Kennard, British Ambassador to Poland, who stated that it was a possibility that Poland would present a fait accompli by seizing Teschen. See Kennard to Halifax, 23 Sept. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 36.
140 Karski, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 214. // On 17 September, Bonnet stated that Poland had unofficially announced its intention to reclaim the rights of the Polish minority in Teschen. See Bonnet to Representatives in London and Warsaw, 17 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 187. // Noël reported that the Polish claims to Teschen were debatable and that it would not be transferred without equal injustice. See Noël to Bonnet, confidential, reserved, 21 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 259.
denunciation of the 1932 Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.\textsuperscript{141} Bonnet warned Beck that by following Germany’s lead, Poland risked sharing responsibility for a general upheaval in Central Europe which might be impossible to stop.\textsuperscript{142} Despite negative references to France in the violently anti-Czech Polish press,\textsuperscript{143} Western fear that pressure might push Poland into Hitler’s camp precluded stronger action.\textsuperscript{144}

Even though the Munich Agreement implicitly recognized the need to settle Polish claims, “in Beck’s nostrils the Agreement stank of the odious ‘Four Power Pact’.”\textsuperscript{145} Consequently, Poland pursued its goals independently. When the Czech reply to the 27 September Polish Note failed to mention the ceding of the Teschen and Freistadt districts, the Polish government increased its pressure.\textsuperscript{146} On 30 September, only eleven hours after the Czechoslovakian government had accepted the Munich Agreement,\textsuperscript{147} Papée delivered the Polish ultimatum to Kamil Krofta, Czech Foreign Minister. The ultimatum demanded the cession of the preponderantly Polish areas of Teschen to Poland within twenty-four hours, and other areas within ten days.\textsuperscript{148} In the case of even partial

\textsuperscript{141} Coulondre to Bonnet, 23 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 318 and Coulondre to Bonnet, 4 October 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 20.
\textsuperscript{142} Bonnet to Noel, extremely urgent, 23 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 315.
\textsuperscript{143} Kennard to Halifax, 23 Sept. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 32.
\textsuperscript{144} Noël to Bonnet, confidential, reserved, 21 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 259. // Kennard warned against Britain and France presenting themselves as obstacles to Poland’s “so-called legitimate interests, and Germany as her champion.” See Kennard to Halifax, 23 Sept. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 36.
\textsuperscript{146} Kennard to Halifax, 30 Sept. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 75.
\textsuperscript{147} The Munich Conference was not only “a snub” for Beck, as he was not invited, but also indicated the apparent failure of his entire policy. See Cienciala, Poland and the Western Powers, pp. 139-141.
refusal, Polish troops would march into Czechoslovakia. Having no options, Benes accepted the conditions.

Beck had again used the circumstances generated by Hitler to secure Polish gains. Noël noted that Beck had acted boldly only after the threat of war had subsided with the acceptance of the Munich Agreement. Beck’s actions had the support of all Polish leaders who agreed that the present opportunities had to be seized in order to repair the “injustice” of 1919, when Czech troops had moved into Teschen. By 11 October, the Polish conditions had been met and Beck was celebrated as a genius. However, this was a hollow victory, for at the same moment that Beck was domestically hailed a hero, Pilsudski’s principles and established allies found themselves “gravely compromised”. While Beck’s policies ran the risk of Poland facing the Reich alone, Poland seemingly cared little about French anger or the dismal state of Franco-Polish relations.

Beck’s “politics of a seesaw” allowed him to maintain his diplomatic freedom while preserving his relations with France and Germany. Although claiming his “faithfulness” to France, his bilateral interpretation of the Franco-Polish alliance

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149 Noël to Bonnet, extremely urgent, reserved, 30 Sept. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 491.
150 Although he considered the ultimatum “inadmissible”, Bonnet told Benes to accept it. See Bonnet to Noël, 1 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XI, no. 502.
151 Noël to Bonnet, confidential, 3 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 7. Noël noted that when war seemed possible, Poland had not been aggressive, the Polish army maintaining that it would never fight on the German side against France. // Kennard recognized this also, noting that only after the Anschluss and Austria’s subsequent weakened position did Beck administer a press attack against “the sister Slav Republic”. Kennard to Halifax, 5 Oct. 1938, DBFP, ser. III, III, no. 136.
152 Noël to Bonnet, confidential, 3 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 7. Noël outlined two main schools of thought among Polish leaders - one was pro-German, anti-League and the other was neutral, leaning towards the West. But both agreed with the ultimatum and Beck’s policy towards Czechoslovakia.
154 Noël to Bonnet, 11 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 76.
permitted him to become aggressive in 1938, first towards Lithuania, then Czechoslovakia. But the inherent weakness of his foreign policy remained, as Poland had no way of protecting itself from a German policy change. This was admitted by Count Szembek, Polish Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, when he warned that "the policy of good neighbourliness which [had] its origin in the agreement of 1934 could easily disappear as a pure fiction." By the middle of October, Poland's blissful satisfaction was fading in the realization that Germany was stronger and Poland estranged from its allies.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLISH “SICKNESS” AND THE CRISIS OF 1939

The Munich Agreement was a sorry substitute for the collective security system Barthou and Litvinov had envisioned. And while Czechoslovakia bore the brunt of the defeat, Soviet, French and Polish foreign policies were affected by the diplomatic surrender. The Soviet Union felt betrayed and recoiled. The lessons it learned from Munich became painfully obvious during the tripartite negotiations of 1939, as the Soviets demanded protection against another Western capitulation. France looked to move away from alliance obligations, nestling itself under the wing of British policy. French diplomatic initiatives would begin again almost a year later, but by then it was too late. The Polish-Soviet rapprochement which occurred in 1939 was shallow because the cardinal issue of Soviet passage was never addressed. The Polish “sickness” of avoiding direct relations with the Soviet Union prevented a Western-Soviet military agreement in August 1939. The consequences of Beck’s inability or unwillingness to re-evaluate the primary danger to Poland were dire.

During the last three months of 1938, French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet moved to reduce all French obligations in East and East Central Europe, and turned to Germany hoping to secure an agreement parallel to the Anglo-German Declaration of 30
September 1938. While France would not denounce outright its existing accords with Poland and the Soviet Union, it comprehensively reviewed each relationship and in both cases looked to the League of Nations to absolve itself. The alliances with Poland and the Soviet Union were no longer valued by France and more, were "resented as a burden".

Noël concluded that France and Poland were like a dysfunctional couple, unwilling to divorce, but whose reciprocal hostility could find itself constantly exacerbated. Consequently, in late October Noël advocated a re-examination of the Franco-Polish accords, which would abrogate France’s obligation of automatic military assistance. Despite French unhappiness, Poland remained an important political factor and Polish support, in the case of a Franco-German war, was considered extremely precious. The French feared that if their relationship with Poland was weakened, Poland would bind itself to Germany. Considering all these factors, Noël suggested that the Franco-Polish alliance be replaced with a friendship and consultation treaty, completed with a limited military accord which permitted staff talks. The French Juridical

3 Noël to Bonnet, 25 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 216. The fact that France was unlikely to defend the Corridor or Danzig served as an excuse, if not a justification, for the hostile acts of Polish diplomacy towards France.
4 *Ibid*. In November, Bonnet assured Noël that there was no need to revise the 1921 Accord because there were enough "loopholes" to keep France out of war. See Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 271.
5 For this reason, the French were very concerned about Poland's military capability because Polish weapons were in short supply and the industry was in desperate need of materials. See Note of the Second Bureau of the State Major of the Army - Poland, 30 Jan. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 462 and Bonnet, *Quai d'Orsay*, p. 234.
6 Noël to Bonnet, 26 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 220.
Department concluded at the end of December 1938 that a new examination of the accords, now considered excessive, could be initiated because of the inoperative Article 16. For all intents and purposes, the French had psychologically severed their ties with the East.

The issue of revising the 1935 Franco-Soviet Treaty was not pushed, as both sides essentially regarded it as defunct. Poland would not allow Soviet passage and all attempts at such would only give Poland a pretext to join the Reich. The anti-Communist fears were still rampant in France and no moves were made for closer relations with the USSR. It was concluded that France would not lose from abandoning the Franco-Soviet Pact and might even gain. The Juridical Service concluded that the only way of addressing the Franco-Soviet Pact without denouncing it was to state that the Pact was contingent on the League of Nations being a political factor. Consequently,

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9 Note of Juridical Services, on the Franco-Polish Accords, 28 Dec. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 240. Although the 1921 accord made no explicit reference to the League of Nations, it was concluded that the accord was accepted under the aegis of the League.
10 Young, In Command of France, p. 225.
11 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 272.
12 Note of M. Nac: The Franco-Soviet Pact, 30 Nov. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 460. Nac reported that the Polish fears regarding the Red Army were justified because regions such as White Russia were sympathetic to Bolshevik propaganda. Only an incontestably strong Soviet Union could persuade Poland to renounce its rivalry with Russia - this was not the present case.
13 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, pp. 272-273. Adamthwaite notes that staff talks could have been initiated by France, however most French ministers feared Communist forces were working to destroy France. On 16 December 1938 French newspapers published an appeal for the dissolution of the French Communist Party on the grounds that it was directed by a foreign power.
by the end of January 1939, the French concluded that the change in the League of Nations and the collapse of collective security had created a new international situation that allowed for a reconsideration of the validity of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Both France and the Soviet Union were content, for the time being, to leave the Pact "in cold storage until German intentions became clearer." 

Beck’s popularity which had resulted from Czechoslovakia’s acceptance of Poland’s ultimatum diminished as it became clear that Poland had not secured substantial gains from its foreign policy and found itself dislocated from its two allies, France and Romania. Fearful of isolation, conscious of Franco-German talks, concerned about tensions with Germany and dreading a reprise of the Ukrainian situation, Beck turned to the Soviet Union. On 26 November 1938, the text of the Polish-Soviet Declaration was released by both governments. It confirmed that the 1932 Non-Aggression Pact

16 Note to the Department - The Franco-Soviet Pact, no date, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 475. It was concluded that if “aid and assistance” in the Franco-Soviet Pact meant that France had to declare war on Germany in the case of German aggression against the Soviet Union, then it was a disadvantage, as reciprocal circumstances could not occur because of the issue of passage through Poland. Thus, “aid and assistance” should be interpreted in the spirit of Article 16. Thus, in the absence of a military convention, “aid and assistance” could mean economic action, envoys of arms, or financial support and not have an automatic character.

17 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 272. // French feared that Soviet isolation or a rapprochement with Germany would permit Germany to focus on the West. See Payart to Bonnet, 23 Nov. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 366.

18 Noël to Bonnet, 14 Dec. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 129. While the Reich had seized 1 114 000 square kms and 10 million people, Poland had only gained 1050 square kms and 300 000 people, most of whom had or would be returned to Czechoslovakia.

19 German-Polish relations were exacerbated over Danzig, the last area for Polish-German cooperation. At the end of October, Ribbentrop, German Foreign Minister, presented a comprehensive plan for a general revision and settlement of Polish-German relations which included the incorporation of the Free City of Danzig into the Reich. Poland would not agree to such a thing. See Prazmowska, “Poland’s Foreign Policy”, pp. 854-55 and 858.

20 Noël to Bonnet, 18 Oct. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 163. // In early December, the main question was the Ukraine. Because of the mutual assistance pacts with Poland and the Soviet Union, France had to be interested in this question. See Noël to Bonnet, 13 Dec. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 117 and Noël to Bonnet, 14 Dec. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 129.

21 This declaration was the result of the Polish initiative of October 1938. See Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, p. 115.
remained the foundation of relations and that commercial connections should be increased. Noël warned that the excited foreign interpretations of the recent Polish-Soviet Declaration were blown out of proportion, as the move was in line with Beck’s general policy. Poland remained faithful to its ‘policy of equilibrium’ and simply reaffirmed the existing accords.

Despite the Polish-Soviet rapprochement, military collaboration remained only a possibility for the future because for the Poles, the Russian danger still prevailed over the German. Even though Poland remained anti-Soviet, Litvinov was satisfied with the Declaration because it ensured that Polish territory would not serve as a launching pad for German forces. The Polish-Soviet Declaration allowed Beck to successfully administer his policy of balance, and again avoid joining an overtly anti-German position. Importantly, once the equilibrium was re-established, no further advance towards the Soviet Union was made.

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22 Noël to Bonnet, 27 Nov. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 412. // It is notable that the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was named, as it reaffirmed the pledge of each country not to participate in propaganda against the other state. This disallowed German-Polish anti-Soviet presentations. See Payart to Bonnet, 27 Nov. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 415.
23 Noël to Bonnet, 8 Dec. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 65.
26 Payart to Bonnet, 28 Nov. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 420. // Litvinov was fearful that the Polish initiative was a manoeuvre to show Germany that Poland “had more than one string in its bow.” At the very least, however, Litvinov thought the Declaration would stop the hostile presses in each country. See Payart to Bonnet, 27 Nov. 1938, DDF, ser. II, XII, no. 415.
28 Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations, pp. 132-133.
“The East is calm, whereas the West is worried” was a Warsaw press slogan in January 1939. Soviet pressure on France to tighten its bonds with Poland was partially answered when colonial questions seemingly turned Hitler westward and Poland regained its importance to France. The Polish-Soviet rapprochement continued with the signing of a commercial agreement on 19 February. But, by this time, Franco-Soviet relations seemed “permanently frozen”. As Germany, Italy and Poland moved to improve commercial relations with the Soviet Union, France acted with “reserve and indifference.” Thus, Polish-Soviet relations improved independently of French influence and reciprocity.

Not surprisingly, Beck refused to alter the 1921 Franco-Polish alliance because it represented “the fundamental basis for relations between Poland and France” and could not “be questioned or attacked because it constitute[d] a minimum.” Thus, the French concluded that revision of the Franco-Polish engagements had “no chance of success”.

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29 Noël to Bonnet, 3 Jan. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIII, no. 268. At the beginning of 1939, the Polish press insisted on the total collapse of French policy in 1938 and commended Beck for distancing Poland from France.
31 Naggiar to Bonnet, 20 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 142. See for details of the Commercial Agreement which besides other things gave each country ‘Most Favoured Nation’ status. Naggiar noted that the agreement illustrated the Soviet desire to ready conditions for a political rapprochement with Poland by solidifying economic solidarity.
32 Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 278. Litvinov dismissed Bonnet as ‘a natural capitulator’ while Daladier declared that he had ‘no confidence in any statement or promise which might be made by the Russians.’
33 Naggiar to Bonnet, 14 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 117. // In a “strictly secret” note to Beck, Lukasiewicz noted at the beginning of February 1939 that Poland ranked above the Soviet Union for France. “Poland takes the role of France’s proper partner, while relations with Soviet Russia become more of an auxiliary and formal factor...consistent with the actual power set up in Eastern Europe.” See Lukasiewicz, Diplomat in Paris, p. 167.
34 Note to the Minister - Conversation of 19 Feb. 1939 with Polish Ambassador Lukasiewicz, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 145.
Poland being “resolutely opposed” to any diminution of the alliance. Rather, Poland would only accept talks aimed at strengthening obligations.\textsuperscript{35}

Although Beck had avoided joining the Anti-Comintern Pact in January 1939, German pressure revealed that Poland’s policy of balance was becoming increasingly precarious and would fall apart if either Germany or the Soviet Union demanded that Poland choose between the two.\textsuperscript{36} The inherent weaknesses of the Polish equilibrium remained and were intensified by an aggressive Germany. Litvinov noted this in a letter to Jakov Souritz, the Soviet Ambassador to France, in January 1939. He wrote:

Beck...will, as before, try to preserve his freedom of action by manoeuvring between us and Germany without binding himself too strongly to either side. But will Hitler allow him to do that? Will he not confront Poland with the dilemma of either completely obeying the orders of Berlin... or else subjecting herself to Hitler's wrath...\textsuperscript{37}

The Munich agreement had had a traumatic affect on Soviet foreign policy, which was believed to be at a “cross-roads” in February 1939.\textsuperscript{38} Litvinov bitterly complained that since joining the League of Nations, the Soviet Union had followed the tenets of collective security loyally, however this policy had not been supported by France or Britain.\textsuperscript{39} The concessions made by the West only made the intransigent powers stronger and it seemed that France's attitude since the Czechoslovakian crisis was one of simply

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36}Budurowycz, \textit{Polish-Soviet Relations}, pp. 135-137 and M. Bloch, \textit{Ribbentrop}, (London: Bantam Press, 1992), pp. 213-215. // Beck declared that good relations with Moscow were compatible with relations with Germany. One of the foundations of Polish foreign policy, although sometimes complicated and obscure, was that Poland wanted to avoid being in the middle of a German-Soviet war because it did not want either side to win and dreaded its territory becoming a new battlefield. See Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 1 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 239.
\textsuperscript{37}Roberts, \textit{The Unholy Alliance}, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{38}Naggiar to Bonnet, 24 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 195. For “cross-roads” reference, see Payart to Bonnet, 19 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 67.
\textsuperscript{39}Naggiar to Bonnet, 24 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 195.
observing the problems in Central and Eastern Europe. Reporting in late February, Paul-Emile Naggia, the French Ambassador to the USSR, stated that if France and Britain demonstrated a commitment to collective security, the USSR would continue to oppose Germany and Italy. However, if France failed to renew its dedication to collective security, there was the possibility that Germany, assisted by Poland and possibly Romania, would be free to move Westward with the support of the East.

Hitler's occupation of Prague on 15 March served as a diplomatic catalyst which provoked the Soviet Union to once again embrace the policy of collective security and move away from its increasingly neutral stance. Litvinov called for a conference including the Soviet Union, Poland, Turkey, Romania, England and France. However this Soviet initiative was rejected by London. Rather, the British reaction to the German move was a proposal for a joint declaration which pledged Britain, France, Poland and the USSR to consult each other "in the event of an action constituting a threat to the independence of any European country."

While France supported the Declaration

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40 Naggia to Bonnet, 10 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 91.
41 Naggia to Bonnet, 24 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 195. Naggia noted that the recent Polish-Soviet commercial treaty and the good relations between the USSR and its four neighbours could play in France's favour.
42 Ibid. For more on this French concern, see Naggia to Bonnet, 11 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 99 and Naggia to Bonnet, 20 Feb. 1939, DDF, ser. II, XIV, no. 142.
43 Payart to Bonnet, 22 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 122. // On 15 March 1939, Germany occupied the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia. The Slovaks, with German encouragement, had declared their independence the day before. German troops marched on Prague without resistance - Munich was shattered. See Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, p. 119.
44 Note of the Minister - Conversation of 20 March with Souritz, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 87 and Corbin to Bonnet, reserved, 21 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 97.
45 Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations, p. 146.
of Four proposal without reservation, the Soviet government made Poland's signature a precondition.

The March Czechoslovakian crisis thoroughly alarmed the Poles, who realized that Poland was "the next object of Hitler's appetite." Despite this, Poland strongly objected to the Soviet Union being one of the Declaration's signatory powers, arguing that "war would start immediately if Hitler saw the formation of a system including the Western powers, Poland and Soviet Union." While the Franco-Polish accord was well-known to Germany and an arrangement with Britain was possible, Soviet participation would result in an "immediate hostile reaction." Rydz-Smigly stated that while Poland was willing to make war against Germany, it was not willing to provoke it. Thus, Poland would not accept an accord including the Soviet Union and by the end of March, "the idea had been dropped."

The British issued their guarantee to Poland on 31 March 1939. Beck accepted the British pledge despite his concerns about the possible German reaction. The

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46 Even though Franco-Polish relations were "barely civil" by later March, France hoped to solidify a "principle of cooperation" which would send a message to Hitler, who was encouraged by the fact that Britain was not a factor in Central and Eastern European politics. See General Musse to Daladier, 30 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 214 and Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 303.

47 Bonnet to Payart, reserved, 5 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 263.


49 Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 23 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 135.

50 General Musse to Daladier, 30 March 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 214.

51 Ibid.

52 Bonnet to Noel, reserved, 10 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 321 and Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, p. 120. // On 18 March Poland refused the Declaration of Four. See Note of the Minister Memorandum on the Subject of the Franco-Polish Accord, secret, 26 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 290.

53 This guarantee was based on Beck's counter-proposal for a bilateral understanding between Britain and Poland. The Soviet government had already tentatively approved the Declaration of Four proposal on 22 March and consequently felt they were victim of a "studied snub" and recoiled defiantly. See Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations, p. 147 and Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, pp. 120-21. The British guarantee was followed by a British-Polish agreement on 6 April. Britain also gave similar guarantees to Romania and Greece.
Anglo-Polish agreement finally ended the security distinction between East and West which had been made at Locarno. Importantly, the British guarantee did not stipulate that Poland now had to co-operate with the Soviet Union. Thus, Beck considered the guarantee a great success, as his independent policy was maintained, the German-Polish Accord remained intact, and Britain was now involved in Eastern Europe.

Even though Poland considered the USSR incapable of offensive action and the anti-Soviet sentiments in Poland had drastically subsided by April, Beck maintained that Poland could not enter into direct relations with the Soviet Union for fear of German reaction. It was imperative that Poland safeguard its independence, for if it sided with either of its two powerful neighbours, "she would no longer be an element of peace, but an element likely to provoke war." Poland's position of balance worked to the Soviet advantage, as no serious military action could be launched against the USSR with a hostile Poland (or Romania) because the aggressor would be exposed to a dreaded flank attack. Litvinov feared, however, that Poland could continue to avoid talks with the Soviets because the French and British guarantees protected it from Germany.

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54 Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 1 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 227 and Corbin to Bonnet, reserved, 7 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 290.
55 Noël to Bonnet, 7 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 292.
57 Noël to Bonnet, 7 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 292.
58 Noël to Bonnet, 18 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 440. Recent improvements in Polish-Soviet commercial relations aided this.
59 Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations, p. 148.
60 Coulondre to Bonnet, reserved, 16 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 201. See also Budurowycz, Polish-Soviet Relations, p. 152.
61 Payart to Bonnet, reserved, 14 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 386. // Chamberlain's Guarantee to Poland was also in the name of France. Even though the French had been forewarned of the news, they had little choice, so as not to weaken the new Anglo-French alliance. France, however, was not interested in increasing its commitments to Poland which they had come to "distrust profoundly". See Young, In Command of France, pp. 229-230.
Hitler’s renunciation of the German-Polish Declaration on 28 April confirmed Beck’s realization that the era of 1934 was over. Beck’s subsequent speech to the Diet signalled clearly that Poland would not be the victim of another Munich: “For us Poles, the notion of peace at any price does not exist. There is only one choice...which is without price: it is honour.” Beck played off Polish pride at the same moment he admitted the failure of his foreign policy of the past five years. Noël reported that this “profound irony” was lost on the Diet.

Litvinov’s ‘resignation’ was announced 4 May and shocked the world. Litvinov was the main architect of collective security and the French feared that his dismissal signalled a Soviet retreat to a neutral position or a possible entente with Germany. While the Soviets assured the French that Litvinov’s removal was not a change of policy but rather a change in method, Coulondre warned that Litvinov’s adversaries in the

62 Noël to Bonnet, 30 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 526. // Hitler used the recent Anglo-Polish Mutual Assistance Pact as justification for this denunciation. See Coulondre to Bonnet, 30 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 528.
63 Noël to Bonnet, 2 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 16. // Prazmowska argues that even after Hitler’s denunciation, Polish officials persisted in their belief that German actions were only a “war of nerves” and that they could call Germany’s bluff. See Prazmowska, “Poland’s Foreign Policy”, p. 866.
64 Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 5 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 67.
65 Noël to Bonnet, 10 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 134.
66 Noël to Bonnet, 4 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 41. // As Roberts notes, rumours regarding Litvinov’s position had often swirled in diplomatic circles, but it was surprising that he was replaced only two weeks after the Soviets proposed a triple alliance. See Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, pp. 128-131.
67 Payart to Bonnet, reserved, 4 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 45 and Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, p. 128.
Politburo were not friends of France.\(^{69}\) By contrast, the Poles reacted favourably to Litvinov’s dismissal.\(^{70}\)

The month of May saw Polish-Soviet relations further improve, Vyacheslav Molotov, Litvinov’s replacement, and the Polish Ambassador meeting twice in the first two weeks.\(^{71}\) Referring to his conversation with Vladimir Potemkin, Beck told Noël that it was the first time since 1932 that he had talked with a Soviet representative without feelings of mistrust.\(^{72}\) Poland and the Soviet Union agreed on their common interest in the Baltic states remaining outside German influence and if necessary, would together defend that independence.\(^{73}\) Although Poland refused to enter into a political or military accord with the Soviet Union, Molotov concluded that there was hope for the future.\(^{74}\)

The Franco-Polish negotiations of May 1939 illustrated the dismal state of relations and the serious lack of communication between the French government departments.\(^{75}\) Even though Gamelin’s military talks with Polish General Kasprzycki were successful,\(^{76}\) Bonnet refused to sign the political accord, at the last minute dodging

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\(^{69}\) Coulondre to Bonnet, reserved, 4 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 47. Voroshilov, for example, was a germanophile.

\(^{70}\) Budurowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations*, p. 151. // Indeed, Litvinov’s frustration with and hostility towards Poland was strong. Litvinov told Payart, the French Chargé in Moscow, on 29 March 1939 that “Until Poland received a direct blow from Germany it would hardly be possible to change Beck’s line.” See Roberts, “The Fall of Litvinov”, p. 649.

\(^{71}\) Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, pp. 131-33.

\(^{72}\) Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 13 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 173. // Potemkin’s positive impressions of the same meeting are recorded in Cannistraro, ed., *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War*, pp. 329-330.

\(^{73}\) Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 13 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 173.

\(^{74}\) Payart to Bonnet, 14 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 182 and Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance*, p. 131.

\(^{75}\) Beck complained that the Anglo-Polish negotiations had taken a couple of hours, while the talks with the French had only been frustrating. See Noël to Bonnet, secret, reserved, 27 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 294. For a succinct description of the problems with the May talks, see Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, pp. 319-324.

\(^{76}\) The military talks were contingent on the signing of the political agreement.
Beck’s attempt to secure a French declaration on Danzig. Bonnet wanted to synchronize the Franco-Polish protocol with the Anglo-Polish agreement, however the British maintained that it would be damaging to settle with Poland while still negotiating with the Soviet Union. If an agreement was reached with Poland before the USSR, Britain would have no means of persuading Beck to accept Soviet aid. The French were not willing to increase their commitments to Poland, fearful that Beck “would abuse such assurances of support by becoming even more truculent.”

The labyrinthine negotiations between Britain, France and the Soviet Union began in early May. Although a detailed synopsis of the trilateral negotiations is beyond the scope of this study, the bargaining reflected the mistrust of the previous six years. Many in the West firmly believed that the failure of the British-French-Soviet talks would result in Soviet neutrality or German-Soviet collusion. Either situation threatened Poland. Yet even though the French often stressed that the essential goal was to quickly secure “an

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77 On 17 May, Bonnet accepted a secret clause which named Danzig a “vital interest” of Poland, which would consequently oblige France to act immediately in the case of an attack on the Free City. This issue had not been accepted by Britain, who felt the Polish formula for Danzig “too large”. Bonnet had no intention of promising more to Poland than Britain. See Corbin to Bonnet, reserved, 20 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 480. See also DDF, ser. II, XVI: 23, 245, 253, 255, 259, 351, 352, 320.
78 Note of the Minister - Conversation with Lord Halifax on the Franco-Polish Accord, 22 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 253 and Corbin to Bonnet, reserved, 5 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 351.
accord which permitted Poland and Romania to receive at least indirect aid from the Soviet Union”, 82 Britain was hesitant and Poland defiant.

The Soviet Union suspected that France and Britain aimed to engage the USSR in an isolated conflict with Germany. 83 Consequently, a primary Soviet objective in the negotiations was to secure a “direct guarantee” of assistance from the West. This would protect the Soviet Union from facing Germany alone. 84 Collective security had been superseded by the need for collective defence. Thus, for the Soviets, “any alliance with the ‘democratic’ states had to be capable of fighting and defeating aggression as well as opposing it diplomatically.” 85 Such assurance could only be realized by securing passage for Soviet troops through Polish territory. However, even as the situation became more desperate and the chances of war increased accordingly, the Poles refused to deal bilaterally with the Soviets or participate in the Anglo-French-Soviet talks.

The frustrations of the Western political negotiations 86 were not felt in Polish-Soviet relations, as the rapprochement of early 1939 continued. 87 There was a sense of solidarity between Poland and the Soviet Union. Both feared that a deal between the Western powers could leave them isolated and vulnerable. Also, the fact that the Soviets had maintained their position in the tripartite negotiations impressed Warsaw, and

82 Communication of the Ambassador of Great Britain to Paris - Aide Memoire, 3 May 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 24 and Bonnet to Payart, 16 April 1939, DDF, ser. II, XV, no. 417.
83 Gauquié to Bonnet, 29 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 21.
85 Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, pp. 132-33.
86 The British readiness to study German and Italian claims declared on 8 June only confirmed Soviet mistrust. See Naggia to Bonnet, 15 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 437 and Naggia to Bonnet, 16 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 454.
87 Gauquié to Bonnet, 29 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 49.
perhaps even secretly inspired envy. While there was a mutual desire not to become too intimate until necessary, Poland emphasized that its relationship with the USSR should remain constant and develop “in a spirit of loyalty, understanding and reciprocity.” The recent French silence on Soviet-Polish relations now rendered it difficult to encourage the delicate evolution towards this rapprochement which now appeared an element, perhaps unconscious, of Poland’s foreign policy.

The main obstacle to Polish-Soviet collaboration during the summer of 1939 was that Poland believed its relationship with the USSR was adequately defined and secure, and thus no direct negotiations with the Soviet Union were needed. Serious cooperation with the Soviets remained repugnant to the Polish leaders, who were essentially anti-Russian and, by conviction, anti-Soviet. The Poles believed that Soviet support, or at least neutrality, was assured because the USSR did not want a common border with Germany, and thus would protect Poland. Beck was confident that Soviet aid could be solicited and regarded Soviet-Polish negotiations during peacetime more of a nuisance than an advantage. Only on an economic level could Polish leaders let themselves move closer to the Soviet Union. Thus, even though an accord between the Western

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88 Ibid. The Baltic issue was another matter where the Soviet and Polish political interests appeared analogous.
89 Ibid.
90 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 19 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 240.
91 Noël to Bonnet, 7 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 363. Polish leaders downplayed the military importance of the Soviet Union.
92 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 19 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 240. The length of the Franco-British-Soviet negotiations also confirmed the Polish belief that the USSR would not bind itself to the West.
93 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 2 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 403. See also General Musse to Daladier, secret, 19 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 240.
94 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 19 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 240. // The Poles considered potential Soviet aid in the form of supplies and transit, and thus it was only a matter of “working out the
powers and the Soviet government could only benefit Poland, Beck refused to participate in the negotiations, claiming that Poland’s present relationship with the Soviet Union was sufficient.95

The Soviet Union’s Mutual Assistance Pacts with France and Czechoslovakia had remained dead letters in September 1938, because they were not supported by military accords.96 Consequently, the Soviets worked to avoid making the same mistakes. French General Palasse argued that Soviet mistrust could only be appeased by precise accords, and thus advocated immediate staff talks.97 The complication that the Soviet Union did not share a border with Germany had to be tackled. If no common effort was made soon, the Moscow talks would further deteriorate.98 The fear remained that the Soviet Union might retreat into “anticipatory neutrality” and secure an agreement with Germany on the basis of the division of Poland and the Baltic states.99 Thus, the fear of rupture in July led the West to accept the opening of military talks with the Soviet Union.

already friendly commercial relations.” See General Musse to Daladier, secret, 2 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 403.
95 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 2 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 403.
96 General Palasse to Bonnet, secret, 13 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 202. // The Soviet Union worked to protect itself from another Munich situation - that is, to be compromised against the Reich and abandoned by the West at the decisive moment. See Naggiar to Bonnet, 18 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 227.
97 General Palasse to Bonnet, secret, 13 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 202. Palasse noted that he had not been invited to discuss precise questions with the Soviet State Major, but Molotov had stated that 100 divisions would be available for the Pact in preparation. // Naggiar reported that the “true impact of alliances was found in concrete and precise military accords.” See Naggiar to Bonnet, 16 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 217.
98 Naggiar to Bonnet, 16 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 217. Naggiar warned that if the Eastern front was easily defeated, Germany and Italy could turn their full weight to the West, assured of Soviet neutrality.
99 General Palasse to Bonnet, secret, 13 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 202. // The Poles had great confidence that Stalin would not deal with Germany, because what could Stalin gain from such an agreement? See Note Written by One of the French Delegation to the Council of the League of Nations, 16 June 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVI, no. 456.
The Poles realized the importance of a military convention to the Soviets, but had little confidence in the USSR as a partner. General Stachiewicz was sceptical that the military talks would succeed and even if they did, he doubted that the Soviets would fulfil their engagements. France was faced with two possibilities: either to rule on Polish questions without consulting the Poles, or apply pressure on Warsaw to participate in the Moscow negotiations. In either case, French General Musse warned that France would clash with Polish pride and provide the Reich with an exploitable crack in the peace front.

The Western acceptance of military talks was half-hearted. In spite of French impatience, the Anglo-French delegation departed 5 August, leaving Tilbury aboard the slow merchant ship, the City of Exeter. The travel time of one week was not used to establish a common Anglo-French approach. The British and French governments did not view these negotiations as an opportunity to reach an agreement, but rather as a "political exercise which would keep Moscow happy and apply pressure on Berlin.

To add insult to injury, during the first meeting with Soviet negotiator Marshal Voroshilov, it was realized that Admiral Reginald Aylmer Ranfurly Plunkett-Ernle-Erle

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100 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 2 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 403.
101 Ibid. On 7 August, Warsaw stated that all Polish-Soviet commercial negotiations would be handled by the Commerce Ministry in order to avoid any impression of political significance. See Naggier to Bonnet, reserved, 7 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 455.
102 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 2 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 403.
103 General A. Beaufre, 1940: The Fall of France, trans. D. Flower, (New York: Knopf, 1968), p. 89. Beaufre notes that while the British instructions were "about an inch thick", they "examined every facet of the problem (Polish-Soviet military cooperation) without producing any ideas as to directive." See Beaufre, 1940, p. 96.
104 Roberts, The Unholy Alliance, p. 141. // The British delegation was instructed "above all to spin out the negotiations as long as (they) could." Beaufre, 1940, pp. 96-97.
Drax, the British representative, did not have written authority to negotiate a military agreement.\textsuperscript{105}

On 14 August, at the third session of the military talks, Voroshilov addressed the cardinal question and asked directly if Poland and Romania would allow Soviet troops to cross their frontiers. The Soviets had pledged to “limit very strictly” their zones of intervention by choosing them exclusively from a strategic point of view.\textsuperscript{106} General Dournenc, leader of the French delegation, and Naggiar, the French Ambassador in Moscow, wired Paris and suggested French General Valin be sent to Warsaw to obtain permission for the Franco-British delegation to discuss Poland’s military participation, without officially involving the Polish government.\textsuperscript{107} This was necessary because if the Soviet Union could not secure passage through Vilnus in the case of German aggression against Poland, the Moscow talks would end.\textsuperscript{108} However, if Poland granted passage, Voroshilov pledged that Soviet details of support would be presented immediately.\textsuperscript{109} Valin was not sent because of the “repercussions which would result.”\textsuperscript{110}

The Poles maintained that Polish-Soviet talks would only occur just before or after war began, because then Poland would be able to secure the most profitable collaboration. For this reason, Noël warned Bonnet that an invitation to participate in the

\textsuperscript{105} Adamthwaite, \textit{France and the Coming of the Second World War}, pp. 335-336 and Beaufre, 1940, pp. 105-106.

\textsuperscript{106} General Dournenc to Daladier, secret, 15 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 41. See also Beaufre, 1940, pp. 109-113.

\textsuperscript{107} General Dournenc to Daladier, 14 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 23. The British delegation agreed with this move. For Polish objections, see DDF, ser. II, XVIII, nos. 131, 202, 217, 344, 368, 455.

\textsuperscript{108} Note of the Minister Conversation of Foreign Affairs Minister with Lukasiewicz, 15 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 51. See also Naggiar to Bonnet, very secret, reserved, 14 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 24.

\textsuperscript{109} Cambon to Bonnet, strictly confidential, reserved, 16 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 65. See also DDF, ser. II, XVIII, nos. 66, 68.

\textsuperscript{110} Adamthwaite, \textit{France and the Coming of the Second World War}, p. 337.
next Moscow meeting must not be extended to Poland. Naggiar reported that Poland did not understand that Soviet assistance would not be forthcoming unless Soviet-Polish talks started immediately. Thus, as France became increasingly desperate to convince Poland to negotiate, Polish officials clearly demonstrated their persistent mistrust of Soviet intentions, the impossibility of Poland binding itself to the Soviet Union in peacetime, however the conviction that a Polish-Soviet deal was possible in time of war.

Bonnet met with Waclaw Lukasiewicz on 15 August. The Polish Ambassador promised to transmit the news of a possible rupture in the Moscow talks to Beck, but stated that the Polish government maintained its position and would not authorize passage over any territory. The Poles believed that the Soviets would simply install themselves in the predetermined military corridors and would not effectively fight the Germans. Lukasiewicz asked Bonnet “What would you say if we (Poland) asked you to guard Alsace-Lorraine with Germans?”

After noting that the Soviets had strictly limited their “zones of intervention”, Bonnet urged Noël, and also General Musse, not to fail in underlining the urgency for the Polish government to accept Soviet aid with clearly defined conditions. Bonnet argued

111 Noël to Bonnet, 10 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 496. See also Naggiar to Bonnet, reserved, 10 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 494.
112 Naggiar to Bonnet, reserved, 7 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 455.
113 General Musse to Daladier, secret, 2 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 403. The Poles believed that negotiations would occur quickly once war started. See General Musse to Daladier, secret, 19 July 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVII, no. 240.
114 Note of the Minister Conversation of Foreign Affairs Minister with Lukasiewicz, 15 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 51.
115 General Musse to Daladier, 18 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 110 and Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 18 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 114.
116 Note of the Minister Conversation of Foreign Affairs Minister with Lukasiewicz, 15 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 51. See also Bonnet, Quai d’Orsay, p. 247.
that the Poles had already admitted the importance of securing Soviet aid and noted that it was dangerous to wait until the opening of hostilities before negotiating. The French Foreign Minister warned that if Poland refused to discuss the strategic conditions of Soviet intervention, it would have to accept responsibility for, and consequences of, the failed military talks in Moscow.\footnote{Bonnet to Noël, very secret, reserved, 16 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 68 and Bonnet to Noël, reserved, very secret, 17 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 93.}

Conscious of the rumours of a Russo-German entente,\footnote{Such rumours had swirled in the Moscow French embassy since 16 August. See Young, \textit{In Command of France}, p. 239.} General Doumenc notified Paris on 17 August that Captain Beaufre was being sent to Warsaw to convince the Polish High Command of “the absolute need for greater flexibility.”\footnote{Beaufre, \textit{1940}, pp. 119-125 and Naggiar to Bonnet, very secret, reserved, 17 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 88. See also DDF, ser. II, XVIII, nos. 90, 92, 94.} If Doumenc could keep the confidence of Poland, he could then negotiate a program of geographically contained collaboration with the Soviets. If not, the tripartite meeting set for 21 August would incontestably fail.\footnote{Young, \textit{In Command of France}, p. 240. Young notes that the French embassy in Warsaw was not enthusiastic about Beaufre’s mission, as Noël was worried about Polish-German rapprochement and General Musse reminded Paris that Beck remained unmove by the Soviet claims of military efficiency.} The Beaufre mission was predictably unsuccessful.

When Noël met with Beck on 18 August, he urged him and his colleagues to look for a protocol which could prevent the rupture of the Moscow talks. Beck replied, “We will look, but I have little hope.”\footnote{Noël to Bonnet, 18 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 113.} Noël stressed that rather than wait until hostilities began, it would be “infinitely wiser” for Poland to negotiate now, because the Franco-
British delegation could secure for Poland the best possible deal.\textsuperscript{122} Noël complained that the motives for the Polish position were more personal than logical, making all French reasoning hopeless.\textsuperscript{123} Although Beck admitted the value of some of Noël’s arguments, he did not alter his position.

Bonnet gave vent to his frustrations, arguing that it was “inadmissible” that Beck refused to discuss the passage of Soviet troops through Polish territory. The French Foreign Minister stated to Noël that if Poland refused to participate in the military talks, France, because of the Franco-Polish alliance, was owed an explanation as to how Poland intended to defend itself against German aggression without Soviet assistance.\textsuperscript{124} Bonnet, far from ignoring the historical reasons for Poland’s trepidation, stressed that unless Beck changed his position, Poland would be responsible for the failure of a security system designed for its benefit.\textsuperscript{125}

On 19 August, Beck officially refused to enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{126} Claiming it a “matter of principle”, and confident that Polish-Soviet relations were secure, Beck stated “we have no military understanding with the USSR; we do not want to have one.”\textsuperscript{127} Noël asked if the French had to inform Moscow of this refusal and

\textsuperscript{122} Noël to Bonnet, 18 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 113. Beck complained that the Soviets had manoeuvred to place responsibility of the failure of the Moscow talks on Poland. See Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 18 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 120.

\textsuperscript{123} Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 20 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 173. See Beaufre, \textit{1940}, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{124} Bonnet to Noël, very urgent, priority, reserved, 19 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 144.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{126} On the same day, the German-Soviet commercial accord was signed. See Coulondre to Bonnet, 21 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 178, Cambon to Bonnet, rigorously secret, reserved, 21 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 186 and Cambon to Bonnet, secret, reserved, 21 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 187.

\textsuperscript{127} Noël to Bonnet, reserved, urgent, 19 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 153 and Lukasiewicz, \textit{Diplomat in Paris}, p. 250.
Beck agreed they did not. Noël labelled Poland’s unwillingness to enter into military or political engagements with the Soviet Union a “sickness” which had obstructed the Eastern Pact, the Franco-Soviet Pact and the Declaration of Four. Hitler could now “play the card of destruction” on Poland and suffer no more than he had last March and September 1938.

Given the “psychological and historical prejudices of Poland and Romania”, Bonnet concluded that the Polish response could not be considered definitive. The statement made by General Stachiewicz on 19 August gave the French Foreign Minister hope. Stachiewicz had stated that Pilsudski’s dogma which forbade the passage of foreign troops over Polish soil would not have the “same value” once hostilities began. Thus, the door was not yet closed on new talks that would have an exclusively technical and preparatory character and would not result in any change in the Polish political position towards the Soviet Union. On 20 August, Naggiar and Doumenc informed Paris that they intended, unless otherwise instructed, to give the Soviets “an affirmative Polish response in principle” so that the military talks could go forward. Bonnet approved this suggestion, and Doumenc’s instructions were “to negotiate and sign in the best common interest a military accord, under the final approval of the French government.” However, this desperate initiative came too late, as the Nazi-Soviet Pact

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128 Noël to Bonnet, reserved, urgent, 19 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 153.
129 Noël to Bonnet, reserved, 20 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 173.
130 Naggiar to Bonnet, reserved, 20 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 167.
131 Bonnet to Noël and Naggiar, secret, reserved, 20 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 172.
132 Ibid. See also Noël to Bonnet, reserved, urgent, 19 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 153.
133 Bonnet to Noël and Naggiar, secret, reserved, 20 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 172.
134 Ibid.
135 Bonnet to Cambon, by telephone, extremely urgent, strictly reserved, 21 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 180 and Bonnet to Naggiar, secret, strictly reserved, 21 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no.
of Non-Aggression was announced on 21 August and signed two days later. The "Waterloo of French diplomacy" had occurred. Another partition of Poland was now inevitable.

Poland's foreign policy in 1939 again frustrated attempts at stopping Hitler. Clinging passionately to the outdated policy of balance and Pilsudski's evaluation of the USSR as Poland's principal enemy, Beck failed to realize that the international situation had drastically changed by August 1939. Beck defiantly resisted French pressure to negotiate with the Soviets, making a Western-Soviet military agreement unattainable. France's diplomatic activity throughout the summer of 1939 seemed "academic" to Naggiar, who lamented that the fundamental issue of Soviet passage through Poland had continuously been skirted, leaving any French plan for peace a mere shell. In August 1939, Stalin felt that the only viable option for securing his state against aggression was a deal with Hitler.

182. See also Bonnet, Quai d'Orsay, p. 248. // Paris' instructions granting Doumenc the necessary powers did not reach Moscow until after Berlin's announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. See Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 338.
136 Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight, p. 209.
137 Naggiar to Bonnet, reserved, 21 August 1939, DDF, ser. II, XVIII, no. 183.
EPILOGUE

The challenges of Poland’s interwar foreign policy were a result of its geographic position. The Versailles Treaty restored Poland as an independent state, however did not create an environment conducive to its survival. Pilsudski’s policy of balance was a diplomatic strategy which was supposed to free Poland from French tutelage and protect it from German-Soviet hostility as well as collaboration. However, this policy was inherently flawed, as Poland had no way of militarily protecting itself against German or Soviet intransigence, and therefore had to rely on the good intentions of Hitler and Stalin. Consequently, Pilsudski’s policy failed to protect Poland from German-Soviet collusion. The Nazi-Soviet Pact illustrated the failure of Poland’s foreign policy, as it allowed Hitler to attack Poland on 1 September, assured of Soviet support.

The Franco-Polish alliance provided a framework for a strong relationship, but was interpreted differently by each signatory. The French, fearful of the implications, sought to reduce their military commitments to Poland, however, the Poles adamantly refused to alter the 1921 military convention. The French assumption that Poland would follow their endorsement of the League of Nations and participate in an East European alliance system was wrong. France’s apparent lack of concern for Poland’s interests led Pilsudski to administer an “independent” foreign policy, driven exclusively by Polish interests. Beck interpreted the alliance bilaterally, maintaining that Poland had no obligations to France’s other allies. Thus, French influence over Poland was never strong
enough to overcome Polish antipathy towards the Soviet Union. Rather, Beck was able
to manipulate the alliance -- never compromising, yet squeezing out as much advantage
as possible.

The absence of Franco-Polish harmony became clear in 1934 when the Eastern
Pact was not embraced by Polish leaders. Pilsudski and Beck refused to participate in
the French-sponsored collective agreement, preferring to deal with Germany and the
Soviet Union bilaterally. Beck often argued that Poland’s participation in the Eastern
Pact would be interpreted by Hitler as an anti-German move, thus upsetting Poland’s
delicate equilibrium. Pilsudski was afraid that Soviet involvement in a collective pact
would diminish Poland’s role in Eastern Europe and weaken the Franco-Polish alliance.
Poland’s eventual refusal to adhere to the Pact was deeply resented by the French, but
contributed to the Franco-Soviet rapprochement.

A fundamental contradiction in the diplomacy of France, the USSR and Poland
during the 1930s was their different interpretations of the Nazi regime. The French,
fearful of a German resurgence, worked to undo peacefully the “injustices” of Versailles.
France maintained relations with the USSR, but considered a deal with Hitler as the best
way to secure peace. Litvinov, by contrast, believed that Hitler could not be trusted and
that the only way to stop Nazi aggression was with a collective agreement. But Pilsudski
and Beck interpreted Hitler’s revisionism not as a threat, but as an opportunity to increase
Poland’s territory and prestige in Eastern Europe. Until the spring of 1939, Beck believed
that Hitler had no ill intentions towards Poland, and was confident until late August that
German-Soviet collaboration was improbable. Thus, as French and Soviet diplomacy
worked to contain Germany, Beck rejected collective security, not wanting to aggravate Hitler or compromise future opportunities.

Anti-Communist sentiments in France and Poland precluded strong alliances with the Soviet Union. Even though Moscow worked diligently to reach an understanding with Paris, the French were reluctant, always mistrustful of Soviet intentions and doubtful of Soviet military capabilities. French bitterness towards Communism resurfaced often in the 1930s and served to push the German danger into the background. Stalin, not Hitler, was usually considered Europe’s primary enemy. But while French anti-Communist feelings at least allowed for limited relations, Polish hatred for Soviet Russia prevented any understanding. Poland was the key to any collective agreement that included the USSR, for the Red Army could not attack Germany or defend Czechoslovakia unless it was permitted to cross through Polish territory. Thus, any effective anti-German military coalition needed Soviet-Polish co-operation. However, Polish leaders unrelentingly refused to enter into an agreement with the USSR, claiming that their Non-Aggression Pacts with Berlin and Moscow, and the Franco-Polish alliance, constituted a satisfactory security net for Poland.

The Eastern Pact was only the first example of Poland’s defiant attitude towards French initiatives. French passivity during such events as the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss and Munich illustrated poignantly that collective security was a dead policy and the ‘protector’ of Eastern Europe was defunct. Beck played his “double game” of maintaining cordial relations with France while flirting with Hitler and profited from the disintegration of the Versailles system. Always maintaining his “faithfulness”
to France, and propelled by the dream of having Eastern Europe as his sphere of influence, Beck moved against Lithuania and Czechoslovakia in 1938 with the full support of his compatriots. But Beck’s ‘mini conquests’ were not without consequences. By the end of 1938, Piłsudski’s alliance system had been destroyed.

The Western reluctance to apply pressure on the Poles was an important component to the Western-Soviet-Polish relationship. Paris strongly believed that a military understanding with Moscow would result in a weakening of the Franco-Polish relationship. Therefore, a Franco-Soviet military agreement was consistently sacrificed for the maintenance of the Franco-Polish alliance. At no point did the French or the British apply substantial pressure on Poland to make concessions in Polish-Soviet relations. Franco-Polish economic relations and the 1939 British guarantee were solid opportunities to apply pressure on Beck to soften his policy towards the USSR, but no use was made of such advantages. The Quai d’Orsay refrained from doing anything that might seriously alienate Poland and force it into Germany’s sphere of influence.

French Ambassador Noël’s description of Poland’s refusal to enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union as a “sickness” was apt. After all, the absence of a Soviet-Polish understanding had contributed to the impotence of French diplomatic initiatives in the 1930s. Piłsudski’s 1934 assessment that Soviet Russia was the greatest threat to Poland remained unaltered, despite Nazi Germany’s growth and aggression. Beck claimed countless times that Hitler had no ill intentions towards Poland and that no tampering with Piłsudski’s equilibrium system was necessary. Even in August 1939, when it was clear that Poland was Hitler’s next target, Beck refused to deal with the
Soviets, claiming it a matter of principle and confident that Polish-Soviet collaboration would be possible once war broke out. But Pilsudski’s security system had no way of militarily protecting Poland from German and/or Soviet aggression. Thus, Beck’s failure to re-evaluate the international situation in 1939 and reassess Pilsudski’s doctrines precluded him from averting Poland’s fourth partition.
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