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Soviet Policy Toward Germany During the Russo-Polish War, 1920

The Russo-Polish War occasioned some of the most anxious moments in the history of relations between Soviet Russia and the Weimar Republic. Within Germany, the advance of the Red Army toward Warsaw in 1920 aroused strong, but contradictory emotions. First, it led many Germans to anticipate the destruction of Poland and to hope for the restoration of the Reich's former eastern territories. Simultaneously, however, the westward Russian march raised fears of the invasion of Germany by Bolshevik forces. Within Russia, a similar dichotomy of views about Germany existed. On one hand, the German government was considered a hostile, though negligible and temporary—a Communist revolution there was thought imminent—factor in Russia's situation. On the other, Germany was held important enough to Russia that serious proposals of a far-reaching alliance against Poland and the Entente were made to her. The former view rested on a fundamentally optimistic assessment of Russia's prospects; the latter, on a sober one. Grounds for concern were afforded by the Soviet Republic's grave economic problems and by worry about whether the weary Red Army could defeat Pilsudski's forces, whose offensive capacity had been demonstrated by their capture of Kiev in May 1920. If Germany, which had had military forces in the field against the Bolsheviks only a year before, should actively assist the Poles, Russia's situation could be appreciably worsened. Surprisingly, therefore, although there are several recent, excellent studies of Soviet-Polish affairs and the Russo-Polish War,[1] and a voluminous literature on relations between the Soviets and the Weimar Republic,[2] little attention has been paid to Soviet

1. See especially Josef Korbel, *Poland between East and West: Soviet and German Diplomacy toward Poland, 1919–1933* (Princeton, 1963); Piotr S. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917–1921* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969); and Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (New York, 1972).

2. Among the major studies which deal with German-Soviet relations in 1920 are: Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: A History of Relations between the Soviet Union and the Rest of the World*, vol. 1 (London, 1930); Edward Hallett Carr, *German-Soviet Relations between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939* (Baltimore, 1951), and vol. 3 of his *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923* (New York, 1953); Gustav Hilger and Alfred Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir History of German-Soviet Relations, 1918–1941* (New York, 1953); Lionel Kochan, *Russia and the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, 1954); Gerald Freund, *Unholy Alliance: Russian-German Relations from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the Treaty of Berlin* (New York, 1957); Herbert Helbig, *Die Träger der Rapallo-Politik* (Göttingen, 1958); John Erickson, *The Soviet High*

policy toward Germany during the conflict with Poland. To explain that policy, and its apparent contradiction, is the purpose of this article.

The Soviet leaders' evaluation of the situation posed by the Polish war was of basic importance in determining policy toward Germany. A recent analysis by Warren Lerner indicates that there was a significant disagreement within Bolshevik ruling circles in early 1920 about the proper course for Russia. Lenin apparently favored making the war against Pilsudski into a revolutionary crusade, and attempted in May to secure adoption of his views by the Party. He abandoned this effort, however, in the face of criticism by the Polish Communist Julian Marchlewski, who considered the revolutionary line unrealistic.[3] Although Lenin was unwilling to force a decision on the question of the export of revolution to Poland when the foremost immediate task was to drive Pilsudski from the Ukraine, the turn of the tide of battle in favor of Russia made him increasingly confident that the Red Army and the Polish proletariat would establish a Soviet Poland. Lenin thought that Germany could play no substantive role in the outcome of the class war which he believed was being waged in Poland by the workers and peasants of Russia and Poland against international imperialism. Indeed, it was events in Poland which would have an impact on Germany. The Sovietization of Poland, he expected, would spark a proletarian revolution in Germany. The Kapp *Putsch* of March 1920, which Lenin compared to the Kornilov Affair of 1917, indicated to him that Germany stood near the brink of its October Revolution. Despite the counsel of Communists better informed about German affairs than he, Lenin was certain that the victories of the Red Army were causing Germany to begin to boil over with revolutionary excitement. It had been precisely because Germany was so near a Communist revolution, he reasoned, that the rulers of the Entente states and Poland had launched this latest effort to crush the Bolshevik regime.[4] Until the homeland of Marx achieved its

Command: A Military-Political History, 1918–1941 (London, 1962); and Horst Günther Linke, *Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen bis Rapallo* (Cologne, 1970). The best treatment of the German side is Christian Höltje, *Die Weimarer Republik und das Ostlocarno-Problem 1919–1934: Revision oder Garantie der deutschen Ostgrenze von 1919* (Würzburg, 1958).

3. Warren Lerner, "Poland in 1920: A Case Study in Foreign-Policy Decision Making under Lenin," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 72 (Summer 1973): 410. Lenin's views at this time are inferred from Marchlewski's criticism. Professor Lerner interprets Lenin's position differently.

4. See V. I. Lenin, speech to the Ninth Party Congress on March 29, 1920, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (hereafter cited as *PSS*), 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958–65), 40: 235–36; speech on April 29, 1920, ibid., p. 332; comments in "The Infantile Disease of 'Leftism' in Communism," written in April and May 1920, ibid., 41:78 and 96; speech of September 22, 1920, ibid., p. 282; Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, pp. 214–20; Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky: 1879–1921* (London, 1954), pp. 464–65; Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York, 1934), pp. 18–19; and Norman Davies, "The Missing Revolutionary War: The Polish Campaigns and the Retreat from Revolution in

historic destiny, however, Russia could not expect aid from the present government in Berlin. The commissar for foreign affairs, G. V. Chicherin, observed, in a speech to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on June 17, 1920, that the domination of Germany by the Entente prevented her from responding favorably even to Soviet requests for economic assistance.[5] The Politburo, in a resolution of June 4, concluded that Germany not only would not aid the Soviets, but that she acted in collusion with Poland against them.[6] Lenin's judgment of early 1920, that "the Scheidemanns are bad allies,"[7] remained unchanged throughout the war. German help against Pilsudski could not be expected, nor was it needed. Thus, on July 22, Lenin instructed Viktor Kopp, the Soviet representative in Berlin, to conduct no further political talks with the German government.[8]

Despite Lenin's position and his specific injunction to Kopp, however, numerous overtures to Germany from the Soviet side were made between February and August 1920. The overtures consistently were aimed at securing German aid against the Poles in exchange for the return to Germany of territories lost to Poland in 1919, and at the establishment of a broad German-Soviet political and economic alliance against the Entente. They were prompted by the view, in contrast to Lenin's, that German assistance against the Poles and their Western supporters was both necessary and possible. The available evidence, although largely circumstantial, suggests that the proposals to Germany were independent foreign policy initiatives made by a group within the Soviet leadership which was opposed to the Leninist majority and which sought to effect a radical reorientation of Soviet policy. Acceptance of the existence of such a group helps explain what otherwise seem contradictory Soviet actions.

In August 1920, Enver Pasha, in Moscow, reported to General Hans von Seeckt, chief of the *Truppenamt* of the Reichswehr, that

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Soviet Russia, 1919–21," *Soviet Studies*, 27, no. 2 (April 1975): 183–84. Lenin expressed his revolutionary expectations to several German Communists, most notably Paul Levi, during the Second Congress of the Comintern in August 1920, and acidly dismissed their skeptical and negative reception of his views. See Angelica Balabanoff, *Impressions of Lenin* (Ann Arbor, 1964), pp. 109–12; and Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau: Stationen eines Irrweges* (Stuttgart, 1957), p. 81.

5. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (hereafter cited as *DVP*) (Moscow, 1957–), 2:650. Concerning the Soviet requests and the negative German response to them, see my "German-Soviet Economic Relations, 1918–1922" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1972), pp. 130–38.

6. Text in Jan Meijer, ed., *The Trotsky Papers, 1917–1922,* 2 vols. (The Hague, 1964–71), 2:210–13.

7. Lenin, comment on February 19, 1920, *PSS*, 40:146.

8. Lenin, letter to Chicherin containing instructions for Kopp, July 22, 1920, *PSS*, 51:242.

> here is a faction which possesses substantial power, and Trotsky also belongs to this faction, [and which] is for an agreement with Germany. This faction would be ready to recognize the old German borders of 1914. And they see only one way out of this world chaos, that is cooperation with Germany and Turkey. And in order to strengthen their faction's position and to win over the entire Soviet government for the affair, [they ask] if it would not be possible to show unofficial help, if possible to sell weapons.[9]

The request for German war material is understandable in view of the Red Army's supply shortage. On July 15, 1920, the Supreme Command reported to Trotsky that existing supplies were adequate for only two months of operations on the Polish front.[10] It is clear, however, that the Trotsky group was not merely angling for weapons. What they sought was some tangible evidence of Germany's willingness to work with Soviet Russia, evidence with which to convince the Leninist majority that Germany was not a puppet of the Entente and that a fruitful alliance was possible.

Only a few members of the group around Trotsky are known. Trotsky's deputy in the Commissariat for War and the Revolutionary Military Council, E. M. Sklianskii, who is mentioned in Enver's report to Seeckt, was certainly one of this group. Aleksei Rykov, the chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy, was probably another.[11] Viktor Kopp, a long-time associate of Trotsky, was primarily responsible for making the group's proposals in Berlin. Within the five-man Politburo, however, Trotsky probably stood alone. L. B. Kamenev backed Lenin.[12] N. N. Krestinskii's position is uncertain. Although Stalin, the fifth member, publicly shared some of Trotsky's

9. Enver Pasha to Seeckt, August 26, 1920. Nachlass Seeckt, quoted in Friedrich von Rabenau, *Seeckt: Aus seinem Leben 1918–1936* (Leipzig, 1940), p. 307. See also Freund, *Unholy Alliance*, p. 79; and Francis L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918 to 1933* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 70–71. Enver Pasha had been virtual dictator of Turkey during the World War, but had fled his country under sentence of death in 1919. The purpose of his trip to Russia, which Seeckt had helped arrange, was to obtain Soviet aid for his plans to regain power in Turkey.

10. S. S. Kamenev to Trotsky, July 15, 1920, *Direktivy Glavnogo Komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii (1917–1920): Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1969), pp. 610–12.

11. L. Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence* (New York, 1941), p. 328; and Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, 3:210. Karl Radek may also have been among Trotsky's supporters. He opposed carrying the war into Poland, for which Lenin charged him with "defeatism" (Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, p. 18), and shared Trotsky's basic assumptions about the disunity of the capitalist world and about the position of Germany in particular. See the assessment of Radek's speech to the Ninth Party Congress, April 1, 1920, in Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, 3:321.

12. See Kamenev's ebulliently optimistic speech of May 5, 1920, in *Sowjetrussland und Polen: Reden von Kamenew, Lenin, Trotzki, Marchlewski, Sokolnikow, Radek und Martow in der Vereinigten Sitzung des All-russischen Zentral-Exekutiv-Komitees des Moskauer Rates der Arbeiter- und Bauerndelegierten, der Gewerkschaftsverbände und der Betriebsräte am 5. Mai 1920* (n.p., 1920), pp. 3–6.

views,[13] it seems doubtful that he supported Trotsky in the Politburo.[14]

The formation of Trotsky's group was a direct result of the Russo-Polish War, which threatened the urgent task of economic reconstruction within Russia. Even before the end of the Civil War, Trotsky had turned his attention to the pressing problems of the domestic economy.[15] He began the transformation of units of the Red Army into labor armies in January 1920, and in February urged the end of War Communism in the countryside.[16] The prospect of war with Poland, however, endangered these plans. Trotsky expressed his "apprehension that Pilsudski was preparing for war" to the Politburo on January 22 and began putting the Red Army's Western Front on a war footing in February.[17] In March, he argued with Lenin and Chicherin about Soviet policy toward Poland in an attempt to remake that policy into a more effective instrument of peace.[18] In April, efforts to prevent a Polish attack failed, and Kiev fell to Pilsudski's forces on May 7.

The Polish successes were rather short-lived. Soviet troops broke through the Polish lines in the Ukraine on June 5 and recaptured Kiev a week later. The turning point of the war came in the first week of July, when a major Soviet offensive opened in the north. Russian forces took Minsk on July 11 and Vilnius on the fourteenth and pushed on toward Warsaw. Among leading Bolsheviks, the advance of the Red Army heightened expectations of a Communist revolution in Poland which would create a Soviet Poland and, perhaps, open the way to a Soviet Germany.

Trotsky, however, did not share this belief. On May 2 he warned that it was frivolous to assume that there would be a proletarian uprising in Poland and an easy victory over Pilsudski.[19] Three days later, in a speech in Moscow,

13. See his articles in *Pravda* of May 25–26 and July 11, 1920.

14. Trotsky (*Stalin*, p. 328) claims that Stalin, contrary to his public utterances, supported Lenin in the important decision to accept or to reject the Curzon ultimatum. Evidence presented in Richard H. Ullman, *The Anglo-Soviet Accord* (Princeton, 1972), p. 166, tends to support this view. Carr (*Bolshevik Revolution*, 3:210) doubts that Stalin took any position in the Politburo on the issue.

15. Deutscher, *Prophet Armed*, p. 447. See L. Trotskii, report on January 6, 1920 to the Moscow Party Committee, *Sochineniia*, vol. 15 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1925–27), pp. 83–103; his speech on January 12, 1920 about Russia's economic position and tasks, ibid., pp. 27–52; speech of January 28, 1920, ibid., pp. 52–83; and the instructions from the first half of January 1920 concerning the conversion of the Third Army into the First Labor Army in L. Trotskii, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia* (*Na voennoi rabote*), 3 vols. in 5 (Moscow, 1923–25), vol. 2, part 2, pp. 37–40.

16. Deutscher, *Prophet Armed*, pp. 490–98.

17. Ibid., p. 459. See also Trotsky's communications to Zinoviev, January 28, 1920; to Sklianskii, March 12, 1920; and to the Moscow and Petrograd Party Committees, May 2, 1920, in *Trotsky Papers*, 2:20–21, 122–25, and 158–59, respectively.

18. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, pp. 178–80; and especially Trotsky to Lenin, Kamenev, Krestinskii, Bukharin, copy to Chicherin, March 24, 1920, *Trotsky Papers*, 2:132–35.

19. Trotsky, *Stalin*, p. 328.

he asserted that the purpose of the war for Russia was to defend the fatherland, not to export revolution, and he called for a maximum effort to bring the war to a speedy end.[20] In Gomel' a few days later, the commissar for war again emphasized Russia's desire for peace and her efforts to secure it. She would sacrifice, he stated, in order to avoid the further loss of workers' blood.[21] His articles in *Pravda* from May through August stressed the dangers and the heavy human and economic costs of the war for Russia, and while he called for the greatest exertions to repulse Pilsudski, he betrayed no enthusiasm for revolutionary goals which could be pursued only at the price of greater grief and increased risks of foreign intervention.[22] Even after the Red Army began to drive westward, Trotsky put no faith in a Polish revolution. Instead, he thought the entry of Russian forces into ethnographic Poland would result in the formation of a united Polish national resistance against the traditional Eastern foe. When Soviet forces neared the Polish frontier, Trotsky urged that the advance be halted and that Lord Curzon's July 11 offer of mediation be accepted in order to avoid a longer, more costly war with a unified Poland.[23] Lenin's position prevailed, however, and Curzon's proposal was rejected. The Soviet march on Warsaw continued, until it was repulsed at the Vistula on August 16–17.

Between January and July 1920, Trotsky tried first to avert and then to minimize the scale of the Russo-Polish War. Russia's task, in his opinion, was to rebuild her economy, not to pursue illusory and costly hopes of Communist revolution abroad. He linked Russia's recovery with the economic recovery of Europe, and of Germany in particular. In a speech to the final session of the Second Congress of the Communist International on August 7, 1920,[24] when the capture of Warsaw and the establishment of a Soviet Poland by the Red Army appeared imminent, Trotsky paid only lip service to the events in Poland. Instead, he stressed Germany's and Russia's common fate and the need for them to be allowed to rebuild their economies in peace. The Entente

20. Text in *Sowjetrussland und Polen*, pp. 11–24.

21. Trotsky, speech of May 10, 1920, published as *Sowjetrussland und das bürgerliche Polen: Rede in einer Volksversammlung* (Berlin, 1920). Trotsky's only reference to revolutionary hopes came in closing and was ritualistic: "The Poland of workers and peasants lives! The Russia of workers and peasants lives! The world revolution, the liberation of all workers, lives!"

22. Articles of May 19, 27, and 28; June 6 and 17; and August 3, 1920.

23. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, pp. 213–14; Deutscher, *Prophet Armed*, pp. 463–65; and Korbel, *Poland between East and West*, p. 49. Trotsky persisted in his efforts to bring the Soviet offensive to a halt even after the Politburo had rejected Curzon's offer, but without success.

24. *Der zweite Kongress der Kommunist Internationale: Protokoll der Verhandlungen vom 19. Juli in Petrograd und vom 23. Juli bis 7. August 1920 in Moskau* (Hamburg, 1921), pp. 681–83. Trotsky's reticence at the Congress about events in Poland is also noted by Deutscher, *Prophet Armed*, p. 467.

had "crucified and suppressed Germany" and wanted to exploit the workers of Russia and Germany "like slaves." There was "no greater lie," Trotsky stated, than talk by Anglo-French capitalists about the recovery of Europe. "Can Europe be restored without Russian raw materials, without Russian grain? Can Europe be restored without German technology, without the German working class? It is not possible." But in order for Germany to revive, he continued, "she must be permitted to live, eat, and work." "Without Russia and without Germany," Trotsky stressed, "Europe cannot be regenerated." His remarks obviously stemmed from the belief, later referred to in Enver's letter to Seeckt of August 26, that German-Russian cooperation in economic reconstruction was the only solution to the chaos which engulfed Europe.

Trotsky first expressed fear of a Polish attack on January 22, 1920, and, as indicated above, began military preparations shortly thereafter. On February 7, an anonymous Soviet agent met in Berlin with a high Foreign Ministry official, possibly Foreign Minister Hermann Müller, and proposed a German-Soviet alliance in terms remarkably similar to those of Enver's report. "If you go . . . with Russia," the visitor promised, the Versailles Treaty would be scrapped and Germany's old eastern borders restored. What Russia would gain from the alliance would be German economic assistance. In fact, he predicted, the alliance would create "an unheard of economic power." The addition of a third, Asian power (Turkey?) to the alliance was possible, he continued, making "the new *Dreibund* the master of the world."[25]

The Soviet agent paid a second visit to the Foreign Ministry on February 10, accompanied by another Russian who had recently arrived from Moscow. The second visitor repeated the request for an alliance against Poland and promised that the formerly German areas of Poland would be restored to the Reich. The German replied that such a step by his government would be dangerous and would probably result in the invasion of Germany by the Entente and the separation of the South German states from the Reich.[26] Other Soviet overtures for a joint war against Poland were made sometime in early 1920 to Seeckt, but without success.[27]

Foreign Minister Müller apparently believed that the Russians' representations were sincere. On February 16, he told the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Reichsrat that a Polish attack on Russia was likely, but that

25. Microfilmed records of the Auswärtiges Amt, *Abteilung A, Geheime Akten betreffend das Verhältnis Deutschland zu Russland, Deutschland Nr. 131 (Geheim), Bd. 20.* St. Antony's Collection, Reel 33, document AS261, memorandum of February 9, 1920, unsigned.

26. Auswärtiges Amt, St. Antony's Collection, Reel 33, document AS272b, unsigned memorandum of February 11, 1920.

27. Höltje, *Ostlocarno-Problem,* p. 60.

he expected the Red Army to achieve victory, which he thought could prove beneficial to German territorial desires in the east. Müller did not think that the Soviets would attack Germany or conduct revolutionary activities within the Reich, because they desired cooperation with Germany in economic reconstruction.[28]

The reticent German reception of the Russian proposals and the continuation of negotiations between Moscow and Warsaw[29] delayed further Soviet-German conversations until April 1920. On April 8, however, S. S. Kamenev, the commander in chief of the Red Army, advised the commander of the Western Front that a Polish attack appeared imminent.[30] One week later, Kopp met with the head of the Foreign Ministry's Russian Division, Baron Ago von Maltzan, and expressed "the urgent need" to discuss German-Soviet relations. Kopp asked if it was possible that Germany would send troops or permit the transit of French troops to aid the Poles against Russia. Maltzan replied that this seemed improbable. Kopp then inquired "if the opportunity existed to construct a combination between the army here and the Red Army for the purpose of a joint struggle against Poland." This suggestion was quickly dismissed by Maltzan as "illusory." Finally, Kopp requested that the German government demonstrate its good will by officially recognizing his status as a commercial agent of the Soviet state, but this Maltzan also refused.[31]

Frustrated at the Foreign Ministry, the interested Soviet circles apparently opened discussions with the Reichswehr in late April or early May. Sometime before May 15, a high-ranking officer of the Red Army General Staff visited Berlin, where he probably met with officials of the Reichswehr,[32] and apparently convinced them that Soviet forces would respect Germany's borders.[33] Conversations were also in progress in early June between Kopp, Seeckt and his aide, Major Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer, possibly Chan-

28. Report by the delegation from Mecklenburg-Schwerin at the Reichsrat, February 18, 1920, in *Sovetsko-germanskie otnosheniia ot peregovorov v Brest-Litovske do podpisaniia Rapall'skogo dogovora: Sbornik dokumentov* (hereafter cited as *SGO*), 2 vols. (Moscow, 1968–72), 2:166–68. See also Höltje, *Ostlocarno-Problem*, p. 24.

29. About these, see Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, pp. 163–93.

30. S. S. Kamenev to V. M. Gittis, April 8, 1920, *Direktivy Glavnogo Komandovaniia*, pp. 629–30.

31. Auswärtiges Amt (hereafter AA), *Geheimakten, Verhandlungen mit Sowjetrussland (Graf Mirbach, Ostschutz), 1920*. Memorandum by Maltzan, April 16, 1920. Microfilm, serial K281/reel 3925/frames 095851-853. Henceforth, in citing documents from the archives of the AA, the file title will be given in full upon its first usage, and the document will be identified by the serial number assigned the file, the microfilm reel number, and the specific frame number on each page.

32. AA, *Abteilung IVa, Russland, Wirtschaft, Politische Beziehungen Russlands zu Deutschland, 1920–21*. Memorandum by Maltzan, May 15, 1920. L625/4775/198941.

33. See Höltje, *Ostlocarno-Problem*, p. 25.

cellor Hermann Müller, and German armament manufacturers concerning possible German assistance in the production of war matériel in Russia, but nothing concrete appears to have been decided.[34] Although Seeckt probably was unable to extend any tangible aid to the Soviets, he most likely assured them that he would oppose any effort to aid the Poles by or through Germany.[35]

Undaunted by his previous failures and hopeful that Walter Simons, who became German foreign minister on June 20, 1920, would be more receptive to Soviet proposals than his predecessors, especially in view of the repulse of the Polish army in the Ukraine (Kiev was recaptured on June 12), Viktor Kopp renewed his efforts at the Wilhelmstrasse. On June 22, he delivered a note which restated Russia's desire "to establish closer economic, political, and cultural connections with the German people as soon as possible."[36]

Simons was not prepared to accept Kopp's position—the Spa Conference was at hand and he could not aggravate relations with the Western powers—but neither was he disposed to reject it. He replied to Kopp, through Maltzan, that he had "taken under consideration with satisfaction the views" which Kopp had presented and that he hoped "present conditions will soon make possible the realization of mutual desires."[37] Until conditions changed, however, the Foreign Ministry maintained a reserved attitude toward Kopp in discussions about commercial affairs and continued to conduct negotiations with the Italian government concerning international cooperation in economic relations with Russia.[38] But Simons did begin, simultaneously, to prepare for a possible future move toward the Soviets. He attempted[39] to determine the

34. Concerning these negotiations, see Himmer, "German-Soviet Economic Relations," pp. 196–98.

35. For Seeckt's views, see particularly Korbel, *Poland between East and West*, pp. 73–74; and Carsten, *Reichswehr*, pp. 67–68. Seeckt's position was consistent with a decision by the Reichsrat on April 28 which refused aid to the Poles and overt aid to the Russians, and directed restraint by Germany until a Soviet victory created an opportunity for a change in Germany's eastern borders. See Günther Meinhardt, "Deutschland und Westpreussen im russisch-polnischen Krieg von 1920," *Westpreussen Jahrbuch*, 20 (1970): 17.

36. *DVP*, 2:582–83. The reference to "cultural connections" is suggestive. The term was later used to refer covertly to possible joint German-Soviet action against Poland. See, for example, AA, *Brockdorff-Rantzau Nachlass*, Rantzau to Maltzan, July 5, 1923, 9101/3431/225466-476. Whether this usage was practiced in 1920, however, is problematic.

37. Maltzan to Kopp, June 23, 1920, *DVP*, 2:583. I. K. Kobliakov, "Bor'ba sovetskogo gosudarstva za normalizatsiiu otnoshenii s Germaniei v 1919–1921 gg.," *Istoriia SSSR*, 2 (March–April 1971): 27, exaggerates the negative aspect of the German reply.

38. Concerning these matters, see Himmer, "German-Soviet Economic Relations," pp. 202–3 and 162–70 respectively.

39. AA, Simons to Rudolf Nadolny, July 5, 1920, K281/3925/095860.

state of the negotiations concerning satisfaction for the assassination of the German ambassador to Russia, Count Wilhelm von Mirbach, in July 1918, which had been broken off in November 1918, the satisfactory conclusion of which was considered a precondition for the renewal of relations.[40] Simons also sent an emissary to Copenhagen to discuss the renewal of German-Soviet relations with Maxim Litvinov, the deputy commissar for foreign affairs, who gave the German agent a "not very cheery" reception.[41]

If the waters of Copenhagen seemed chilly, those of Spa were even icier for the Germans. The Spa Conference of July 5–16 created a situation in Germany which was propitious for the Soviet officials who sought an agreement with the Germans. The Allies' rejection of German requests for concessions in the questions of disarmament, coal deliveries, and reparations increased the German leaders' hostility toward the Entente and encouraged them to turn toward the East.[42]

Kopp quickly attempted to exploit the effects of the Spa deliberations by pressing again for a German-Soviet understanding. He visited Maltzan on or shortly before July 14 and suggested, on his own initiative, that Soviet successes in the war with Poland and the treatment of Germany at Spa made a "quick clarification of German-Russian relations desirable and necessary."[43]

Kopp returned to the Foreign Ministry on July 19 and once more proposed the resumption of relations to Simons and Maltzan. The Germans were offered a deal at the expense of Poland: the establishment of a common Russo-German border and the settlement of the Polish corridor problem to Germany's satisfaction in a Russo-Polish peace treaty. Details of this and of the restoration of normal diplomatic relations would be worked out at a German-Russian conference held prior to peace talks with Poland. Kopp pressed Simons to reach a decision on his offer quickly because he was returning to Moscow on July 23, to discuss relations with Germany.[44]

The response of the German government to Kopp's *démarche*, and other events of late July and early August 1920, suggest that an unwritten agreement was reached between Simons and Kopp concerning the dismemberment of Poland. As a quid pro quo for Kopp's assurance that Russia would restore to Germany her eastern borders of 1914, the Germans probably promised

40. According to Wipert von Blücher, *Deutschlands Weg nach Rapallo: Erinnerungen eines Mannes aus dem zweiten Gliede* (Wiesbaden, 1951), p. 101, the Legal Department of the Ministry forced consideration of the Mirbach question.

41. Helbig, *Träger*, p. 46.

42. This is implicitly also the view of Helbig (ibid., p. 44).

43. Memorandum by Maltzan, July 1920, in the Political Archives of the AA, Bonn, quoted by Linke, *Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen*, p. 107.

44. AA, memorandum by Maltzan, July 19, 1920, K281/3925/095869-872. Kopp described the deal he had offered to Simons in vaguer terms in a report to Chicherin on July 21, cited in Kobliakov, "Bor'ba," pp. 27–28.

benevolent neutrality in the Russo-Polish War as well as the resumption of full diplomatic and economic relations with the Soviets.

On the day following Kopp's meeting with Simons and Maltzan, the German Cabinet approved the Foreign Ministry's proposal that Germany declare neutrality in the Russo-Polish War[45]—an act of strategic importance to the Soviets. Three days later the Cabinet took action even more clearly advantageous to Russia by barring the shipment of arms to Poland (as well as to Russia) in view of Germany's declared neutrality.[46]

On July 22 Simons gave Kopp a letter for Chicherin,[47] in which he submitted that the time had come when "the resumption of normal relations between Germany and Russia should be officially discussed." Germany expected the Soviet government first, however, to make formal amends for the injury to Germany's honor caused by the assassination of Mirbach in 1918, and Simons suggested a manner of apology which would be acceptable to Berlin.[48] Were Chicherin agreeable to this, Simons asked that the commissar state a time and place for "a mutual discussion which would have as its object our economic and political relations." He expressed the hope that these negotiations would enable "the German and Russian people . . . [to] meet together soon in common work toward the economic reconstruction of their countries." Simons further referred to Kopp's indications that the Red Army would respect "the old German frontiers" and proposed that a German liaison officer be attached to the right wing of the Soviet forces in Poland in order to avoid problems at the border.[49]

Simons publicly demonstrated his good will toward the Soviet regime, and also his belief in Kopp's sincerity, in an address to the Reichstag on July 26. The foreign minister proclaimed that the recognition accorded Soviet

45. Alte Reichskanzlei, *Inhaltsangaben von Kabinettsprotokollen 1919–23, Sitzungen des Reichsministeriums (Protokolle), 1919–21.* Protocol of Cabinet session of July 20, 1920, 3438/1669/745171.

46. Ibid. Protocol of session of July 23, 1920, 3438/1669/745183.

47. Text in AA, *Büro des Reichsministers, Akten betreffend Russland, 1920–1926,* 2860/1404/551564-566. All subsequent citations from the letter are from this text.

48. Simons's position on the Mirbach affair may have been a significant concession on his part. He pointed out in the letter to Chicherin that he felt the capture and punishment of Mirbach's murderers "will by now be next to impossible." He may have known, however, that the apprehension of one of the assassins, Bliumkin, would indeed have been possible, because Bliumkin was a student at the academy of the Red Army. Hilger reported this to Maltzan sometime in 1920, but whether the report was made before July 22 and whether Simons was informed about it are not known. See Hilger and Meyer, *Incompatible Allies,* pp. 8–9.

49. Erickson, *Soviet High Command,* p. 687, errs in stating that "the original suggestion [to attach a German liaison officer to the Red Army came] from Chicherin in a communication to the German government . . . dated for the German file 22nd July." Erickson refers to K281/095996-999, which is actually a copy of Simons's letter to Chicherin and a copy of the receipt for the letter signed by Kopp.

Russia by Germany at Brest-Litovsk was still valid and that Germany would not treat the Soviet regime "as a pariah." He stated his certainty that Russia would not invade Germany, because "what the Soviet republic needs is economic support" which Germany could give it. Simons saw in Russia an "enormously developing economy," the rebuilding of which was "a labor in which we would do well" to join.[50]

A memorandum written by Hans von Seeckt at the end of July indicates that he fully shared Simons's views.[51] He also envisioned a German-Soviet diplomatic offensive for the return of Germany's eastern lands based on the principle of national self-determination. The secretary of state for political affairs in the Foreign Ministry, Edgar Haniel von Haimhausen, spoke in similar terms on August 17 to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Reichsrat. Germany could not initiate the annexation of the now Polish territories, he said, because of fear of Western countermeasures, but these former areas of the Reich, once "liberated" by the Soviets, should declare their independence from Poland on the basis of the right of self-determination.[52] Orders were sent out from Seeckt and the Interior Ministry to border stations instructing them to prepare for "an eventual occupation of the corridor area."[53]

Confirmation of the Germans' expectations came from Soviet forces in Poland along the East Prussian border. The Supreme Command of the Red Army had directed as early as July 10, and consistently thereafter, that the borders of Germany be scrupulously respected, for reasons which included the security of the right flank of the Red Army and the fear that any hint of an invasion of Germany would endanger the Soviet state by provoking other powers against it.[54] In late July and early August, Soviet officers (including division commanders) informed German frontier authorities that they were under strictest orders not to violate the border. Insofar as the order to respect the German boundary resulted from concerns about the security of the Soviet right flank and about possible adverse international complications, it was compatible with the positions of both Lenin and Trotsky. But the Soviet officers in the field indicated another reason for this policy—it was the inten-

50. *Verhandlungen des Reichstages: Stenographische Berichte*, vol. 344 (Berlin, 1921), p. 262.

51. AA, memorandum entitled "Die militär-politische Lage im Osten und Schlussfolgerungen," July 31, 1920, 2860/1404/551567-573.

52. Höltje, *Ostlocarno-Problem*, pp. 29–30.

53. Ibid., p. 28.

54. See the plan for the offensive against Warsaw, July 10, 1920, in N. E. Kakurin and V. A. Melikov, *Voina s belopoliakami 1920 g.* (Moscow, 1925), p. 202; S. S. Kamenev's directive to Soviet forces in Poland, July 23, 1920, ibid., p. 212; and the notes of a conversation between Kamenev and M. N. Tukhachevskii, August 10, 1920, *Direktivy Glavnogo Komandovaniia*, pp. 650–52. Kamenev's instructions of July 23 even directed that the "*former* [emphasis added] borders of East Prussia" be respected, which might be significant in view of the Kopp-Simons discussions of July 19–22.

tion of the Soviet government, they believed, to tear up the Treaty of Versailles and restore Germany to her eastern borders of 1914.[55] These instructions, which apparently were sent down through the Red Army command structure, were consistent only with Trotsky's program.

Even before Kopp left Berlin with Simons's letter, the Germans' hope to benefit from the expected collapse of Poland was being smashed. Kopp had reported his proposals of July 19 to Chicherin on July 21—very possibly the first indication Chicherin had of the nature and extent of Kopp's maneuvers in Berlin.[56] It was probably after hearing of Kopp's activities from Chicherin that Lenin, on July 22, directed him to instruct Kopp to engage in *no* political discussions with the Germans. Chicherin promptly informed Kopp that his actions in Berlin were the result of misunderstanding or ignorance and stressed that the Soviet government, although it strongly desired the establishment of friendly trade relations with all countries, refused to consider any political agreement with Germany at present, especially one which had the character of an alliance against the Western powers or which referred to the Versailles Treaty, nor would it further discuss the Mirbach affair.[57]

The Leninst majority probably considered Simons's *démarche* a pathetic attempt by the hitherto hostile German government to switch sides at the last moment in order to profit from the defeat of the Poles. Furthermore, believing themselves to be on the brink of total victory in Poland, they had no need of the meager quid pro quo which the Germans offered. The lateness of the German response robbed it of whatever value it might have had for Trotsky. Moreover, the German demand for an apology for the assassination of Mirbach was "stupid" in Trotsky's opinion, and he desired that efforts be made to get the Germans to drop the matter before it further aggravated his position by arousing "unpleasant recollections."[58] Anger—because Kopp had allowed the Mirbach matter to arise—possibly led Trotsky to inform Lenin and Chicherin that he considered it "absolutely essential to entrust the conduct of negotiations with Germany to Comrade [A. A.] Ioffe," one of his closest associates.[59]

In his answer to Simons, dated August 2, 1920,[60] Chicherin stated that Simons's views "correspond in principle completely to the wishes and the interpretation of our government," but wondered openly why the German

55. See particularly Höltje, *Ostlocarno-Problem*, p. 26; Meinhardt, "Deutschland und Westpreussen," pp. 22–24; and Rolf Brandt, "With the Soviet Army," *Living Age*, 307 (October 2, 1920): 28–30.

56. Kopp to Chicherin, July 21, 1920, *SGO*, 2:195–96. See also Kobliakov, "Bor'ba," pp. 27–28.

57. Chicherin to Kopp, July 22, 1920, *SGO*, 2:197.

58. Note by Trotsky, August 15, 1920, *Trotsky Papers*, 2:250–51.

59. Trotsky to Lenin, Krestinskii, and Chicherin, August 4, 1920, ibid., 2:242–45.

60. Text in *DVP*, 3:75–77.

government had taken so long to respond to what he considered Soviet Russia's unmistakable desire for peaceful relations with all countries. He was generally agreeable to the idea of conversations "for the purpose of the restoration of our economic and, as far as possible, also political relations," and suggested Berlin as their site. He expressed the opinion that Simons's request for an apology for the assassination of Mirbach, which he refused—thus largely nullifying his agreement to negotiations—was based on misinformation. Chicherin recalled that a public apology had been given by the Soviet government in 1918 and claimed that the responsibility for the escape of the assassins lay with the German occupation authorities in the Ukraine, whence the murderers fled, rather than with the Moscow government. All of the other proposals made by Simons, Chicherin said, could not be discussed until they had been considered at greater length by the Soviet government.

Kopp clarified the Soviet position about these other matters when he met with Maltzan immediately upon his arrival in Berlin on August 12. He informed Maltzan that no decision had yet been reached by Moscow concerning the attachment of a German liaison officer to the headquarters of the Soviet command on the Polish front.[61] The Russian reluctance to establish liaison with the Reichswehr should be interpreted as an indication that Germany was still regarded by the makers of official Soviet policy as hostile, because liaison was established with Lithuania, which was considered friendly.[62] Kopp, furthermore, reneged on his assurances concerning the restoration of Germany's eastern borders of 1914. Although he admitted that originally he had stated that Russia would respect the 1914 frontiers, he now said that Russia, if a Soviet regime was instituted in Poland, would determine Poland's frontier with Germany based on ethnographic factors. In the event a peace treaty with Pilsudski was necessary, moreover, Russia would demand only the right of free transit through Poland for herself and Germany.[63]

After hearing the Soviet reply, Maltzan said that he was "seriously disappointed" by what he considered Chicherin's "light manner" of treating the Mirbach affair and especially by Chicherin's failure to make counterproposals toward a solution. He concluded from this that the Soviets were not really interested in the restoration of relations with Germany, which Kopp denied. In order to try to save something from the situation, Kopp attempted, contrary to Chicherin's express instructions, to achieve a solution of the Mirbach problem. He told Maltzan that Moscow would be willing again to

61. AA, memorandum by Maltzan, August 12, 1920, K281/3925/095946-950. The claim of Kurt Rosenbaum, *Community of Fate: German-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1922–1928* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1965), p. 15, that a German liaison officer "established contact with the Red Army," appears to be erroneous in view of Kopp's statement.

62. Kakurin and Melikov, *Voina*, pp. 204–5.

63. AA, Maltzan memorandum of August 12, 1920, K281/3925/095947-948.

express publicly its regret about the assassination, to send the German government a statement of its previous apology and of its efforts to apprehend the assassins, and to guarantee the safety of future German representatives in Russia. He sought to increase German receptiveness to this suggested compromise by claiming that his government had a fund of three billion gold marks available for purchases in Germany.[64]

The reversal suffered by the Red Army at the Vistula on August 16–17 did not diminish the interest of Kopp or the Germans in reaching a solution of the Mirbach problem. By August 20 a course of action had been worked out. The German government would send a delegation to Moscow to accept the Soviet apology. Subsequently, a conference concerning the renewal of economic relations would be held in Berlin.[65] Negotiations were already in progress between Kopp and Edmund Schüler, director of the Ministry's Personnel Department, about the return of the Russian embassy in Berlin and the German embassy in Petrograd, or similar accommodations in Moscow, in preparation for the dispatch of the German delegation.[66]

Schüler telegraphed Chicherin on August 20 to inquire if the latter was agreeable to the arrangements he and Kopp had made. This may have been the first indication Chicherin had about Kopp's continued efforts to reach a compromise solution of the Mirbach problem, in which Chicherin had refused to make concessions. On August 21 the commissar for foreign affairs sent a sharply worded telegram to Kopp. "My explanation in the letter to Simons about Mirbach settles the affair," chided Chicherin. "To apologize in any form whatever is still unconditionally inadmissable for us." To be sure that Kopp did not miss the point, Chicherin spelled out the situation for him:

> Either the present [German] government is a political continuation of the past—and in such case the apology given by us before is fully adequate . . . or the present government is entirely new, in which case our responsibility to the previous government does not apply to the new one and no apology is necessary.[67]

To Chicherin, Germany was either for or against Russia and, therefore, an apology would be either superfluous or humiliating.

Kopp met with Simons and Maltzan on August 29 and informed them that he had been unable to win over Moscow for the solution of the Mirbach affair he had worked out with Maltzan. Although he said that Moscow refused

64. Ibid.

65. AA, memorandum by Maltzan, August 13, 1920, K281/3925/095963-965; Simons to Haniel, August 14, 1920, K281/3925/096044; and memorandum, unsigned, August 20, 1920, K281/3925/096030-031.

66. AA, memorandum of August 20, 1920, K281/3925/096030-031; and Schüler to Chicherin, August 20, 1920, K281/3925/096034-038.

67. *DVP*, 3:141–42.

any further action in the matter, he suggested that a panel, composed of a Czech, an Italian, and an Austrian, be established to arbitrate a settlement. Simons reacted unfavorably to this suggestion, though he did not flatly reject it.[68]

Two days later, Kopp received a telegram from Chicherin in which he was instructed to "bring decisively to an end the efforts of the Germans to raise anew all their old demands." No concessions were possible to the Germans, who "have completely forgotten that the Brest Treaty was annulled."[69] Nonetheless, Kopp, still striving to achieve an accord with Germany, returned the same day to the Foreign Ministry and proposed that a mixed Russo-German commission determine, on the basis of the diplomatic documentation, whether adequate satisfaction had been given Germany for the injury to her national honor. This time Simons agreed.[70]

Kopp's continued persistence again attracted fire from Chicherin. In a letter of September 2, he warned Kopp that the Politburo had "finally and categorically" decided against any further consideration whatsoever of the Mirbach affair. Any form of apology would discredit the Soviet government in the eyes of the German proletariat. The German government, Chicherin concluded, had to realize that the time might soon come when it would find Soviet diplomatic and economic support "very valuable."[71] For the present, however, Chicherin's instructions ended the negotiations.[72]

From their inception until they were terminated by order of the Politburo, Soviet overtures to Germany consistently sought to implement Trotsky's goal of a broad German-Soviet alliance which would promote Russia's economic recovery and secure German aid against Poland. The desire for alignment with Germany is intelligible only against the background of Trotsky's perception of the gravity of Russia's isolated position, the need for foreign military, economic, and political aid, the time-wasting confusion in Soviet policy-making circles in early 1920, and the critical wrong-headedness, as Trotsky saw it, of the subsequent policy of exporting revolution, by which "the Soviet regime risked its very existence."[73] Although it is possible that

68. AA, memorandum by Maltzan, September 1, 1920, K281/3925/096086.

69. *SGO*, 2:233–34.

70. AA, Maltzan memorandum of September 1, 1920, K281/3925/096086.

71. *SGO*, 2:234–35.

72. The end of the discussions was not the result of a cooled German attitude, as stated by Freund, *Unholy Alliance*, p. 78. Simons was still speaking in terms most favorable to Soviet Russia on September 1. See Leo Stern, "Die aktuelle Bedeutung des Rapallo-Vertrages und der Kampf der DDR für friedliche Koexistenz der beiden deutschen Staaten," in *Rapallo und die friedliche Koexistenz*, ed. Alfred Anderle (Berlin, 1963), p. 20.

73. Lerner, "Poland in 1920," p. 407. A radically different assessment of Trotsky's position during the Russo-Polish War than that advanced in the present article is presented in N. Davies, "The Missing Revolutionary War," especially pp. 187–92. Davies

the Leninist majority might have endorsed inquiries at the Wilhelmstrasse in February and April in order to ascertain Germany's attitude, the content of the inquiries was contrary to the majority viewpoint and it is clear that the later proposals were not officially sanctioned. Kopp admitted on at least one occasion that he acted on his own initiative. His inability to make a formal proposal to Simons on July 19 and the necessity for him to prompt Simons to make the formal proposal of the establishment of closer relations to Chicherin also indicate that he acted without authorization, a point which is further demonstrated by the sharply negative reaction of Lenin and Chicherin to his activities. That it had to be the German government which took the first official step is, moreover, consistent with Trotsky's request, communicated through Enver Pasha, for a demonstration from the German side of its readiness to enter into close relations with Soviet Russia. Kopp's subsequent persistence in trying to arrange a solution of the Mirbach problem strikingly demonstrates the divergence between the official Soviet position and that of the Trotsky group.

Although the representations in Berlin had as their immediate cause the urgency, as Trotsky saw it, of securing German assistance in the war against Poland, they also reflected a much broader difference in outlook between Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin regarded the Polish attack on Russia as the major thrust of a concerted offensive by the Entente. Because Germany had demonstrated no particular readiness, in his view, to aid the Soviets in their economic reconstruction, and because it appeared, if with only the slimmest justification,[74] that Germany aided the Poles, she was regarded simply as a tool of the Allies. Trotsky, however, recognized that the international situation was more complex. He perceived that France, more than Britain, was the prime mover behind the Polish attack,[75] and he was aware of internal divisions over policy toward Russia within Britain[76] and Germany. These differences, he believed, could be exploited to the advantage of the Soviet state. Although Trotsky's position was defeated in the Politburo in early September 1920,

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sees Trotsky as the leader of a "Bolshevik Left" in 1920 which allegedly outdid Lenin in its enthusiasm for revolution in Poland and Germany.

74. It was on the basis of Polish troop movements from the German border to the Russian front that the Politburo concluded on June 4 that Germany was conspiring with Poland. See Jan Meijer's editorial comments in *Trotsky Papers*, 2:210–13.

75. See especially his speech of August 7, 1920, in *Der zweite Kongress der Kommunist Internationale*, pp. 681-83.

76. See particularly Trotsky's telegram to Chicherin and Lenin, June 4, 1920, with marginal comments by Lenin, *Trotsky Papers*, 2:208–11 (cited also by Deutscher, *Prophet Armed*, pp. 461–63); and the account of the debate in the Soviet leadership over policy toward Britain in Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Accord*, pp. 161–70.

the final victory was his. Less than three months later, Lenin recognized the value of Trotsky's insights and executed a major shift in Soviet foreign policy.[77] This shift led to the trade agreements with England of March 16 and with Germany of May 6, 1921, and ultimately to the Treaty of Rapallo.

77. With regard to England, see M. V. Glenny, "The Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement, March 1921," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5, no. 2 (1970): 78–79; in general and with specific regard to Germany, see Himmer, "German-Soviet Economic Relations," pp. 251–58 and 266–69. On the first tangible fruit of this shift see Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Accord*.