

# HITLER-STALIN PACT

## (GERMAN-SOVIET NON-AGGRESSION TREATY)

### TREATY AT A GLANCE

#### *Completed*

August 23, 1939, at Moscow

#### *Signatories*

Germany and the Soviet Union

#### *Overview*

Culminating a period in which the Soviet Union concluded a series of nonaggression treaties with its neighbors, the German-Soviet nonaggression pact, apparently reconciling the two great ideological poles of world politics, sent shock waves across the globe, setting the stage for Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland and the beginning of World War II.

## Historical Background

As Adolf Hitler came to dominate more and more of Europe in the late 1930s, Stalin lost all desire to oppose this ideological antithesis of communism, especially after the Great Powers' appeasement of Hitler at Munich. When Britain guaranteed Polish security, which meant that Hitler—facing the possibility of war from the West if he invaded Poland—now had a reason for treating with the USSR in the east, Stalin replaced his Jewish and pro-Western foreign minister Litvinov with Vyacheslav Molotov. Stalin approached Hitler, proposing and concluding a Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact, guaranteeing that neither nation would act against the other.


The pact stunned Stalin's apologists in the West, mostly intellectuals and others who forgave Stalin his excesses—the deadly consequences of forced collectivization of Soviet farmlands, the purges of 1936–38—because he was leader of the only ideology actively and aggressively opposed to fascism. Now, it seemed, Stalin had shirked his historical duty and indeed had climbed into bed with the enemy. In many ways, however, Stalin was merely following a Soviet foreign policy tradition since the day Lenin formed the Soviet Union in 1922: preach revolution, led by the USSR, and communist unity for the world at large, but work diplomatically to further Russian expansion.

But it was not merely Western communists and fellow travelers but virtually the whole world that reeled

in shock that the vehemently anticommunist Germany had come to terms with the resolutely antifascist USSR. It was as if the scales had fallen away from eyes beclouded since 1933 with the rise of Hitler and the birth of the notion of appeasement. The truth was, of course, that ideology was yielding to pragmatic maneuver on the eve of World War II: Hitler saw nonaggression with the Soviet Union as a necessary preliminary to attacking Poland. Stalin, having been rebuffed in his attempt to achieve a working relationship with Britain and France, had no desire to be isolated in the war he knew would come. Made the arbiter of Europe by the British guarantee of Poland, he therefore chose to wing a deal with the Nazis.

## Terms

Unlike the nonaggression treaties the Soviet Union had signed with other powers, this one went beyond the mere declaration of nonaggression. It was associated with a trade agreement concluded a few days earlier, on August 19 (see TRADE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND GERMANY), which effectively exchanged German industrial products for Soviet raw materials. As part of the August 23 treaty, a secret protocol provided for a German-Soviet partition of Poland and cleared the way for the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states.



The Government of the German Reich  
and  
The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist  
Republics

Desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following Agreement:

#### Article I

Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.

#### Article II

Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third Power.

#### Article III

The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

#### Article IV

Neither of the two High Contracting Parties shall participate in any grouping of Powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

#### Article V

Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

#### Article VI

The present Treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not denounce it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this Treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

#### Article VII

The present Treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The Agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

#### Secret Additional Protocol

On the occasion of the signature of the Nonaggression Pact between the German Reich and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics the undersigned plenipotentiaries of each of the two parties discussed in strictly

confidential conversations the question of the boundary of their respective spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following conclusions:

#### Article 1

In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognized by each party.

#### Article 2

In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish State the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish State and how such a State should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

#### Article 3

With regard to south-eastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in these areas.

#### Article 4

This Protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

Moscow, August 23, 1939

For the Government of the German Reich:

V. RIBBENTROP

Plenipotentiary of the Government of the U.S.S.R.

V. MOLOTOV

## Consequences

The nonaggression pact gave Hitler license to invade Poland, actively abetted by Soviet forces invading from the east, on September 1, 1939. Stalin also decided to increase Soviet influence in the west by invading Finland, which had been "lost" to mother Russia during World War I, on November 30, 1939. This ignited a short but costly war that resulted in securing Finland's surrender on March 12, 1940.

For the Soviet Union, the nonaggression treaty proved to be a pact made with the devil. On June 22, 1941, Hitler's armies invaded Soviet territory, abrogating the treaty and bringing to Stalin's people the worst devastation they had ever known.