Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Baltic Question

Allied Relations during the Second World War

Kaarel Piirimäe

The World of the Roosevelts

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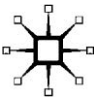

ROOSEVELT, CHURCHILL, AND THE BALTIC QUESTION

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To Monika, Paul, Villem, and Matilda

List of Previous Publications

Editor, with Olaf Mertelsmann, *The Baltic Sea Region and the Cold War* (2012)
Editor, with James S. Corum and Olaf Mertelsmann, *The Second World War and the Baltic States* (2014)

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Preface

It was a small piece of archival evidence that helped spark interest in me for this topic almost ten years ago. While writing a research proposal for the University of Cambridge, I was struck by reading a report from the British consul in Riga, Douglas MacKillop, on the Soviet Union's occupation of the Baltic states in 1940. He commented dryly that Latvian nationalism, "a romantic aspiration, a battle cry and a crusade, had in its final manifestation become something of a racket." With their economic weaknesses and internal divides, the disappearance of these states could, in the view of the diplomat, be described as not entirely regrettable.[1] I was surprised that someone should feel so skeptical about the future of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, three states that had, within the 20-year period after the First World War, "put themselves on the map," to use the words of E. H. Carr.[2] Was it the fault of the Baltic states that their disappearance was not universally deplored? Or perhaps there were wider considerations and assumptions underpinning MacKillop's views, which persuaded him to take a rather relaxed attitude toward the exit of three small states from the international system? These questions drove me to look into British and American perceptions of the Baltic states during the Second World War—in the context of their foreign policies and relations with the Soviet Union. In the process I realized that, even though more than 70 years had lapsed since 1940, there was still no comprehensive study of the handling of the Baltic question in the Big Three relations, and therefore my interpretation may find a useful niche in the historiography.

Throughout this project I have enjoyed the generous support of many institutions. My master's and doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge were supported by the Archimedes Foundation in Estonia and by St. John's College and the Cambridge European Trust in England. This multi-archival research would have been quite impossible without the help of the St. John's College travel fund. The publishing of the doctoral thesis as a book was greatly facilitated by the Marie Curie postdoctoral fellowship scheme, and the project "Phoenix from the Ashes? The Concept of National Self-Determination in World War Two" funded by the Archimedes

Foundation. This mobility program, along with the support of the Estonian National Defence College, gave me the chance to travel to conferences and conduct additional research in many archives. I must express my particular thanks to Prof. Tõnu Tannberg who eased my way back to Estonia by accepting me on his Estonian Science Foundation project "Estonia in the Era of the Cold War" and supported this monograph.

During this long journey, I have incurred many debts. First of all I would like to thank Prof. David Reynolds for his unequalled diligence and hard work as supervisor and for his continued encouragement and help in turning my dissertation into a book. Supervising is a "life sentence," as he once noted. I was lucky to have two of the most attentive examiners, Dr. Kristina Spohr Readman and Prof. Patrick Salmon, to read the manuscript with great care and provide many valuable suggestions. Ilvi Jõe Cannon helped me improve the language of one of the earlier drafts, while Prof. James S. Corum of the Baltic Defence College was most kind to proofread the final version of the manuscript and offer his excellent advice. I was able to draw on the opinions of my brother Pärtel and Eva, my sister-in-law, both highly professional historians whose constructive criticism I have always valued very highly. Dr. Eric Sibul at the Baltic Defence College suggested improvements in some parts of the manuscript. Needless to say, the mistakes that inevitably remain lurking in the text are all mine.

Trips to numerous archives would not have been possible without the help of many friends. Sven Sakkov, Silvi Valge, Indrek Elling and Kyllike Sillaste-Elling, and Olev Oleks and Heljo Laev gave me shelter in Washington, DC, and New York while I was digging in the archives there. Vello Ederma and the late Gunnar Paabo, Estonian patriots who arrived in America as a result of the Second World War, entertained me with colorful stories about the very historical period I was studying. Olev Olesk, the last foreign minister of the Estonian government-in-exile, showed me his most interesting photo collection that miraculously bridged Estonia's disrupted history from the prewar years up until the 1990s and beyond. Indrek Ibrus and Andres Klaar were always there when I needed a warm place to stay during my trips to the National Archives in Kew, London. Jaak Valge, Vladimir Sazonov, Aivar Niglas, Indrek Paavle, Meelis Saueauk, Peeter Kaasik, Maria Falina, and Lidia Pakhomova all helped me get to grips with the archives in Moscow. Dan O'Keefe hosted me at Cambridge, UK, during one of my library trips to my former hometown.

Academic breaks at two outstanding institutions were crucial in clearing my mind about the main ideas about this book. First I would like to thank the friendly staff and scholars of the Institute of European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University in Washington, DC, for the opportunity to reside as the institute's visiting fellow during June–July

2011. I am particularly grateful to my friend Francisco Rodriguez Jiménez for his help in turning that trip into reality. From March to May 2013 I was able to stay as visiting researcher at the Department of Political Science and Contemporary History of the University of Turku in Finland. It was in the tranquil environment of that institute that I was able to compose the book proposal. Many thanks to Dr. Louis Clerc, Prof. Kimmo Rentola, Dr. Ville Laamanen, Niko Hatakka, and other teachers, researchers, and the administrative staff at the Turku University.

I am most grateful to Dr. David B. Woolner of the Roosevelt Institute who read the book proposal in record time and recommended it to the publisher. Chris Chappell, my editor at Palgrave Macmillan, and his assistant Mike Aperauch made my final efforts as painless as could be. I would also like to thank Peter Lang Publishers for the permission to reproduce my chapter "'A Really Dead Issue': The Baltic Question in the European 'Non-Settlement' at the Start of the Cold War," which appeared in Olaf Mertelsmann and Kaarel Piirimäe (eds.), *The Baltic Sea Region and the Cold War* (2012), 63–88. It was crucial to add this text.

It is deeply unfair that acknowledgments for family should come last. I used to joke sometimes that the result of all the hard work for my PhD was one marriage and two children—now three—but still no thesis. The truth of the matter is that all the real graft was done by my wife, Monika, while I was off in the library. Monika has been following me faithfully all throughout these years, and gave birth to two wonderful boys, Paul and Villem, and a daughter, Matilda, who have been a source of much joy and comfort in our lives. But I must also thank my brother Pärtel, who greatly encouraged me to pursue an academic career, his wife, Eva, as well as my father, Helmut; mother, Krista; and brother Kristjan, who have all supported me longer than I can remember. Last but not least, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Malle and Kolla, my parents-in law, who have truly become a second family to me over the years.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations in the Text

ACPWFP	Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy, US Department of State
AWCC	Allied War Crimes Commission
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRPS	Foreign Research and Press Service, UK
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
DP	Displaced Person
HMG	His Majesty's Government
MP	Member of Parliament, UK
Narkomindel	*Nardodnyi Komissariat Po Innostrannym Delam*—People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, USSR
NKVD	*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*—People's Commissariat for Internal affairs (USSR)
Orgburo	*Organizatsionnoe biuro*—Organizational Bureau, USSR
OSS	Office of Strategic Services, the United States
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UN	United Nations
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abbreviations in the Notes

CAB	Cabinet Office papers, The National Archives, UK
CAC	Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, UK
DO	Dominion Office papers (UK)
DVP	*Dokumenty vneshnei politiki, 1939 god* (Moskva, 1992)
FO	Foreign Office, UK
FRUS	US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC, various years)

ERA	Eesti Rahvusarhiiv—Estonian National Archives, Tallinn
LC	Library of Congress, Washington, DC
NA	US National Archives, College Park, Maryland
PM	Prime Minister
PREM	Prime Minister's papers, CAC
RG	Record Group, NA
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, London, UK
VKP(b)	*Vsesoiuznaia Kommunisticheskaia Partiia (bolshevikov)*—All-Union Communist Party (Kolsheviks), USSR
WM	War Cabinet minutes, TNA
WP	War Cabinet papers, TNA

Introduction

At the beginning of August 1942 the British Foreign Office received a notice from its embassy in Washington about the plan of the US propaganda services to celebrate the first anniversary of the Atlantic Charter. The Office of War Information had already circulated recommendations to all American radio stations as how to present the charter to the public. It advised the radios to extoll the universal character of its principles: "The Atlantic Charter is world-wide in scope. It applies to India, China, Russia, Burma, Africa, Europe and all the Americas." It was suggested that the president and the British prime minister should exchange telegrams on August 14. In his announcement Franklin D. Roosevelt would dwell on the meaning of the charter, underlining particularly its application to Asia and Africa as well as to Europe.[1]

Gladwyn Jebb, responsible for postwar planning in the British Foreign Office, thought the prime minister should see the report immediately. Churchill's intervention was quick. In his message to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden he expressed displeasure at the idea of expanding on the meaning of the charter: "There is every advantage in keeping things vague and general."[2] Next Churchill wrote directly to Roosevelt insisting on thinking twice before publicizing national self-determination in the Allied propaganda worldwide: "Its proposed application to Asia and Africa requires much thought. Grave embarrassment would be caused to the defence of India . . . the Arabs might claim by majority they could expel the Jews from Palestine." He pleaded with the president to consider his difficulties in the empire "with the kindness you always show to me."[3] By a timely and determined intervention on the highest level, an Anglo-American joint celebration of the Atlantic Charter was nipped in the bud. Three months later Jebb was able to observe with satisfaction the encouraging feature of British public opinion, "the total lack of interest in the Atlantic Charter."[4]

This episode illustrates well one of the main subjects of contention—the question of colonialism—between Roosevelt and Churchill during the Second World War. It shows the United States championing the nations' right to self-determination as a matter of principle, and Britain defending its

national interest of keeping the empire intact, in disregard of the high moral principles if need be.[5]

Although true in some respect, this interpretation may also lead to dangerous stereotyping. A consistent reading of the charter would have resulted in the support of the Allies for the claim of the Baltic states to regain their independence; this independence they had lost through Soviet annexation by force in 1940. Churchill and Roosevelt had pledged publicly not to recognize territorial chances brought about during the war,[6] but as many historians have noted, both war leaders were willing to compromise on the principle after the Soviet Union entered the war as an ally.[7] Despite the claims of a number of participants and eye witnesses, and scholars after the event, Roosevelt's record of defending the rights of the Baltic states was in the final analysis not significantly more effective than Churchill's.

As Elisabeth Barker has noted, Churchill wanted to lead and mold political opinion, whereas Roosevelt had—at least in outward show—to follow and respond to it.[8] The difference between the two men lay not so much in the essence of their policies but in appearances. The US president was simply able to convey greater promise to foreign as well as to domestic audiences than the prime minister could. But as Jonathan H. L'Hommedieu has written, this advantage also presented a pitfall for Roosevelt's political successors, as it exposed the Democratic Party to accusations of duplicity in the postwar period.[9] A striking example of Roosevelt's approach was his assurance to a delegation of Lithuanian Americans in October 1940, just before elections, that Lithuania's independence had only been "temporarily put aside."[10] The Baltic and the Polish communities in the United States were not likely to forget the president's failure to fulfil the raised expectations.

Understanding this crucial difference between the two war-time leaders helps one overcome some of the muddled thinking still present in literature about the Baltic question during the Second World War. One of the myths that was promoted by American actors during and immediately after the war, and which is still lingering on, is that Roosevelt saved the Baltic states from being bargained away by the British to the Soviets as part of the British-Soviet treaty of May 1942.[11] As this book will attempt to show, Roosevelt's intent was not to save some small states from the Soviet clutches. His objective was to avoid the hard bargain over territories and spheres of influence, which he considered inevitable in the long run, to become *public*, and he was convinced the British would mismanage the issue anyway. But in the final analysis Roosevelt's perceptions and preferences had no effects whatsoever, as it was Stalin who made the decision (for a treaty without territorial clauses) quite independently of the American point of view.

While the key decisions rested in the hands of Roosevelt and Churchill, there were also the diplomatic services, foreign ministries, and foreign

secretaries who played their part in the making of foreign policy. The relations between the rank and file, the leading officials of the ministries and the political leadership were always dynamic, assuring that the formation of foreign policy was never a straightforward process. The reports of the diplomats on the ground allow one to explore cultural perceptions of the Baltic and the Baltic region among the foreign-policy establishments. Particularly interesting in this respect is the "Riga group," a circle of some of America's leading diplomats in the 1940s, such as George F. Kennan, Charles E. Bohlen, and Loy W. Henderson, who had received part of their training in the prewar Baltic states.[12] The views of the rank and file also provide a useful perspective on the people responsible for all the major decisions.

This book also gives voice to the Baltic nations—through their diplomats in London, Washington, Stockholm, and Helsinki—who were most affected by the Allied diplomacy, policies, deliberations, negotiations, and decision making. Although, for the most part, the Baltic diplomats were pawns of a game they could hardly understand—for lack of information—their views, their perceptions, and their sometimes frantic attempts to avoid the inevitable are in themselves a telling commentary of, and a valuable perspective on, the policies of the great powers. This book concentrates on the Estonian diplomats and their networks and discusses the views of their Latvian and Lithuanian colleagues only to the extent that these were reflected in the Estonian documents.[13]

The problem for the Baltic diplomats was not only that they were neglected in favor of the strategic necessity to keep the Soviet Union happy and the Red Army fighting. They were also trying to argue for national self-determination of small states at the time that can be described as the end of the era of nationalism in Europe. Eric Hobsbawm has included the Second World War in the period that he terms the "apogee of nationalism," spanning from 1918 to 1950.[14] But one should perhaps agree with Glenda Sluga that the Second World War was in fact an apogee of twentieth-century internationalism.[15] Carsten Holbraad also identifies the war as a watershed: "it was widely accepted that nationalist feelings and policies had been the bane of the first half of the twentieth century." There was a tendency to see nationalism as a destabilizing force that should be combatted by emphasis on transnational political union. "Many people in the mid-1940s even believed," Holbraad observes, "that the time had come to abandon the traditional concept of sovereign states in favor of some form of international integration."[16] Indeed, this book will discuss plans to establish confederations in East-Central Europe to fight the twin problem of ethnic strife within national borders and international conflicts in the region. As a corollary to this thinking, however, the independent existence of small states, the Baltic states included, was not something that was widely supported.

That the Baltic states were struggling against a current of opinion forming against nationalism and the small state runs as a red thread through their activities. Without considering the development of political ideas at the time, the story about the exit of the Baltic states from the international system, or the "putting aside" of their independence to use Roosevelt's words, would remain an incomplete one. In order to pinpoint the influence of political ideas on policy, this book analyzes the discussions of the British and US official organizations for the planning of the postwar world.

There are a number of books about the Allied diplomacy that touch upon the Baltic question in one way or the other, and some articles that focus on particular episodes. There is a useful summary of the British reactions to the annexation of the Baltic states from 1940 to 1941,[17] and a few analyses of the creation of the US nonrecognition policy in 1940.[18] The period, which has been particularly well studied, is the beginning of the Big Three Alliance from June 1941 to mid-1942 and the handling of the Baltic question in that context. The standard work is the study of the American historian Steven Miner; his interpretation has been taken up by other scholars.[19] The weakness of Miner's interpretation lies chiefly in his treatment of the Baltic question separately from the Polish question, although these two were closely intertwined. It also tends to idealize the foreign policies of the American administration and contrast it to the "cynical" and "realist" approach of the British.[20] This book will try to demonstrate that President Roosevelt, even in 1941–1942, was not as idealistically minded as has sometimes been assumed. Last but not least, Stalin's reasons for halting the pressure on the British to recognize the Baltic states as Soviet territory have not been adequately explained.

The Allied handling of the Baltic question after 1942 has scarcely been studied. There is an article on the Anglo–Soviet discussions on the Baltic states in 1943 in the context of the negotiation for setting up the United Nations War Crimes Commission;[21] and a few articles on the secret agreement between Stalin and Roosevelt on the Baltic states in 1943 in Teheran.[22] There is only one study dwelling on the position of the Baltic question in the Allied diplomacy toward the end of the war and in the immediate postwar years, which is Lawrence Juda's analysis of the shaping of the American nonrecognition policy.[23] Juda argues convincingly that the United States was ready to recognize the Soviet takeover of the Baltic states, but wished to settle this within the broader context of a peace treaty with Germany. Since no final peace conference took place, the US nonrecognition became established.[24] However, this argument needs an important qualification. I will argue that there was a time gap, 1945–1946, when the Baltic question might well have been settled had Moscow made a determined effort to get the issue out of the way. Why Britain did not recognize de jure the Soviet

annexation after the war has not been studied at all, yet this is even more interesting than the American case.[25]

In the analysis of Soviet policies toward the Baltic states, this book mostly relies on published Russian language sources, of which a good many collections have become available since the early 1990s.[26] In the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History I was able to see the personal archive of Viacheslav Molotov. There is an abundance of published sources on the Allied relations during the war, including the correspondence between Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt, and the most important diplomatic papers of the US State Department.[27] British foreign policy during the war is less well covered although there is a selection of Foreign Office papers in *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin*.[28] For the immediate postwar years, there are the *Documents on British policy overseas*.[29] As to archival sources, I have used the collections of the British National Archives in London, mostly the papers of the Foreign Office (FO 371, 954), the Prime Minister's office, the War Cabinet, and the Dominion Office but I have also dug in Churchill's papers at the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge. I was also able to make use of the records of the meetings of the Royal Institute of International Affairs stored at the archive of the Chatham House in London.

On the American side, I have made extensive use of the resources of the US National Archives at College Park, Maryland, especially the decimal files of the State Department on the Baltic states, the Harley Notter papers of the Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy, papers of Charles E. Bohlen, Elbridge Durbrow, and John D. Hickerson, as well as the documents of the Office of Strategic Services, especially the Foreign Nationalities Branch. In the Library of Congress I have consulted the papers of Loy W. Henderson and Averell W. Harriman. At the Mudd Manuscript Library of the University of Princeton I was able to see the papers of Hamilton Fish Armstrong. Last but not least, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum gave me access to the reports of Ambassador John Wiley.

The Estonian perspective is covered by the records of August Torma, the Estonian minister in London, which at the time were housed at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs but have now been turned over to the National Archives of Estonia. Among the collections located at the Estonian National Archives in Tallinn, I have consulted the documents of the Estonian Consulate General in New York and the personal papers of Kaarel Robert Pusta. Some of the documents of the Estonian Foreign Delegation, which operated in Stockholm and Helsinki, have been conveniently published in *Tõotan ustavaks jääda . . . Eesti Vabariigi valitsus 1940–1992*.[30]

CHAPTER 1

The Soviet Annexation and the Estonian Diplomats-in-Exile, 1940

Shortly before midnight on June 14, the Soviet commissar of foreign affairs, Viacheslav Molotov, presented an ultimatum to the Lithuanian foreign minister, Juozas Urbšys, who was staying in Moscow for talks. The terms were severe: the Lithuanians had to form a new government subservient to Soviet interests and permit the entry of an unspecified number of Soviet troops and their stationing in the most important centers of Lithuania. The reply had to reach Moscow by 10 a.m. the following morning, but in any case the Red Army would cross the frontier regardless of the Lithuanian response. After an intense debate, at which President Antanas Smetona insisted on resistance, the government complied, and at 3 p.m. Soviet forces crossed the border.[1] According to the report of the German military attaché, the Red Army "massed" on the East-Prussian frontier in what was described as a "defensive move" against Germany.[2] At the same time, Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vladimir Dekanozov, a Georgian and an ally of Beria working as an assistant to Molotov, arrived in Kaunas to supervise the overthrow of the existing regime.

On June 16, the Soviet government delivered similar ultimatums to Estonia and Latvia, accusing them of forming a military alliance with Lithuania against the Soviet Union, of harboring pro-British sympathies, and of not believing in the strength of the German-Soviet friendship. The countries were occupied the following day. Andrei Zhdanov, the chief party ideologue of the war against Finland, was sent to Tallinn and Andrei

Vyshinskii, the famous prosecutor at the 1930s' trials, to Riga to take charge of affairs in Estonia and Latvia, respectively. Soon "peoples governments" composed of leftist intellectuals were established with the acquiescence of President Konstantin Päts in Estonia, Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia, and Antanas Merkys in Lithuania (Smetona had fled to Germany on June 15). All coups were carried out under the semblance of popular support, carefully reported by the pro-Soviet press in the West.[3]

There is a strong temptation to cast Soviet actions as a desperate reaction to the German triumph in the West. By a dramatic coincidence, Paris fell on the same day as Lithuania received the first ultimatum. But as Alfred Senn had observed, the political-military campaign against the Baltic states could not be pulled off on a day's notice. It required long-term planning. Senn situates the start of the preparations to February, when the Winter War was coming to a conclusion and when Moscow called its *polpreds*, the envoys in Kaunas, Riga, and Tallinn, to Moscow for consultation. The final decision to overrun the Baltic states was probably taken on May 24 or 25, when France was already showing clear signs of collapsing.[4]

Back in the autumn of 1939, Stalin had decided on a clever backdoor strategy of Sovietizing the Baltic states without provoking an open conflict. After the British and French declarations of war on Germany on September 3, Stalin assumed, basing his predictions at least partly on the experience of the First World War, that the war of attrition on the Western Front (but not in the East) would be a prolonged one. On September 7, Stalin told Dimitrov, Molotov, and Zhdanov that two equally matched camps of capitalist countries were fighting for world domination.[5] He probably assumed that during that "war of attrition" he would have time to consolidate his gains from the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, which had assigned the Baltic states, together with Finland, eastern Poland, and Bessarabia, to the Soviet sphere of influence. Stalin was satisfied that the status quo in Europe had finally been destroyed by the pact, and he could not foresee that this would lead to the German dominance of the continent so swiftly.[6]

Destroying the Versailles-Riga system in the East justified the risks, however. Tangible gains in power and territory were the chief official justification for the pact with Hitler. As Molotov told the Supreme Soviet on October 31, 1939, it gave "the Soviet Union new possibilities to influence the course of events in the international arena."[7] Nikita Khrushchev would later remark that Stalin "knew that Hitler wanted to betray, outwit us. But he thought that we, the Soviet Union, had outsmarted Hitler by signing the pact. Stalin told us that the pact would give us real power over Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bessarabia and Finland."[8] Perhaps Stalin preferred a treaty with the Western powers, but London and Paris had not been prepared to

endorse a Soviet "Monroe Doctrine" in the Baltic.[9] "The English and the French wanted to have us as slaves," Stalin told Georgii Dimitrov, the general secretary of the Comintern, on September 7.[10]

If precautionary measures against the German forces stationed in East Prussia were perhaps foremost in the minds of Soviet leaders in June 1940, opening the Finnish Gulf for the Baltic fleet had loomed large in Moscow's actions in September 1939. Estonia had therefore the unenviable role of being the focus of Soviet attention in 1939. In parallel to the invasion of Poland, the Red Army had prepared for operations against the Baltic states. By the end of September, Moscow had amassed 270,000 troops on the borders of Estonia and Latvia, with the orders to march into enemy territory on September 30.[11] Since mid-September Soviet ships and aircrafts had appeared in Estonian territorial waters and airspace to intimidate and possibly provoke a conflict. However, Stalin hesitated to use force and instead decided for diplomatic pressure.

There was also the desire on Estonia's part to prevent the conflict from escalating and to pinpoint Soviet demands.[12] On September 24, Foreign Minister Karl Selter traveled to Moscow to sign a trade agreement. Molotov seized the opportunity and asked Selter to conclude a treaty of mutual assistance, allowing the Soviets to establish strategic bases on the Estonian territory. The escape of the Polish submarine *Orzel* from Tallinn harbor, where it had been interned, provided a pretext for presenting far-reaching demands. According to Molotov, the incident had demonstrated the Estonian inability or unwillingness to control its territory, which was jeopardizing Soviet security.[13] He brushed aside Selter's apologies, questioned Estonia's neutrality, and warned that the Soviet government would have to take "active measures," use force if necessary, to "expand its security system on the Baltic." He noted: "20 years ago you forced us to sit in this Finnish puddle [Gulf of Finland]. Do you think this will last forever?"[14]

On September 28, Estonia and the USSR signed a mutual assistance pact that allowed Moscow to station 25,000 troops on the Estonian territory. Similar agreements were concluded with Latvia and Lithuania later in October. Molotov told Latvian foreign minister Wilhelms Munters: "Peter the Great was already concerned about an exit to the sea…we cannot permit small states to be used against the USSR. Neutral Baltic states—that is too insecure." Stalin added: "I tell you frankly a division into spheres of influence has taken place…As far as the Germans are concerned we could occupy you. But we want no abuse."[15]

The "time of bases," as the period between September 1939 and June 1940 is known in Estonia, was a novel experiment in the Soviet tactics of exporting its system to capitalist countries. No similar example of self-restraint can be found in Soviet Sovietization policies. For nine months

Stalin kept his word and did not intervene in the internal affairs of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Soviet legations were forbidden to entertain contacts with the Communist circles, and troops in the garrisons were ordered not to interfere with the local population.[16] Stalin was extremely optimistic about the Soviet ability to win sympathies among the Baltic people, so that the Stalinist system could eventually be introduced without much resistance. He even told Dimitrov: "We will not try to Sovietize them. Time will come, when they will do it themselves!" Moreover, Stalin thought the Soviets had found a "formula," which could be used to draw even more states into the sphere of influence of the USSR. "But for that we need to be careful," he cautioned, and expressed the need "to strictly observe the internal regime and independence of these states."[17]

The Baltic peoples refused to Sovietize themselves, as even the Soviet leaders were forced to admit. Molotov would explain the need for "external encouragement" at the Supreme Soviet on August 1, 1940, by complaining that the expected rapprochement had been "opposed by the ruling bourgeois groups of the Baltic countries," who had "begun to increase their hostile activities."[18] In order for the common man to develop genuine sympathies for the Soviet system, the ruling and the propertied classes had to be liquidated. As was common for Soviet practice, the police and the security forces began a thorough cleansing of the population immediately after the takeover.[19]

Back in the autumn of 1939 there had been a clear strategic rationale for Stalin to proceed with caution. It would have been unwise to fuel the fears of other small states on the Soviet border, from Finland to Turkey. These considerations receded to the background after the completion of the peace treaty with Finland on March 13, 1940, and quite drastically so after the success of German arms in Western Europe.

The Winter War from November 30, 1939, to March 13, 1940, had left a profound suspicion in the Soviet mind toward the West. Awareness of the British and French plans about intervention in Scandinavia and an attack on the oil fields in the Soviet Caucasus confirmed old Bolshevik fear of capitalist encirclement. According to Patrick R. Osborn, the Politburo's decision on March 5 to kill the around 22,000 Polish officers and civil servants in camps and prisons in Russia may have been the result of the anxiety.[20] From the Soviet point of view, they were not dealing with just a couple of hostile small states but rather with a potential coalition secretly supported by capitalist enemy nations. As Gabriel Gorodetsky notes, the move against Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia was thus not a measure taken against Germany only, but also against Britain.[21] The *Pravda* article of May 28 that heralded a propaganda campaign against the Baltic states referred to the pro-Allied sympathies of the Baltic governments as a major offense against the Soviet Union.[22] Just as the Polish prisoners of war in Soviet custody, the

Baltic states appeared as a fifth column in the Soviet rear in a dangerous military situation.

The speedy fall of France only strengthened the Kremlin's fears of an impending capitalist drive against the Bolshevik state. Why did the French not fight? Why did Hitler allow the evacuation of Dunkirk? Stalin and his entourage suspected that French capitalists were joining hands with the Germans and that Hitler was engaging in negotiations with the British to join forces against the Soviet Union.[23] Dunkirk confirmed for Stalin that Anglo-German negotiations had either borne fruit already or else Hitler was doing his utmost to promote such discussions.

The mission of Stafford Cripps, the new British ambassador to Moscow, did not alleviate these suspicions. Cripps could likely be a British maneuver to demonstrate to the Nazis that the Soviets could not be trusted and thereby strengthen their own position in negotiations with Berlin. Then there was also a genuine fear in the Kremlin about the possibility of Germany turning its armies to the East.[24] According to an informant of the American envoy John C. Wiley in Estonia and Latvia, on June 19 the Kremlin was in a "state of acute anxiety and confusion . . . Stalin's policy, which was premised on a long and exhausting war, has collapsed with the collapse of France."[25] The suspicious mind of Stalin and the dogmatic belief in the capitalist encirclement hindered a realistic assessment of the dangers, something that would contribute greatly to the disasters of 1941.[26]

What was probably foremost in the minds of the Soviet leaders when they decided to take over the Baltic states was the unexpected possibility of a peace settlement. Wilfred Gallienne, the British consul in Tallinn, thought Stalin feared the loss of his opportunity to bag all his gains from his cooperation with Hitler.[27] The attention on France also gave Stalin a convenient cover. A Soviet official would frankly tell Lithuanian vice-premier Prof. Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius in June that "our party [the Communist Party] can delay no longer, for such favorable circumstances might not repeat themselves."[28] Molotov would add later in July that he expected Germany to exhaust itself in war, and the "hungering masses" would rise up against their oppressors. The Soviet Union, well prepared and with fresh forces, would rush to the aid of the revolution in Europe. When this happened, Molotov explained, the Soviet Union "cannot allow a small island with a form of government that will have to disappear in all Europe to remain behind our back."[29] The idea of a fifth column loomed large in these speculations.

According to the Soviet script, the occupation and annexation had to look from outside as a spontaneous revolution. The Soviet camouflage induced historian Geoffrey Roberts to argue that "an urban-based, activist left-wing minority welcomed the Red Army occupation and demanded Soviet power and incorporation into the USSR." This popular sentiment, he contends,