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## IV. Archives on World War II

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# The Truth Behind The Start of World War II

by Carl Osgood

Dec. 24—We revisit here Russian President’s Vladimir Putin’s report on June 19, on the roots of World War II, which was directly addressed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche in a June 24 [statement](#), “Putin’s Discussion of the Second World War Can Prevent World War III!” and add to that a review of 75 pages of documentation published in the relevant volumes of the U.S. State Department’s official *Foreign Relations of the United States*, as well as additional documentation from the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, which demonstrates that the American intelligence community at that time agreed with Putin’s view. Putin’s document is available in English in the [article](#) on the origins of World War II, published in the American journal *The National Interest*. He presented his analysis of the causes of that horrendous disaster for mankind, with his own call for urgent measures today to prevent the current crisis from ending in the same disaster—which, in the age of thermonuclear weapons, could end civilization as we know it.

In doing so, Putin documented, through Soviet and other archives from that era, that it was particularly the failure of British and Polish leaders, abetted by the failures of the allies in general, to confront Adolf Hitler’s ambitions in Eastern Europe, not the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, that set Europe on the path towards war.

Today’s Polish political elites, as well as NATO-aligned political leaders in other countries, erupted in howls of protest, insisting that what Putin argued was



Vladimir Putin, President of Russia.

not true, that Hitler and Stalin *together* were responsible for the start of World War II, that only Hitler and Stalin were responsible for making Poland the first victim of the war through the 1939 division of Poland.

American diplomats had understood in 1937-38 that anti-Semitic violence and government legal actions, akin to those of Germany, were a huge problem in Poland, and reported that reality back to Washington. American diplomats also understood that Czechoslovakia was key to Hit-

ler’s plans for occupying Eastern Europe, and that Poland stood in the way of defending Czechoslovakia’s sovereignty, because Warsaw was also eyeing a piece of that country’s territory. These same diplomats also knew that Neville Chamberlain’s British government planned to sell out Czechoslovakia to Hitler months before it happened, demonstrating that there would be no anti-Hitler coalition. All of this documentation has been available for decades, but it is ignored by those revisionists of today, some of whom have even posited that the U.S. and the UK alone defeated Hitler, ignoring the fact that the vast majority of the war was fought within the Soviet Union, and 27 million Soviet citizens died in defeating the Nazi scourge.

Putin wrote:

The blame for the tragedy that Poland then suffered lies entirely with the Polish leadership, which had impeded the formation of a military alliance between Britain, France and the Soviet



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German troops entering Brno, Czechoslovakia, March 1939.

Union and relied on the help from its Western partners, throwing its own people under the steamroller of Hitler's machine of destruction. The Soviet Union did its utmost to use every chance of creating an anti-Hitler coalition. Despite—I will say it again—the double dealing on the part of the Western countries.

### Never Again

Putin's concern is that there are signs today that the world could blunder into war yet again:

The creation of the modern system of international relations is one of the major outcomes of the Second World War. Even the most insurmountable contradictions—geopolitical, ideological, economic—do not prevent us from finding forms of peaceful coexistence and interaction, if there is the desire and will to do so.

Today the world is going through quite a turbulent time. Everything is changing, from the global balance of power and influence, to the social, economic, and technological foundations of societies, nations and even continents. In the past epochs, shifts of such magnitude have almost never happened without major military conflicts. Without a power struggle to build a new global hierarchy. Thanks to the wisdom and farsightedness of the political figures of the Allied Powers, it was possible to create a system that has restrained from extreme manifestations of such objective



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Adolf Hitler salutes German troops entering Poland, September 1939.

competition, historically inherent in the world development.

It is a duty of ours—all those who take political responsibility and primarily representatives of the victorious powers in the Second World War—to guarantee that this system is maintained and improved. Today, as in 1945, it is important to demonstrate political will and discuss the future together.

In this regard, Putin reiterated his call for a five-power summit among Russia, China, the U.S., the UK, and France, which would discuss the issues of preserving peace to include not only security matters and arms control but also to take up the situation in the global economy, particularly with respect to the coronavirus pandemic.

### European Parliament Resolution Blames Hitler and Stalin

The direct trigger that led to Putin's article was a *resolution* voted up in the European Parliament (EP) on September 19, 2019, which put equal responsibility for the start of World War II on Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union, as if it began with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed one week before the Nazi invasion of Poland:

Whereas 80 years ago on 23 August 1939, the communist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and its secret pro-



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*Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov signs the German–Soviet Treaty of Friendship in Moscow, September 28, 1939. Among those behind him are co-signer Joachim von Ribbentrop, Germany’s Minister of Foreign Affairs; Soviet Premier, Joseph Stalin; and Alexey Shkvarzev, Soviet Ambassador to Germany.*

protocols, dividing Europe and the territories of independent states between the two totalitarian regimes and grouping them into spheres of interest, which paved the way for the outbreak of the Second World War.

It immediately followed this saying:

As a direct consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, followed by the Nazi-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 28 September 1939, the Polish Republic was invaded first by Hitler and two weeks later by Stalin—which stripped the country of its independence and was an unprecedented tragedy for the Polish people.

Later in the resolution, the European Parliament maintains:

Russia remains the greatest victim of communist totalitarianism and that its development into a democratic state will be impeded as long as the government, the political elite and political propaganda continue to whitewash communist crimes and glorify the Soviet totalitarian regime; [The EP] calls, therefore, on Russian society to come to terms with its tragic past.

[The EP is therefore] deeply concerned about

the efforts of the current Russian leadership to distort historical facts and whitewash crimes committed by the Soviet totalitarian regime and considers them a dangerous component of the information war waged against democratic Europe that aims to divide Europe, and therefore calls on the Commission to decisively counteract these efforts.

Putin, during a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) heads of state summit on December 20, 2019, told the assembled heads of state that he was “surprised” and “somewhat hurt” by the EP resolution. The EP reference to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, he said, begged the question:

Was this the only document signed by one of the European countries, back then the Soviet Union, with Nazi Germany? It turns out that this is not at all the case.

Putin then proceeded to list a series of agreements European powers signed with Nazi Germany from 1934 on, beginning with the Declaration on the Non-use of Force between Germany and Poland, followed by the Anglo-German maritime agreement of 1935, the joint Anglo-German declaration of Chamberlain and Hitler signed on September 30, 1938, and several others involving France, Lithuania, and Latvia. Putin wrote:

Thus, the Treaty between the Soviet Union and Germany was the last in a line of treaties signed by European countries that seemed to be interested in maintaining peace in Europe.

### **Geopolitics Is Fatal**

But, as any competent historian will do, Putin stressed that the roots of World War II were in fact planted by the Versailles Treaty of 1919, the treaty that ended World War I.

Later in his remarks, Putin highlighted the role that Poland played in the pre-war geopolitical maneuvering in Eastern Europe, particularly with respect to Czechoslovakia, using documents from the Soviet archives. He referred to a conversation with French President Edouard Daladier, as recorded in one of these documents, in which Daladier said he saw no reason in a Franco-Polish alliance and the sacrifices that France was making as part of it. Putin said:



*The roots of World War II were in fact planted by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, the treaty that ended World War I. Shown: The Signing of the Treaty of Peace at Versailles, 28 June 1919, by Joseph Finnermore.*

follow-up remarks to the Russian Defense Ministry Board a few days later—was one of complete hysteria. In a statement issued on December 21, the Polish Foreign Ministry wrote:

We are concerned and disbelieving to note the statements made by representatives of the Russian Federation authorities, including President Vladimir Putin, about the causes and course of the Second World War. They allude to the propaganda messages of the Stalin’s totalitarian era, already condemned even by a Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

So, what does this mean? It means the Soviet Union was ready to help Czechoslovakia, which Nazi Germany was going to rob. But the agreement between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia stated that the Soviet Union would do this only if France fulfilled its obligations to Czechoslovakia. France linked its aid to Czechoslovakia to support from Poland. But Poland refused to provide it.

The next document that Putin referred to, reported that as Germany was laying claim to parts of Czechoslovakia,

[Poland] also laid claim to their part of the “prey” during the partitioning of Czechoslovak territory and demanded that a certain part of Czechoslovakia be transferred to them. Moreover, they were ready to use force. They formed a special military group called “Silesia,” which included three infantry divisions, a cavalry brigade, and other units.

### Polish Political Elites Freak Out

Not surprisingly, the response from the Polish government to Putin’s remarks to the CIS Summit—and his

The statement went on to detail what it said were crimes committed against Poland by the Soviet Union both before and after the German invasion, including, among others, an August 1937 order by the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs by which “111,000 Poles, Soviet citizens, were murdered and several dozen thousand were deported or arrested (as part of the so-called Polish Operation of the NKVD),” and the massacres of 22,000 Poles in the Katyn Forest and other locations.

The day after Putin’s speech to the Defense Ministry Board, the Polish Foreign Ministry summoned the Russian Ambassador in Warsaw, Sergey Andreyev, to lodge a complaint. Polish Radio, citing PAP (the Polish Press Agency), reported that Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Marcin Przydacz said that the Polish authorities “voiced strong opposition” after top Russian officials, “including, in particular, President Vladimir Putin, and the chairman of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin,” made a series of “historical insinuations” in recent days.

Przydacz was quoted as saying that some recent claims by top Russian officials were “based on the propaganda of a totalitarian state” and showed “that the Stalinist narrative is consciously and aggressively

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Henri Manuel  
*Edouard Daladier, Prime Minister of France (1933, 1934, 1938-40).*



Government of Poland

*Marcin Przydacz, Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland.*



CC/Olaf Kosinsky

*Mateusz Morawiecki, Prime Minister of Poland.*

well before the war, including the Ukrainian famine in the early 1930s and the purges of the later 1930s. Historians, Morawiecki said, estimate that 20-30 million people in the U.S.S.R. died as a result of Stalin's crimes:

Communist leaders, Joseph Stalin in the first place, are responsible for all these crimes. Eighty years after World War II started, attempts are made to rehabilitate Stalin for political goals of today's President of

Russia. These attempts must be met with strong opposition from every person who has at least basic knowledge about the history of the 20th century.

trying to enter Russian historical imagination." Przydacz also said that attempts to falsify history "are the best proof that international efforts are still very much needed to clearly condemn not only Nazi but also Soviet totalitarianism," the PAP news agency reported.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki issued his own statement on December 29, accusing Putin of lying repeatedly about Poland and that one motivation for him to do so is to distract attention from Russia's own failures under his leadership. In the course of his statement, Morawiecki gave his own timeline of events, mainly incidents of collaboration between Hitler and Stalin that he said proved that Poland was the victim of joint criminal action by two totalitarian states. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, he said, was not a non-aggression pact, but rather "a political and military alliance, dividing Europe into two spheres of influence—along the line formed by three Polish rivers: the Narew, Vistula, and San," an alliance that was deepened by further such agreements and crimes against Poland arranged between two "friends," Hitler and Stalin:

Without Stalin's complicity in the partition of Poland, and without the natural resources that Stalin supplied to Hitler, the Nazi German crime machine would not have taken control of Europe. Stalin was engaged in criminal activities in the east, subduing one country after another, and developing a network of camps that the Russian Alexander Solzhenitsyn called "the Gulag Archipelago."

The crimes of Stalin, Morawiecki continued, began

### **The British Madam Protests Too Much**

The Poles were joined in similar freakouts from the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and Germany's *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*. The BBC, in an analysis that was picked up in the Polish press, claimed that the reason why Putin was angered by accusations "against a country that does not exist anymore" was because—

The U.S.S.R.'s victory in World War Two is one of the most venerated pillars of state ideology, and more than 70 years on it is still celebrated with much fanfare and bombast every year. It is also a key way for President Putin to legitimize himself and his expansionist foreign policy as a successor to the Soviet empire. So, the Kremlin sees any criticism of what is known in Russia as the Great Victory as an attack on itself.

The Polish news site *PolandIn*, following the same British logic, argued:

[Putin's deflection of criticism on to Poland] is an attempt to push back on the accusation of carving up Poland in 1939 and a repetition of Soviet propaganda that the action was merely for the protection of civilian population and a tactical move to slow Hitler down in his con-



UK Ministry of Information

*UK Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced “peace with honor” on his return to Britain, after he and French Prime Minister Daladier signed the Munich Agreement sacrificing Czechoslovakia to Adolf Hitler on September 30, 1938.*

quest of Europe, so that the U.S.S.R. could prepare for the inevitable war with Germany.

*FAZ*, for its part, tried to excuse the Munich sellout of Czechoslovakia—which wasn’t even mentioned in the EP resolution:

Even though it’s true that the Polish army annexed the [Czechoslovakian] Zaolzie province after the Munich conference ..., the attempt to make Poland the culprit—bearing in mind the scale of crimes committed by Hitler and Stalin—is inadequate and indecent.

*FAZ* complained that Putin focused only on the Munich agreement rather than the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

### **Anti-Semitism in Poland in 1938**

While the opening of the Soviet archives is of immense importance, the documentary evidence available from U.S. archival sources supports what Putin has reported. The official reports to Washington from the U.S. Ambassador in Warsaw, Anthony Joseph Drexel Biddle, Jr. (of the Philadelphia Biddles—Nicholas Biddle was one of his ancestors) indicate that anti-Se-

mitic activity was a serious problem in Poland. Biddle reported on September 25, 1937 the following:

Wave of anti-Semitic activities of young students and workingmen commenced 3 weeks ago and culminating last Sunday in numerous street beatings and window breaking, occasioning grave anxiety in Jewish circles.

In a more extensive report dated October 7 (but not received in Washington until October 19), Biddle reported:

The establishment by official action of the so-called ghetto in institutions of higher education with the result that Christian and Jewish students are now required to occupy distinctly separate sections in class and lecture rooms. [The decision to create the “ghetto”] was sanctioned, if not actually directed by the Polish Government, and it is quite unthinkable that this action would be reversed, particularly in view of the fact that it has met with almost universal approval in the racially Polish press.

Biddle reported that leading Jewish circles in Poland were convinced that establishment of the “ghetto” in



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*Jewish Ghetto Police guarding a zone divider fence in the Warsaw Ghetto, June 1942.*

schools would lead to it being adopted in transportation, theaters, and other areas of activity.

In a later dispatch dated October 20 (and received in Washington on November 2), Biddle reported that Polish authorities were becoming quite sensitive to foreign reactions to the treatment of Jews in Poland:

In several conversations Colonel Beck [Józef Beck, the Foreign Minister] has given me the very definite impression that he was well aware of the force and significance of the reaction abroad

to anti-Jewish activities in Poland, and I have readily observed that he is not personally inclined towards anti-Semitism but, in fact, displays, either as a matter of principle or good politics, a spirit of tolerance and helpfulness in his contacts with Jews.

The “solution” that the Polish authorities were looking to was emigration of the Jews, perhaps to areas of Africa and/or Palestine that were controlled by the British Empire.

Biddle also corresponded extensively with President Franklin D. Roosevelt more broadly about Poland and Europe (as did Biddle’s predecessor, John Cudahy, who Biddle replaced on May 4, 1937). In Biddle’s view, Beck’s foreign policy was derived from the views of his late master, Marshal Józef Pilsudski, who had died in 1935. Biddle described Beck as increasingly “the master” of Polish foreign policy since the Polish-Lithuanian crisis who was pursuing a cautious course in foreign affairs. In a report to FDR on April 10, 1938, Biddle wrote:

Colonel Beck is engaged in an effort to make friends with Germany at every possible turn, in a play for time wherein he hopes to strengthen Poland’s defensive position against what Pil-



DoS/U.S. Embassy, Oslo, Norway

*Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Jr., U.S. Ambassador to Poland (1937-1943).*



Lothar Schaack

*Józef Beck, Polish Foreign Minister (right), with Nazi leader Hermann Göring in July 1935.*

sudski anticipated, and now he, Colonel Beck anticipates, an inevitable eventual conflict with Germany.

With the corridor and Danzig questions<sup>1</sup> looming as potential difficulties, Colonel Beck, to my mind, might not be expected to do anything effectively towards establishing his long envisaged neutral zone from the Baltic to the Black Sea,<sup>2</sup> and even perhaps the Aegean, until Britain will have become fully rearmed and France will have set her political

house in order, and brought her air force to effective standard, making an Anglo-French front capable and willing to take an effective and active stand in checking Germany’s aspirations for the control of Europe.

Biddle did not expect Beck to take an anti-German position openly, however, writing:

I do not believe Colonel Beck would risk provoking German suspicion and ire by exposing his hand in a long-range scheme, entailing blocking or cutting across Germany’s drive to penetrate the

1. The Polish corridor was a strip of territory granted to Poland by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 to give Poland direct access to the Baltic Sea. The same treaty made the German-speaking Danzig a free city under the protection of the League of Nations.

2. The “neutral zone from the Baltic to the Black Sea” that Biddle refers to is the Intermarium project [described](#) in the May 16, 2014 issue of *EIR* (p. 23) as “a projected confederation of nations located between the Baltic, Black, Aegean, and Adriatic seas.” A footnote to it reports that “Churchill worked on Intermarium with Austrian Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and the latter’s Pan-European Union, which Parvus had aided through his money connections in 1923, the year before his death.” Anglo-Dutch agent Alexander Helphand Parvus was the originator of the “permanent warfare/permanent revolution” doctrine adopted by Leon Trotsky and later resurrected by the American neo-conservatives who populated the George W. Bush Administration of 2001-2009.

Danubian valley. Colonel Beck may therefore be expected to play for time, and to conduct his foreign policy cautiously and quietly.

Beck, nonetheless, went out of his way to be friendly with Adolph Hitler, as the documents cited by Putin show.

### American Diplomats Saw the Munich Sellout Coming

A review of 75 pages of documents published in the 1938 volume of the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the U.S. State Department's official history, titled "Analyses and Reports of the General Political Developments in Europe Affecting the Maintenance of International Order and Preservation of Peace," shows that American diplomats knew in general Hitler's intentions towards Czechoslovakia (though how that would be resolved was yet to unfold); that Poland had designs of its own on a portion of that country; about Britain's policy of appeasement of Germany; and that the Soviet Union was really the only country that might potentially defend Czech sovereignty.

Central to this appears to be the Assistant Secretary of State, a diplomat, George S. Messersmith. In a lengthy [memorandum](#) dated February 18, 1938, addressed to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Messersmith pans the notion, apparently current in Europe at the time, that Hitler might actually intend to abide by agreements that he had signed:

I have myself never been able to understand why these illusions should persist when Hitler himself in his book and in the statements which he has made privately and semi-publicly has never left any doubt as to his political practice according to which agreements are valid only as long as he believes they should be kept.



NARA/C.M. Bell  
*George S. Messersmith, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State (1937-1940).*

Paris, [reported](#) to Hull that the French Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, told him:

The British government] had made it clear that Britain would do nothing to prevent the absorption of Austria by Germany. France could not alone attempt to protect Austria. It was clear therefore that Austria within a very limited time would fall into the hands of Germany. It would then be the turn of Czechoslovakia.

Hitler's Germany would take over Austria in the *Anschluss* of March 12, 1938.

Bullitt's report continued:

Delbos showed me a note which he had just received from [UK Prime Minister Neville] Chamberlain in which it was asserted that there would be no change in British policy. He commented that

this note was of course valueless. The fact was that England had embarked on a policy of turning over central and eastern Europe to Germany in spite of her obligations under the League of Nations.



Public domain  
*William C. Bullitt, U.S. Ambassador to France (1936-1940).*

On March 2, the American Minister in Prague, Wilbur J. Carr, [reported](#):

[Edvard Beneš, the President of Czechoslovakia,] believes Germany will want to negotiate and he is ready to negotiate within the framework of complete loyalty to England and France who would be informed of every step and the reservation that the negotiations shall not involve intervention in Czechoslovak internal affairs.

Given what Delbos had told Bullitt a little over a week earlier, this seems to have been a forlorn hope.

### Hitler Will Not Stop

The following day, Sumner Welles, the Under Secretary of State, [reported](#) that the British ambassador in Washington told him that Chamberlain had instructed the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, to seek an audience with Hitler to ascertain two things, the first of which was on Germany's colonial ambitions and the second: "the precise extent and nature of Germany's attitude with regard to a permanent Central European appeasement."

Anthony Biddle, Jr., the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, [reported](#) on March 12 that his sources in London and Paris reported that what Henderson reported back to Chamberlain was that what Hitler wanted in Central Europe was "a free hand for Germany in Austria and Sudeten Deutsch [a reference to a German-speaking portion of Czechoslovakia]."

There are many more documents along this vein but two appear to be particularly prescient. On August 17, the American Chargé d'Affaires in London, Herschel Johnson, [reported](#) on a conversation he had the night before with Ivan Maisky, the Russian ambassador to the UK, on what he took to be the official Soviet foreign office view of Germany's objectives in eastern Europe:

The picture he drew is also of interest as part of the background which, provided this account is a sound one, must presumably have great influence on the mind of Hitler in any decision he will have to make regarding the solution of the



Russia Ministry of Defense  
*Ivan Maisky, Ambassador of the Soviet Union to the UK (1932-1943).*

Czechoslovak question. For, according to this theory, if Hitler loyally accepts a peaceful settlement between the Czechs and the Sudeten Deutsch for a regime which will fully maintain the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia as it now exists, he will have accepted the most serious single impediment to Nazi plans for German expansion in south-eastern Europe.

According to Monsieur Maisky the dispute with Czechoslovakia is being used as simply the opening wedge in Germany's struggle for continental domination. If Hitler succeeds ... in mutilating Czechoslovakia and reducing what is left to a position of political and economic vassalage he will have opened the door to the creation of a solid bloc of states extending to the Black Sea.... He will thereby have gained access to Rumanian oil and the wheat fields of Hungary which will make Germany largely self-sustaining. Furthermore, with Czechoslovakia out of the way the Danubian and Balkan countries will be unable to resist the pressure which Germany will bring to bear upon them.... Maisky said ..., that Hitler envisages the inclusion of Hungary, Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Bulgaria in a strict customs union with Germany, to be further implemented by military conventions designed to give the German General Staff complete control of their armies.

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Maisky believed that Germany would not stop at that, but the question was, would Hitler go east or west. To go east could only be directed at Russia, which Maisky thought was unlikely, at least not for the next 5-10 years by which time he believed that Russia would be ready. Instead, he thought Germany would next turn "to Belgium and Holland, with their rich tropical colonial possessions." Johnson continued:

Maisky's idea that Czechoslovakia is the key to the whole situation in Central Europe is of course shared by nearly all commentators. The idea that Maisky was working on however, was that as far as Germany's future plans are concerned it is not

so much a question of whether she attempts to settle the Czechoslovak issue at once by force or whether she accomplishes the same purpose by other means. It is in the accomplishment of the purpose that the danger to the future lies. He was emphatic in expressing his conviction that Hitler should not be allowed to destroy Czechoslovakia and that the time to prevent that destruction was now. At the same time, he said efforts should be made by the western powers within the limit of possibility to lessen the growing burden of dependence on Germany that is now falling on the Danubian countries, none of whom want to be sucked into the German maelstrom.

### **Listen to the Russians**

In a [memo](#) a few days later, on August 20, following the receipt of Johnson's cable, Messersmith wrote to Hull that the Russian view of German intentions should not simply be dismissed:

There might be a tendency to minimize the views expressed in this telegram coming as they do from a Soviet Ambassador. I would like to say that in my opinion I believe that the Soviet Ambassador has given a fairly correct view of what the real German objectives are. I base this opinion on my long experience and considerable personal contact with leaders in the present German Government. The objectives which the Soviet Ambassador has attributed to the present German Government accord with those which I have heard high ranking officers of the German Government express to me directly or by implication from time to time.

Indeed, Messersmith had been U.S. Consul in Berlin from 1930-1934, where he gained notoriety as the diplomat who approved the visa for Albert Einstein to come to the United States.

In 1934, he became Minister to Austria, where he stayed until returning to the State Department in 1937. So he was certainly in a position to know the thinking of the then-present German government:

The emphasis which I believe the Soviet Ambassador places upon the importance of the German objectives in Czechoslovakia is not too great. The first part of the comprehensive German pro-

gram involves domination of Austria and Czechoslovakia so as to open the way to Rumanian oil, without which Germany cannot make war, as well as free access to the raw materials and agricultural products of Southeastern Europe. The first step in the German program is domination of Southeastern Europe as this is necessary if any further progress is to be made. This is the reason why I consider, and have considered for the last four years, that the German objectives in Czechoslovakia are definite and unalterable. If Germany should accept any solution of the Czechoslovak problem which does not give her domination and control of that country her whole program for expansion in any direction is stopped.

At the end of his report, Messersmith wrote:

I am convinced that Czechoslovakia has for Germany a primary importance and that, if she fails in her objectives there, it means a stoppage of her whole program. As the present regime cannot change any of its objectives without its whole program falling down and as the Czechoslovak objective is among all these the most vital, I see no letup on the pressure on Czechoslovakia and the danger of war over this question constantly present and not to be minimized.

### **The Lessons of Nuremberg**

November 20, 2020 was the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal which put 20 top Nazis and German military leaders in the dock. On that occasion, a conference convened in Moscow on the lessons to be drawn from the war crimes trials that followed the war, which was addressed by both President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Putin, Lavrov, and Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova all stressed the importance of the Nuremberg Tribunal in preserving the historical record of what actually happened during the war in Europe, as opposed to what Zakharova described as the recent trend of the falsification of history as well as the precedents that the trial set for international law.

Putin told the participants:

I am certain that the forum's theme matters to you not only from a professional standpoint, but

also in terms of the sense of personal responsibility for preserving the historical truth about World War II. You understand the significance of the Nuremberg verdicts, and the norms and principles these trials helped devise for responding to today's challenges and threats....

The Nuremberg decisions are still relevant today. A month ago, based on those decisions, the Soletsk [district] court in Russia recognized the brutal execution of thousands of peaceful, innocent people near the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka in Novgorod Region as genocide. That was the first such precedent in Russian legal practice.<sup>3</sup>

We constantly refer to the lessons of the Nuremberg Trials; we understand their importance for defending the truths of historical memory, for making a well-founded and solid case against deliberate distortions and falsifications of World War II events, especially the shameless and deceitful attempts to rehabilitate and even glorify Nazi criminals and their accessories.

I will say even more. It is the duty of the entire international community to safeguard the Nuremberg Trials' decisions, because they concern the principles that underlie the values of the post-war world order and the norms of international law....

Lavrov, in his remarks, stressed the importance of the Nuremberg verdicts for international law:

The Nuremberg Principles formed the basis for the norms covering the most heinous international crimes. The preparation, planning, unleashing, and waging of a war of aggression were qualified as such. The spirit and letter of the legal process became the embodiment of hopes for justice, respect for the value of human life and dignity. On October 24, 1946—exactly one year after the UN Charter entered into



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*The Nuremberg Trials—an example of international criminal justice—proved that justice can be achieved based on broad interstate cooperation, consent, and mutual respect. Shown, Nazi leaders in the dock, guarded by American Military Police, at the first Nuremberg trial, November 1945.*

force—the first UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, spoke in favor of the Nuremberg rulings becoming a permanent part of international law. In December 1946, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a special resolution which confirmed the international legal principles recognized by the Nuremberg Tribunal Charter.

The Nuremberg Trials—an example of international criminal justice—proved that justice can be achieved with a professional approach based on broad interstate cooperation, consent, and mutual respect. Clearly, the Nuremberg Tribunal's legacy is not limited to law, but has enormous political, moral, and educational value. A strong vaccination against the revival of Nazism in all its forms and manifestations was made 75 years ago. Unfortunately, the immunity to the brown plague that was developed in Nuremberg has seriously worn off in some European countries. Russia will continue to vigorously and consistently oppose any attempts to falsify history, to glorify Nazi criminals and their henchmen, and to oppose the revision of the internationally recognized outcomes of World War II, including the Nuremberg rulings.

3. Russian authorities uncovered a mass grave of at least 2,600 victims of a Nazi massacre in the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka, 380 miles northwest of Moscow. The victims, believed to number 3,700, were killed between 1941 and 1943.