**Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1920s**

USSR was unpopular with the West after leaving WW1 in early 1918 with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Along with Germany, USSR was excluded by their former countries. They were not invited to the Paris Peace Conference, and when Civil War broke out in the USSR, Britain and France were two nations which sent troops to support the Whites. Because of this, there was a period where Germany and Russia looked like they might work together – as Lenin said, “Germany wants revenge and we want revolution”.

Relations became increasingly strained during the 1920s between the West and USSR. Lenin saw the new League of Nations as a “band of robbers”. Although by 1927 the League had involved USSR in some decisions, they did not become a member state until 1934.

Britain in particular distrusted the Communist east. In 1924, the first Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald recognised the USSR as a diplomatic nation; by the end of the year, a fake letter (The Zinoviev Letter) claiming to link the British Labour Party to the Russia Communist Party was published in the Daily Mail; the fake letter was an order for Communists to incite the British Army to mutiny so that Russia could invade. This was enough to topple the Labour Government from power. A further “Red Scare” in 1927 led to Britain abandoning diplomatic relations with the USSR until 1930.

Examples in the 1920s:

**1919 – Formation of Comintern.** This was officially the “Third Communist International”. It was a group of international communists which aimed to encourage and incite revolutions in other countries.

It was frustrating for the West that officially Russia was just a member of the Comintern, and therefore could not “control” the group. But in reality they were in charge and told the members what to do.

**1922 – Treaty of Rapallo.** This was a treaty between Soviet Union and Germany. They dropped any economic and territorial claims against each other. USSR also allowed Germany to train troops and test equipment in Russia. This did not break the Treaty of Versailles, but also gave Russia access to German technology.

**1927 – Russian support for Communist Revolution in China.** Stalin announced to a Party Congress that China was the “second home of world revolution” and invested resources and agents in encouraging the Chinese Communist Party. Unfortunately in April 1927 the right wing opponents captured Shanghai and massacred huge numbers of Communists. Trotsky and the left wing of the Russian Communist Party blamed Stalin (which was ironic since Stalin favoured Socialism in One Country and it was Trotsky who wanted Perpetual Revolution…). This was one of the reasons that the left wing was expelled in the power struggle.
Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1930s

In the 1930s, Stalin found himself worried about Hitler, who had proclaimed in Mein Kampf that Slavic peoples were untermenschen (sub-human) and that Lebensraum (living space) could only be taken at the expense of the Soviet Union. However, he also had reason to worry about Japan, which had eyes on imperial expansion on the continent. Having captured Manchuria from China, they now posed a threat to the Russian borders. In 1931-32, Stalin signed non-aggression pacts with Afghanistan, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and France.

By 1934, Hitler had signed the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact which essentially ended the Rapallo Treaty between Russia and Germany. The Soviet Union sought to defend herself by signing mutual assistance pacts with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935.

To make matters worse, Hitler then signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 with Japan and later with Italy in 1937. This was an agreement to fight the Comintern, or Communist International. As noted above, this was not technically just the Soviet Union, but in reality was a treaty of hostility against the USSR. Further hostility arose between Germany and USSR in the Spanish Civil War. Although Germany only sent squadrons of bombers and USSR used Comintern agents, so it was not a direct conflict, it was still a confrontation of Fascist and Communist.

After Anschluss (1838) and the Czech Crisis (1938) when Hitler threatened Czechoslovakia, only to be awarded the Sudetenland by Britain and France and then allowed to take all of Czechoslovakia, Stalin felt very insecure. After all, it appeared to him that the Western countries wanted Hitler to attack the East. Whilst not entirely as

1931-32 – Non-aggression pacts. As a means of self-defence, the Soviet Union signed as many non-aggression agreements as possible.

1935 – Mutual Assistance Pacts with France and Czechoslovakia. In response to German actions, USSR sought other allies in Europe.

1936 – Spanish Civil War. Both Communist and Fascist countries supported each side. Russia did not directly get involved but sent agents and directed Comintern (Communist International) to send brigades of volunteer fighters. This was an instance of Communism conflicting with right wing political policies in other countries.
simple as that, it is true that the West saw a strong Germany under Hitler as a buffer against Communism. Stalin had not even been invited to the Munich Conference to deal with Czechoslovakia, despite the fact that it was geographically more relevant to the Soviet Union than Britain.

When Britain and France sought a treaty with Soviet Union, Stalin saw this as an effort to use him to sort out Hitler and ignored what he saw as western manipulation. Instead, Stalin instructed his foreign secretary Molotov to seek an agreement with Hitler; the Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939) was signed soon after. Publically it agreed an economic alliance and a non-aggression relationship. However more important was the agreement that Russia would not defend Poland if Germany invaded. This allowed Germany to be certain that they would not face a war on two fronts and gave Stalin the confidence of an agreed border. It also secretly agreed a line in Poland that Russia could advance to, and that Stalin could occupy the Balkans.

On 1st September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland, sparking a British response on 3rd September. On 17th September, Soviet troops entered Eastern Poland up to the line agreed with Germany. Following this, other Baltic states signed agreements to allow Soviet troops to occupy their countries. Then on 27th November, Stalin scrapped the non-aggression pact with Finland. A day later they claimed that Finnish troops had attacked Soviet patrols, and on the 30th Soviet troops invaded Finland.

1939 – Nazi-Soviet Pact. Made between Germany and USSR in response to Germany’s obvious interest in Poland. Very surprising to the world but Stalin saw it as the safest route. Don’t forget that USSR and Germany had worked together for a while after WW1, e.g. Rapallo Treaty, whereas UK and France seemed a less reliable option.