



# “Stunned, Bewildered, and Groggy with Disbelief”:

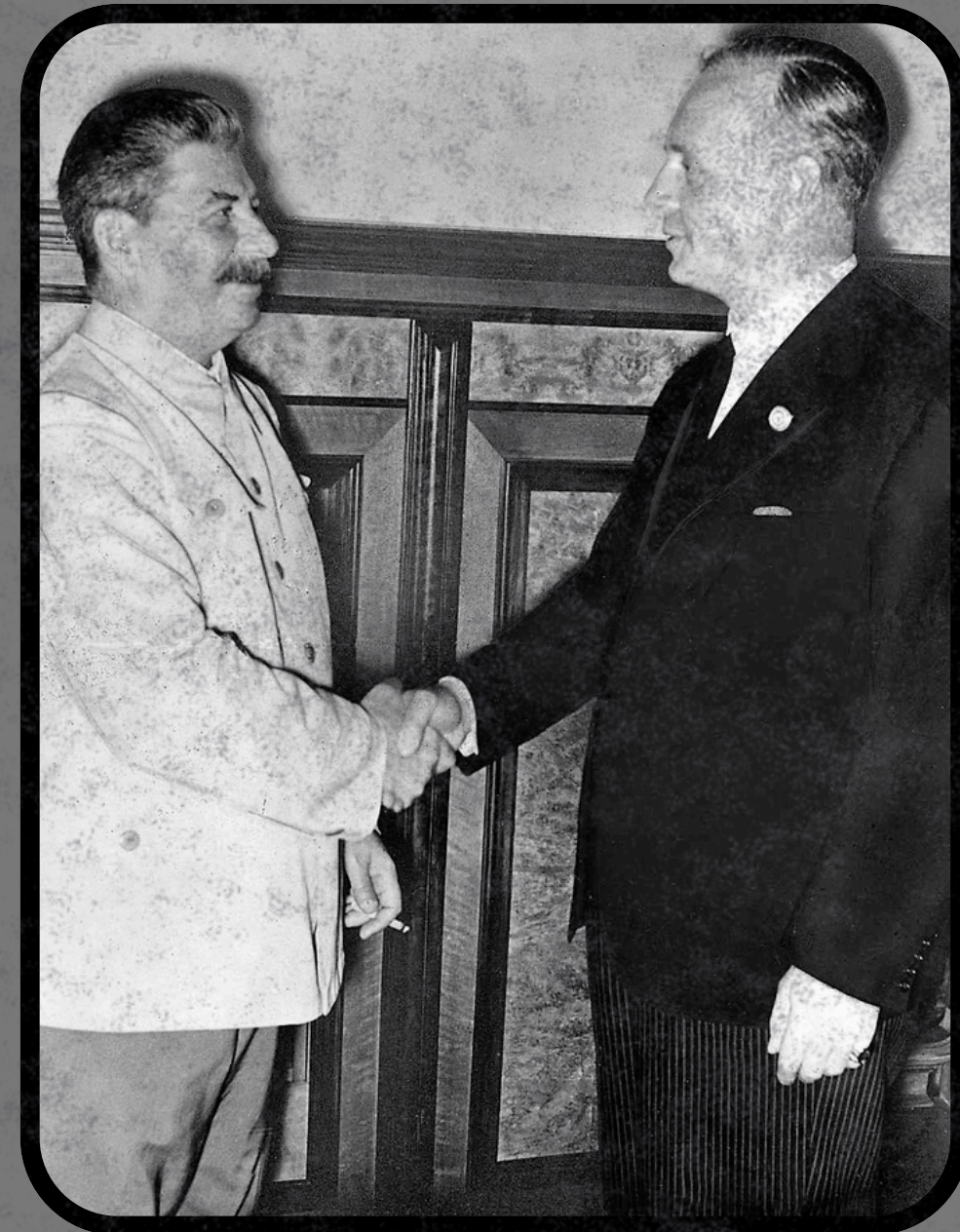
## The German and Soviet Reactions to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

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### The Soviet Reception

#### Shock

- The pact astonished the Soviet citizens.
- Factory director Victor Kravchenko recalled the pact crashing “meteorlike” into the Soviet consciousness, leaving the population “stunned, bewildered and groggy with disbelief.”
- Much of this shock was due to the prior animosity shared between the Soviets and Nazis.
- Russian author Elena Skriabina wrote that, “Throughout the 1930s none had railed more against the Bolshevik menace than had the Nazis; similarly, none had been more savage in their denunciation of the Nazi beasts than had the Soviets.”

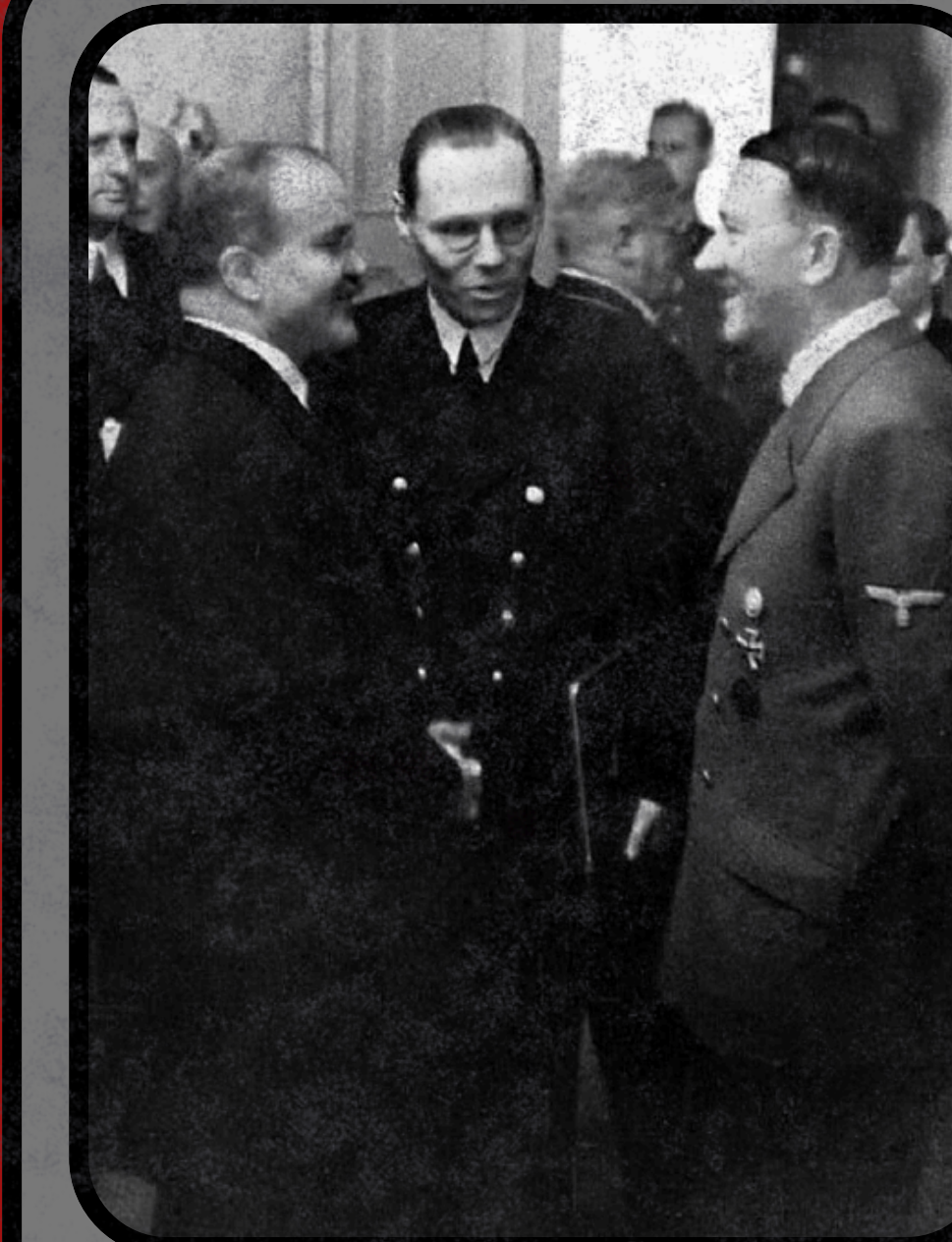


Above: Stalin shaking hands with Ribbentrop, 23 August 1939.

### Introduction

In the early morning of 24 August 1939, the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop signed a treaty of nonaggression and political cooperation with the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov, today known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The treaty allowed Hitler to invade Poland, thus beginning the Second World War, and Stalin to annex significant territory. The pact stunned the international community due to the nations’ mutual animosity prior to the pact. And yet, literature regarding the German and Soviet reactions is nearly nonexistent. Recognizing this, my project seeks to unveil and compare the many reactions of the German and Soviet citizens to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

### The German Reception



Above: Molotov meets Hitler and diplomat Gustav Hilger, 12 November 1940

#### Shock

- As with the Soviets, the pact stunned the German citizenry.
- “To see the names of Hitler and Stalin linked in friendship on a piece of paper,” recalled Nazi architect Albert Speer, “was the most staggering, the most exciting turn of events I could possibly have imagined.”
- Diarist Victor Klemperer could not believe “the incredible turnabout, confusion, the incalculable situation, [or] the balance of forces after this volte-face.” “Machiavelli,” Klemperer eloquently penned, “is a babe in arms by comparison.”

### Mutual Cultural Changes

#### Propaganda

- The pact forced the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany to completely overhaul their propaganda efforts.
- Soviet memoirs and accounts relay how the term ‘Fascism’ disappeared from the state’s lexicon and anti-Nazi books and authors were quickly recalled from circulation.
- For their part, the Nazis mobilized their newspapers like the *Völkischer Beobachter* (People’s Observer) to favourably portray their new allies and they ceased foreign propaganda campaigns, dissolving institutions like the Anti-Komintern.

#### Films

Both nations repealed films critical of their former foes. The Soviet film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), named after the Russian prince who defeated the invading Teutonic Germans in the 13th century, was quickly recalled from theatres following the pact. The Nazi film *Legion Condor* (1939), a propaganda film on the German exploits against the Communists during the Spanish Civil War, had to cease filming because of its anti-Soviet messaging.



Left: frame from *Alexander Nevsky*, released December 1938



Right: frame from *Legion Condor*, taken in December 1938

#### Indignation and the Loss of Faith

- The Soviet citizens were highly diverse in their reactions to the pact and many held the new alliance in high regard. More common, however, were those who hated the pact.
- Robert Robinson was living in Moscow and recalled that for many Soviets, it was difficult to imagine “that their country, which championed equality, fraternity, and world peace, had overnight become linked with Adolf Hitler.” Some were so distraught that they openly wept in Robinson’s shop.
- Gabriel Temkin, living in Leningrad during the war, wondered: “Where were the high, noble principles I believed a socialist state would always adhere to?”
- Many Soviets lost their ideological faith following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.



Left: map of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, June 1941

#### Praise and Strengthening Convictions

- While not all Germans approved of the pact, many considered it a diplomatic masterpiece.
- A Bavarian doctor “could not believe” that Hitler and Stalin could make a pact together; he soon “began to marvel” at the Führer’s “amazing diplomatic chess move.”
- Another German remembered the day the pact was announced: “Everyone beaming with joy. Wherever one goes, everywhere people speak excitedly of the Agreement with Russia!”
- Germans from all walks of life, from Nazi Generals to Communists within the Reich, approved of the pact.
- On the whole, the pact only served to strengthen German convictions to their Führer.

Right: list of references for this project available by scanning the QR code

