

## The Soviet Occupation of Estonia 1939-1940

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Since the introduction of "perestroika," or "restructuring," several non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet empire, forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, have made news by vociferously demanding autonomy or even independence from Moscow. However, while Kremlin reformers have denounced Stalin's political and economic crimes, they have been slow in criticizing his foreign policy. Even today the Soviet leadership justifies the occupation in 1940 of the independent Baltic states as necessitated by security concerns. Moreover, the Kremlin still declares that masses of the people in the Baltic countries welcomed the arrival of the Red Army. Typical of the Soviet view is the statement by Nikita Khrushchev:

The annexation of the Baltic states also furthered our progressive aims with regards to the peoples of that area. Unlike the Belorussians and Ukrainians, the Baltic peoples are of a different national stock. Yet they have still been given a chance to live in conditions equal to those of the working class, peasantry, and laboring intelligentsia of Russia. We were absolutely certain that the annexation was a great triumph for the Baltic peoples as well as for the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

The present leader in the Kremlin, Mikhail Gorbachev, has expressed similar views. Addressing the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 26 November 1988, the general secretary, describing the pre-war conditions in the Baltic states, said: "we know how backward Lithuania was, and when there was a very great outflow of population from Estonia because it was impossible to live there. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

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This paper seeks to examine the sequence of events which led to the military occupation of Estonia by the Red Army. Most of the documents cited come from Estonian, German, Russian, British, and American sources.

Curiously, although they numbered only 1.2 million, the Estonians did not feel particularly threatened during the years immediately preceding World War II. The colossus to the east seemed passive. Estonians had learned to live in the shadow of their giant neighbor. The truly troublesome nation during those years was Hitler's Germany. Estonians felt fortunate that they did not share a common frontier with Germany. Moreover, it was considered advantageous that the two giants, Germany and the Soviet Union, were seemingly irreconcilable enemies; the Estonian people hoped that they would keep each other in check. The vitriolic propaganda emanating from Berlin and Moscow seemed to indicate that Germany and Russia could never become reconciled to each other.

Another popular pre-war myth in Estonia concerned Great Britain. British warships had shielded the Baltic coast from the Red Fleet during the desperate days of the Estonian War of Independence in 1918-20. Many Estonians continued to believe that the British fleet would steam into the Baltic should either Germany or Russia threaten the independence of the Baltic states.<sup>3</sup> The tragic fate of Czechoslovakia caused uneasiness in Estonia, but few considered the less than heroic role of Britain to be a sign of British weakness. Rather, they viewed it as the misguided policy of one man, Neville Chamberlain.

On 23 August 1939 foreign ministers Joachim von Ribbentrop of Germany and Vyacheslav M. Molotov of the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. Of crucial significance to the Baltic states, as well as to Finland, Poland, and Romania, was the pact's Secret Additional Protocol. This codicil assigned Finland, Estonia, Latvia, the eastern half of Poland, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina to the Soviet sphere of interest.<sup>4</sup> Lithuania was not mentioned, but on 28 September 1939 an amendment assigned that territory to the Soviet sphere of interest in exchange for areas around Lublin and Warsaw.<sup>5</sup>

Although Estonians did not know of the secret agreement, the Estonian Foreign Minister, Karl Selter, strongly suspected that a deal had been struck at the expense of the Baltic states. He knew that in negotiations with Britain and France, Moscow had insisted on unilateral guarantees regarding the Baltic countries and on the right to move military forces into these territories should a threat arise. He reasoned that an abrupt abandonment of talks with the British and French, and the speedy conclusion of an agreement with the Germans, could only mean that Hitler had accommodated Stalin's demands concerning the Baltic states.<sup>6</sup>

When the German armies crossed the Polish border on 1 Septem-

ber 1939 and Britain and France shortly thereafter declared war on Germany, the Baltic countries, including Estonia, declared themselves neutral. To reinforce the claim of neutrality, no special measures—such as a partial mobilization—were undertaken.

Estonia had always maintained a close relationship with Poland, and Estonian public sympathy was with Poland in her uneven struggle against Germany. The rapid defeat of the Polish forces was received with a special sense of sadness. The Estonian public also felt disappointed in the feeble support rendered to Poland by Britain and France. Governmental circles in Estonia expected Germany to execute the war vigorously and emerge victorious as early as November 1939.<sup>7</sup> Estonia's status as a neutral nation was also predicated on an early termination of the war with a German victory.

Ominously, 17 September saw the Red Army units cross the Polish eastern frontier and attack the disintegrating Polish armies from behind; Stalin had begun to collect the benefits awarded him under the non-aggression pact. Two days later, the Estonian ambassador in Moscow, August Rei, was called to the Kremlin and informed by Molotov that "since the Estonian government cannot guarantee its neutrality, the Soviet Baltic Fleet will be deployed to protect the Estonian territorial waters."<sup>8</sup>

In the days that followed, Soviet warships entered Estonian territorial waters in several instances, and one even shelled the coast. A Soviet submarine fired a torpedo against an Estonian passenger ship, but fortunately missed the target. On 24 September Soviet military aircraft joined the demonstration by repeatedly violating Estonian airspace.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of these aggressive activities, Moscow announced that the Soviet government was ready to sign a new trade agreement with Estonia which had been under negotiation for some time. Although originally Ambassador Rei had been designated to sign the agreement, Foreign Minister Selter himself was ultimately appointed to perform this task.

Selter and his wife left Tallinn by train on the night of 22 September and arrived at the Soviet border town of Kingisepp the next morning. Rather than proceeding straight to Leningrad, the Selters' coach was unhooked and left on the siding for a couple of hours. During the delay, the Estonian foreign minister saw three military transports pass by, and two columns of troops with weapons and full combat gear move on the road toward the border. After a stop in Leningrad, where he was met by Soviet dignitaries, Selter continued his trip to Moscow, arriving on the afternoon of 24 September.<sup>10</sup> The "unscheduled" stop at Kingisepp apparently served as psychological conditioning for the surprise that awaited him in Moscow.

On the evening of his arrival, Selter was called to the Kremlin

where Molotov led the conversation. After commenting on the trade agreement, which was, Molotov said, ready for signatures, he shifted the conversation to foreign relations. He praised the trade relations between the two countries but added, "political relations between the Soviet Union and Estonia are not in order, they are bad. The escape of . . . [an] interned Polish submarine from Tallinn shows that the Estonian government does not care very much about the security of the Soviet Union."<sup>11</sup>

To ease these political tensions Molotov offered a military alliance that would give the Soviet Union the right to establish military bases on Estonian territory for the duration of the war. Selter and Rei countered that such an alliance would be contrary to the Estonian policy of neutrality and would seriously impair Estonian sovereignty and independence. Molotov assured the Estonians: "we do not want to impair your sovereignty or form of government. We are not going to force communism upon Estonia. We do not want to hurt the economic system of Estonia. Estonia will retain her independence, government, parliament, foreign and domestic policy, army, and economic system. . . ."<sup>12</sup> Molotov emphasized the urgency of the matter and twice admonished the Estonian foreign minister: "Do not compel the Soviet Union to use force in order to achieve her aims."<sup>13</sup> Not having been authorized by the Estonian government to negotiate a military alliance with the Soviet Union, Selter insisted that he must first report to Tallinn. He returned to the Estonian embassy with the intention of flying to Tallinn the next morning, but was called once more to the Kremlin, where Molotov handed him a draft of the proposed mutual assistance treaty. After clarifying several points and answering questions, Molotov once more emphasized the need to conclude the treaty at the earliest possible date.

The ultimatum stunned the Estonian people. According to Alexander Warma, who was at the time working in the Estonian Foreign Ministry, Selter was extremely depressed upon his return from Moscow. He told some close friends in the ministry to obtain passports and visas and be ready to leave Estonia on short notice. He expected the Red Army to march in at any minute.<sup>14</sup>

Pressed for time and facing limited options, the Estonian government was forced to determine a course of action. Colonel Villem Saarsen of the General Staff, who had intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the government, noted in his memoirs that the Estonians probed neighboring states for possible support; the responses were disappointing. Finland considered herself part of the Scandinavian bloc and did not wish to become involved in Estonian problems. Latvia, herself a small country, feared entering into any talks on the subject lest she antagonize her powerful neighbor. Neither Finland nor Latvia had obtained reliable information about the Secret Protocol and did not know that, in fact, they

were programmed to share a similar fate.<sup>15</sup> Britain and France, preoccupied with the war in the West, were unable to help. When the German ambassador to Estonia, Dr. Hans Frohwein, was approached, he strongly recommended that the Estonians accept the Soviet demands.<sup>16</sup>

Estonia was therefore left to rely only on her own limited resources. Colonel Elmar Tambek, who was the chief of staff to the president of the Estonian Republic, Konstantin Pats, noted in his memoirs that armed resistance was considered. However, in terms of military forces already assembled on frontier, the Soviets would have enjoyed a tenfold advantage in personnel and even a more crushing advantage in weapons such as tanks, planes, and artillery. An armed conflict with such unequal forces would have meant heavy casualties and a speedy defeat for Estonia.

President Pats reasoned that the physical survival of the people should be his uppermost objective. Moreover, he was disappointed in the military. Moscow's ultimatum had caused the Estonian military to be placed on full alert, but the movement of some Estonian units to their advanced combat positions near the border had not proceeded smoothly. The commander of one of the regiments had issued contradictory orders and created confusion in the ranks.<sup>17</sup>

On 26 September, the Estonian cabinet met in an emergency session. Pats was seeking the views of the cabinet members on the crisis. If they opted for military action, he would authorize general mobilization, which would increase the armed forces from 16,500 to 90,000 men.<sup>18</sup> Since Estonia could not rely on outside help, the president did not expect the country to hold out beyond three weeks. He believed enormous human and material losses should be avoided by accepting the Soviet demands.<sup>19</sup> Virtually everyone in the cabinet, and a majority in the parliament, supported him. The mood in the country remained tense as Soviet air force overflights continued and units of the Soviet Baltic Fleet continued to intrude into Estonian territorial waters.

The Estonian delegation was sent back to Moscow instructed to accept the demands but also to seek a softening of them. The Estonians arrived in Moscow on 27 September at 6:00 p.m. On the same night Molotov invited them to the Kremlin to continue negotiations. The Soviet foreign commissar opened the session by reporting an incident in the Gulf of Narva, where allegedly a submarine had torpedoed and sunk the Soviet steamer "Metalist."

The "Metalist" episode almost certainly belongs to the category of Soviet diplomatic mythology conceived for the convenience of reinforcing additional demands. Colonel Villem Saarsen of the Estonian general staff reported that approximately an hour before the story of the "Metalist" was aired on Leningrad radio, Estonian reconnaissance planes had flown over the reported site of the sinking and had noticed nothing.

Moreover, shortly after the "sinking," the "Metalist" had been sighted in perfect working order. When General Johan Laidoner, the Estonian commander in chief, mentioned the incident to Molotov in Moscow in December 1939, Molotov is reported to have smiled and said: "Oh, let it be!"<sup>20</sup>

The spurious incident served Molotov's purpose of justifying additional demands. Whereas initially he demanded that the Soviets had the right to establish bases in Estonia, now he specified that 35,000 Soviet troops were to be deployed and remain in Estonia for the duration of the war.<sup>21</sup> The Estonian delegation vigorously objected and called the deployment of troops an unwarranted expansion of the earlier demands, virtually amounting to an occupation.

At this juncture, Stalin arrived and entered the discussion. He insisted that land forces were needed to protect the Soviet air and naval bases in Estonia. He agreed to reduce Soviet troop strength to 25,000, but the Estonians felt that even this number was far too high. However, Stalin remained adamant.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Selter protested to Stalin the violation of Estonian airspace by Soviet airmen. Stalin replied: "These were young, inexperienced fliers. They make errors. They are not attentive. But we can eliminate that. It will not happen again."<sup>23</sup> The treaty was signed at midnight 28 September 1939.

Arno Raag, a well-known journalist in Estonia, reported that there was an enormous sense of relief among the population once it became known that a treaty with the Soviets had been signed. The full text of the agreement was published in all major newspapers. People noted with satisfaction that the treaty affirmed the Peace Treaty of 1920 and the 1932 Non-Aggression Treaty.<sup>24</sup>

The implementation of the mutual assistance pact nearly led to the military occupation of Estonia, a fate which the country had narrowly avoided during the negotiations in the Kremlin. The chief of the Soviet military commission was Komandarm Kirill A. Meretskov, the commander of the Leningrad Military District, whose task was to plan, in conjunction with a group of Estonian officers, the deployment of Soviet forces in Estonia. The Soviet team members arrived on 2 October in Tallinn. They were met by the Estonian team, headed by Major General Nikolai Reek. The initial Soviet proposal envisioned a Soviet garrison in almost every major city of Estonia. The Estonians strenuously objected, citing the Mutual Assistance Treaty proviso that Soviet forces were to be stationed only in a few designated areas. After a heated argument during which the Soviet tank commander, Dimitri G. Pavlov, threatened to use his armor to resolve the problem, the commission adjourned and Meretskov went to Moscow for additional instructions. On the Estonian side, General Reek resigned, and his place was taken by Foreign Minister

Selter. The talks now proceeded more smoothly; Selter was able to say, when the Russians became adamant, "when I discussed this point with Mr. Stalin. . . ." No Soviet officer wanted to find himself on the wrong side of Stalin.<sup>25</sup>

After much wrangling, the Soviet-Estonian military commission completed its work on 25 October 1939. The main area for the Soviet bases was designated as the Haapsalu and Paldiski region in northwestern Estonia. Tallinn harbor was to be used temporarily by the Baltic Fleet until the naval base at Paldiski was fully developed. Soviet air bases would be located in the Kuusiku region. The total Soviet troop strength was not to exceed 25,000, but the Estonian authorities had no means to check on the number of personnel the Soviets deployed.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, Latvia and Lithuania were pressured to sign similar mutual assistance pacts with the Soviet Union. Latvia caved in to Moscow's demands on 5 October, and Lithuania followed five days later. The Lithuania deal was sweetened by the transfer to Lithuania of the city and region of Vilna from the Polish territories occupied by the Red Army.

The deployment of Soviet troops to their designated areas in Estonia began on 25 October 1939 and was completed in the first week of November. The entire operation went smoothly, without serious incident. The Soviet columns were escorted by Estonian officers, the road junctions guarded by Estonian Home Guard detachments.<sup>27</sup> Once the Red Army units had arrived, their officers confined them to their bases in complete isolation from the local civilian population. Only the Estonian construction workers employed on the Soviet installations saw the Soviet soldiers. The Red Army refrained from interfering in Estonian internal affairs and generally observed the stipulations and terms of the Mutual Assistance Treaty.<sup>28</sup>

The Finnish-Soviet Winter War, which broke out on 30 November, introduced the first jarring notes into the new Soviet-Estonian relationship. Estonian sympathies were naturally with the Finns, to whom they are related by language and culture. Estonians had not forgotten the Finnish volunteers who had helped in their War of Independence of 1918-20. While the Estonian government had to maintain a neutral attitude, groups of Estonians crossed the ice-covered Finnish Sound and enlisted in the Finnish army to fight the Russians.

The Soviets used Estonian air bases to launch attacks against Finnish cities. This constituted a violation of the neutrality provision of the Mutual Assistance Pact between Estonia and the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> The Winter War glaringly demonstrated that Estonia had ceased to be an independent country and had been drawn into the grip of her powerful neighbor.

Estonian leaders nevertheless remained guardedly optimistic that

the Soviets would fulfill their treaty obligations. General Johan Laidoner, commander in chief of the Estonian army, was shown every courtesy by the Soviet leadership during his week-long state visit to the Soviet Union in December 1939. Stalin himself received him and praised the Estonian leaders for their cooperative attitude. General Laidoner's radio speech on his return from Moscow reflected confidence that the Soviet Union would respect Estonian independence. Ambassador Warma also stated that similar feelings were being expressed by many other Estonians in leadership positions.<sup>30</sup>

There were, however, dissenting voices. One was that of Karl Selter, who remained highly suspicious of Soviet intentions. After completing the negotiations for the Mutual Assistance Treaty and the military commission's work, he resigned as foreign minister and asked to be posted to Berlin as ambassador. However, the Berlin appointment met with strong opposition by some senior Estonian diplomats who did not think Selter's performance in Moscow had proven him an Estonian Metternich. Consequently, he had to be satisfied with representing Estonia at the almost defunct League of Nations in Switzerland. Still, the appointment took him a safe distance from the Soviet Union.

In October 1939 another event caused uneasiness in Estonia. Adolf Hitler issued a call to the Baltic Germans to "return to Germany." Many of these German families had lived in the Baltic lands for 700 years and had never been citizens of Germany or considered Germany their "home." Yet the German minority in Estonia and Latvia had reasons to be particularly wary of the Bolsheviks. In 1917-19 the largely German Baltic nobility had been terrorized by the Bolsheviks; many had been imprisoned and executed. The fact that their leaders—who had been briefed in Berlin—vigorously promoted the idea of leaving the Baltic area served as a sure sign that Berlin was expecting their ancient homeland to come under Bolshevik rule. An equally convincing argument for leaving was the fact that the Germans who remained would be deprived of German cultural benefits such as German language schools, clubs, churches, and newspapers.

It was not attraction to the National Socialist ideology or a sense of loyalty to the führer, but rather their historic fear of the Bolsheviks and the fear of losing German cultural benefits that caused the Baltic Germans to respond to the call to "return home." In 1939 and 1940, out of a total of 16,356 Germans in Estonia, 12,660 left for Germany.<sup>31</sup> Since many Estonians had also been alarmed by the prospect of Soviet rule, some of them managed to "prove" a German connection, whether real or fictitious, and joined the exodus to Germany.<sup>32</sup>

To dramatize the urgency of the situation, Baltic German leaders were briefed about the Secret Additional Protocol of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

However, they were sworn to secrecy. Dr. Erhard Kroeger, one of the Baltic German leaders in Latvia, reported having attended a meeting with high German officials during which Heinrich Himmler told the group about the Secret Additional Protocol. The general public of Baltic Germans were never told.<sup>33</sup>

In March 1940 the uneven contest between Finland and the Soviet Union drew to a close. The Finns had suffered heavy casualties and material and territorial losses, but they retained their independence. Although technically victorious, the Soviet Union had suffered a serious blow to its prestige. Hitler's generals had followed with keen interest the inept performance of the Red Army in combat.

In the early morning hours of 10 May 1940, the calm was broken on the Western Front with a massive attack by Hitler's divisions. The world watched with dismay as the defenses of the western allies were shattered in record time. Minus their weapons, British troops managed to escape through Dunkirk. The French armies disintegrated, and the victorious Germans marched into Paris on 14 June 1940. The Allied collapse had come with unexpected swiftness.

Stalin sent Hitler a telegram congratulating the Germans on their brilliant victory. In private, he surely experienced considerable anxiety about the ally who could soon dedicate all his attention to the East.

Events in France served as a signal for Stalin to act in the Baltic countries and in Romania. Stalin felt compelled to consolidate his gains while he still had time: Lithuania was the first Baltic state to receive a Soviet ultimatum. On the day Paris fell the Soviet foreign ministry handed the Lithuanian ambassador a note accusing Lithuania of military conspiracy against the Soviet Union. Latvia and Estonia were soon subjected to the same accusation. Soviet demands for Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were delivered to the Romanian government on 26 June 1940.<sup>34</sup>

The Soviet ultimatum was delivered to the Estonian ambassador, August Rei, at 2:30 p.m. on 16 June by Molotov himself. The note accused Estonia of maintaining a military alliance with Latvia and seeking to enlarge this "anti-Soviet conspiracy" by drawing in Lithuania and Finland. The ultimatum demanded that Estonia form a friendly government which would "honestly" execute the terms of the Estonian-Soviet pact. Furthermore, the Soviet government demanded the right to station Soviet troops in all the important Estonian population centers. The latter provision was to guarantee faithful compliance with the terms of the pact.<sup>35</sup>

In a signed statement, Ambassador Rei added that the written ultimatum was accompanied by two oral demands: (1) the ultimatum had to be answered by 11:00 p.m. of the same day, and, (2) in case of non-

compliance, the Red Army, concentrated near the border, stood ready to march into Estonia immediately.<sup>36</sup>

With combat-ready Soviet troops already in the country, armed resistance was not an option for the Estonian government. The Soviet ultimatum was accepted before 5:00 p.m. on 16 June 1940. At 5:00 a.m. the next day, large units of the Red Army crossed the border. Once again, escorted by Estonian army officers, Home Guard, and police, the operation took place without serious incident. However, this time the Soviet commanders no longer acted as guests but as occupiers. Altogether five Soviet divisions with more than 100,000 men streamed into Estonia within two days.<sup>37</sup>

In the face of such gross violations of the agreements the Soviets had so recently concluded with Estonia, higher Estonian government leaders remained in a trance-like state. Minister of the Interior August Jurima counseled a friend who wished to leave the country, "No need to panic, dear Ots, these Soviets are not the same wild men we knew in 1918. They have become much more humane." Economics Minister Leo Sepp expressed similar sentiments: "We can manage with the Russians."<sup>38</sup> Ironically, Jurima, Sepp, and all the other cabinet members, along with the president of the republic and General Laidoner, were arrested and deported to Russia by the Soviet regime in the ensuing months. Only Prime Minister Juri Uluots managed to escape.

This time nothing was left to chance. The occupation and absorption of the Baltic countries into the Soviet empire followed a more or less standardized plan prepared in Moscow. To insure that the plan was followed, Stalin sent high ranking officials to supervise it. Kaunas received Vladimir G. Dekanozov, one of Lavrenti Beria's trusted aides. To oversee the operation in Latvia, Stalin sent the notorious Andrei Vyshinski, the infamous procurator of the purge trials in the 1930s and Molotov's assistant, to Riga. Tallinn became involuntary host to Andrei Zhdanov, secretary of the Leningrad Communist Party apparatus and a close associate of Stalin.

Zhdanov arrived in Tallinn by a private train on 19 June. The route from the station to the Soviet embassy was cleared of people and patrolled by the Red Army soldiers. Machine guns were set up at street intersections. Escorted by two armed body guards, Zhdanov stormed into the office of the Estonian president and presented the list of people Moscow wanted to see in the new cabinet.<sup>39</sup> The list was headed by Dr. Johannes Vares-Barbarus, a physician and a poet with leftist leanings from the provincial town of Parnu, as the new prime minister. The majority of the new cabinet members were non-Communists, but people who leaned toward the left politically. More significant than the political affiliation of the cabinet members, however, was the fact that they were Communist

fellow travelers disposed to follow the Zhdanov line closely. The new cabinet was sworn in on 21 June.

Although Soviet control over Estonia was achieved by military occupation, the Kremlin felt compelled to follow a certain "revolutionary" scenario which included demonstrations, freeing of political prisoners, and new elections. In 1917 the Bolsheviks had been a sizable political force in Estonia, receiving 40 percent of the votes cast.<sup>40</sup> From this high-water mark the Bolshevik popularity in Estonia began to ebb. Two Communist policies contributed to the decline: the refusal to distribute large estates to the landless, and opposition to Estonian independence. Once independence had been secured in 1920, the Bolshevik popularity continued to slip. The failed Communist coup of 1 December 1924 led to the outlawing of the party, which from then on played only a minor role in the political life of the country. Further, Stalin's purges almost completely annihilated the sizeable body of Estonian Communists living in Russia, whose 1927 number was estimated to be 3,700.<sup>41</sup> By its own admission, the Estonian Communist Party in Estonia proper did not exceed 150 members in 1939.<sup>42</sup> Party members succeeded, however, in organizing a substantial body of fellow travelers who welcomed the new order with its opportunities for personal advancement. This group of Communists and fellow travelers became the vanguard of action in the Moscow-directed "revolution" and hastily assembled "parliament" in 1940.

Andrei Zhdanov and the staff of the Soviet embassy in Tallinn directed these revolutionary activities. Prior to the street demonstrations in Tallinn, the Soviet embassy had warned the Estonian interior ministry that any interference by Estonian police could cause widespread bloodshed.<sup>43</sup>

From the office of the president of Estonia, Colonel Elmar Tambek witnessed the "revolutionaries" marching from the downtown rallying point to the presidential palace to present their demands. He estimated that the crowd numbered between 2,000 and 3,000 people, some of whom carried red flags. With the demonstrators were a number of flatbed trucks filled with people. On one of the trucks Tambek recognized Karl Sare, a local Communist activist. The demonstrators were escorted by a few Soviet armored cars and tanks. As they came nearer, Tambek noticed about 150 poorly dressed men who sang songs in the Russian language. The crowd shouted: "Bread! Work! Release the political prisoners! New government! Down with the bourgeoisie!" Counter-demonstrators from the sidewalk shouted: "Long live the president! Shoot the bastards!"<sup>44</sup>

From the presidential palace, the marchers went to the Central Prison, where the president ordered anyone remotely considered "political" to be released. A group of demonstrators broke into the armory of the

Home Guard and passed a number of rifles and machine guns to the "revolutionaries."

Aside from minor commotion, the city was relatively calm. Only at the barracks of the Signal Battalion did a serious exchange of fire between the demonstrators and the Estonian soldiers take place.<sup>45</sup> On the same day, a revolutionary tore down the Estonian flag from the tower of the Toompea Castle, where the government met.

Following the street demonstrations, the people were given the opportunity to elect representatives "who had the best interests of Estonia and the Soviet Union in heart." The old parliament was disbanded by the president on 5 July; new elections were set for 14 and 15 July. Similar marching orders and timetables were enforced in Latvia and Lithuania. The elections were unconstitutional in Estonia: the Estonian constitution required at least a thirty-five-day delay after the call for elections before the actual balloting. The new government undertook to change and "simplify" the election law, for example, by introducing portable ballot boxes.<sup>46</sup>

Thinly veiled orchestration by the Communist Party became evident in all aspects of the national elections. Overnight a list sponsored by an organization previously unheard of, the Working People's League, was presented in all eighty voting districts. Late on the night of 9 July the government-controlled radio announced that all candidates not sponsored by the Working People's League had to submit their platforms by 2:00 p.m. the next day, or they would be disqualified. The opposition candidates worked all night and most submitted their platforms the following day. Then the Central Election Committee in Tallinn determined that the platforms submitted were too similar to those of the Working People's League. Such platforms were obviously prepared to deceive the electorate and the Central Election Committee declared them null and void. This step effectively removed most opposition candidates from the race.<sup>47</sup>

The parliament that was elected was made up completely of faithful Communist Party members and fellow travelers who dutifully approved whatever the upper leadership placed before them. On 21-22 July 1940 this docile body declared Estonia a Soviet Socialist Republic and requested that it be accepted into the Soviet Union. Even if the parliament had been a legally constituted body, it had no right under the Estonian constitution to vote for the abolition of the republic's independence.<sup>48</sup>

The action taken by the spurious Estonian parliament satisfied the requirements of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, which issued a decree admitting Estonia to the Union of Socialist Republics on 6 August 1940. This act of "socialist legality" terminated Estonian independence and led Estonia into the painful phase of Sovietization.

Stalin's forcible seizure of the Baltic countries did not improve the

strategic position of the Soviet Union. In fact, the occupation and subsequent "Sovietization" degraded Soviet security. By 22 June 1941, when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the great majority of the population in the Baltic lands had become bitterly anti-Soviet. This change was caused by the terror employed by the new rulers. One program which more than any other created violent anti-Soviet feelings was the massive deportation of "anti-Soviet" elements and their families. An estimated 19,000 men, women, and children were deported from Estonia alone during the first year of Soviet power.<sup>49</sup> Since Estonia's population was only 1.2 million, the effect of these deportations was felt in every community. The other Baltic countries suffered proportionately.

The most massive deportations took place a week before the German invasion. As a result, guerrilla units sprang up everywhere. They were initially composed of men who had escaped deportation or arrest. Their numbers were dramatically increased by young men who sought to evade the draft after war broke out. Many of these groups attacked smaller Soviet military units and harassed lines of communications. Most importantly, the Red Army forces in the Baltic countries sensed they were in a hostile environment. The Lithuanian guerrillas liberated large areas of their country and established a national government even before the German army arrived. The Germans, having occupied the country, disbanded the Lithuanian government.

In the case of Estonia alone, the Soviet Union broke four major treaties. The Kremlin broke the pledge it had given in the Peace Treaty of Tartu 1920 renouncing sovereign rights over Estonian territory forever. In the Treaty of Paris of 27 August 1927, the Soviet Union had renounced war as a national policy and had yet used military means to occupy Estonia. By signing the Non-Aggression Treaty of 1932 with Estonia, the Soviets had specifically pledged not to use force against that country. The Soviet Union grossly violated the Mutual Assistance Treaty of 1939, which affirmed the Treaty of Tartu and pledged to respect the economic and political order and independence of Estonia.<sup>50</sup>

According to the perception of the vast majority of the Estonian people, the arrival of the Red Army in 1940 was not a triumph but a tragedy. The Estonians and the other Baltic peoples have not, however, abandoned their hopes for national self-determination, as the recent popular demonstrations in the Baltic lands testify. The Estonian national flag, the symbol of independence, has already made a comeback. Ironically, the restoration of the flag took place by order of the ruling Communist Party, the same organization which banned it forty-nine years earlier. The hoisting of the flag over the Toompea Castle on 23 February 1988 was witnessed by a crowd of over 100,000 freely assembled Estonians.<sup>51</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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