

The Japanese—Soviet Neutrality Pact

A diplomatic history, 1941–1945

Boris Slavinsky

Translated by Geoffrey Jukes

NISSAN INSTITUTE/ROUTLEDGE CURZON JAPANESE STUDIES SERIES



The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact

This book provides a detailed account from the Soviet Foreign Ministry archives of the neutrality pact between Japan and the Soviet Union, signed in April 1941, which was breached only 9 months before its expiry date of April 1946 when the Soviet Union attacked Japan. Japan's neutrality had enabled Stalin to move his Far Eastern forces to the German front where they contributed significantly to Soviet victories from Moscow to Berlin. The Soviet Union's violation of the pact and its retention of the southern Kurile Islands, seized in 1945, created a sense of victimization in Japan to the extent that there is still no formal Peace Treaty between the two countries to this day.

The Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact, previously published in Russia, appears here for the first time in English. In his translation of this book, Geoffrey Jukes has revised and updated this important work, which Dr Slavinsky was unable to complete before his untimely death in April 2002. In an additional chapter, Jukes provides evidence that, in 1944, the Soviet government provided Japan with information, obtained by espionage, about American, British and Australian intentions and capabilities. Jukes suggests that the most likely explanation of this is Stalin's desire to be seen as a great military leader by keeping Japan in the war until he was ready to attack, then avenging Russia's defeat in the war of 1904–5, and by taking more territory than Nicholas had lost – precisely what he did in 1945.

Dr Boris Slavinsky (1935–2002) graduated from Kiev Institute of Technology in 1958, and until 1967 worked in engineering design, receiving his DSc degree in 1966. From 1967 to 1971 he was in the Japanese section of the USSR State Science and Technology Committee before becoming Deputy Chief Scientific Secretary, Far Eastern section, USSR Academy of Sciences, and simultaneously head of the 'Soviet Foreign Policy in the Far East' Section of the Institute of History. From 1996 until his death in 2002 he was a Senior Research Fellow of IMEMO (Institute of World Economics and International Relations), Russian Academy of Sciences.

Geoffrey Jukes, after graduating from Oxford in 1953, spent many years researching Soviet foreign and defence policies with the UK Foreign and Colonial Office (1953–6 and 1965–7) and the Defence Intelligence Staff (1956–65). He then moved to Australia where he is now an Associate Fellow of the Australian National University and a Senior Fellow of Melbourne University. Mr Jukes has written numerous articles, books and contributions to collective works on Russia/the Soviet Union in Russo-Japanese (1904–5) and both World Wars as well as on Soviet strategy, the Sino-Soviet dispute and the Soviet Union in Asia.

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Translator's note

One of the regular charges made against the Soviet Union during the Cold War was that it could not be trusted to observe any treaties that it signed. Instances cited in support of this allegation often centred on its relations with its western neighbours. In the inter-war years it signed non-aggression treaties with them, then in 1939–40 invaded five of them, annexing parts of Poland and Finland, and swallowing Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania whole. But the West's accusations never touched on one particularly flagrant violation, the declaration of war on 9 August 1945 on an eastern neighbour, Japan, despite the existence of a Neutrality Pact between them that was not due to expire until 13 April 1946.

The reason why this particular transgression was not cited as evidence of Soviet perfidy is simple. Until the dropping of the two atomic bombs the United States and United Kingdom had long been actively soliciting Soviet entry into the war against Japan as the quickest way of bringing Japan to its knees. Moreover, Roosevelt and Churchill underestimated Stalin's personal ambition to avenge Russia's defeat in the war of 1904–5, and wooed him more than they need have done. In particular, they not only acquiesced in his recovering everything that had been lost in 1904–5, but lightheartedly accepted his claim on the entire Kurile Islands chain which, unlike Korea, Formosa or Southern Sakhalin, Japan had not acquired by war. The three islands and a group of islets closest to Hokkaido had never been Russian, the rest had been recognised as Russian only from 1855 to 1875. Russia then ceded them to Japan in exchange for Japan's relinquishing its claims to Sakhalin. Inclusion of the South Kuriles among Stalin's gains added to his violation of the Neutrality Pact and detention of Japanese prisoners of war for anything up to 10 years after the end of the war created in Japan a sense of victimisation which has lasted to this day. Fifty-eight years after the war's end, there is still no formal peace treaty between Japan and Russia.

Both sides were guilty of breaches of the Pact, but neither chose to make any breach an occasion for denouncing it, because it served their mutual interests. While Japan fought in the south and the Soviet Union in the west, neither wanted to open an additional front in the north-east. But

at the Tehran conference in November 1943, Stalin gave his allies an undertaking to join the war against Japan within 2 to 3 months from the end of the war in Europe. From then on the date of Germany's surrender would determine whether or not the Neutrality Pact would be violated. And in mid-1945, while Japan was frantically seeking Soviet mediation to end the war, and the Soviet Foreign Ministry stalling as only it knew how, Red Army troops, tanks and guns were already streaming eastwards.

By attacking the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, then invading British, Dutch and American dependencies in South-East Asia, Japan placed Hitler in an awkward position. Germany was already at war with the USSR, but had not sought Japan's assistance, despite being allied to it in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936 and the Tripartite Pact of September 1940. The latter obliged Germany to assist Japan only if the United States attacked it, but Hitler, for reasons never explained, declared war on the USA a few days after Pearl Harbor. By so doing he made it easier for Roosevelt to overcome isolationist opposition to US involvement in the war in Europe, and follow his inclination to give priority to defeat of Germany, the strongest enemy, over defeat of Japan.

As Dr Slavinsky demonstrates, Japan had at various times between the two World Wars invaded or contemplated invading the Soviet Far East. However, the Red Army defeated it in tests of strength in 1938 and 1939, so its expansionist ambitions turned southwards. There the colonies of defeated France and Holland and hard-pressed Britain offered easier and richer spoils, particularly the oil, rubber and valuable minerals, such as tungsten and tin, that Japan sorely lacked.

Only the United States could offer strong opposition to Japan's southward push. In late 1940 Germany, victorious in Europe but unable to invade Britain or force it to make peace, and planning to invade the Soviet Union, sought only to keep the USA out of the war. However Japan, at war with US- and Soviet-backed China since 1937, had to choose between the prospects of deterring US intervention or of crippling its ability to intervene.

The Tripartite Pact appeared to provide a solution, in the form of an alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan (with other countries, including the Soviet Union, to be invited to join later) aimed at intimidating the United States into staying out of the war. Italy's dictator, Mussolini, and Japan's Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, were assured that such was its sole purpose, and Article 5 of the Treaty indeed stated specifically that it was not directed against the Soviet Union. Germany therefore actively misled both its co-signatories, because when they signed the Pact on 27 September 1940, its preparations to invade the USSR were already under way.

The Tripartite Pact thus purported to give Japan some insurance against American intervention in its projected southward expansion, and at that time its expansionist plans did not include an attack on the USA. However, it saw a risk that the Soviet Union, not then at war, might

exploit its entanglement in war in the south to invade its northern possessions, Manchukuo, Korea, Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. To insure against that possibility, Japan sought a non-aggression pact. An insuperable obstacle to that was that a treaty the USSR already had with China precluded signing a non-aggression pact with any country with which either was at war. However, the increasing signs that Germany was preparing to invade prompted Stalin also to seek some assurance against a two-front war. So he took a personal hand in negotiating a Neutrality Pact with Japan, and it was signed on 13 April 1941, just 10 weeks before the invasion. The course of Soviet–Japanese relations from then until the Japanese surrender on 2 September 1945 is examined in this book.

In translating the work I have shortened some of the extracts from meetings successive Japanese ambassadors in Moscow and Soviet ambassadors in Tokyo had with officials of the respective Foreign Ministries, and from the diary notes of Soviet ambassadors Smetanin and Malik. However, the extracts cited by Dr Slavinsky from the most important records of conversation, for example, between Stalin and Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka in 1941, and Stalin and Roosevelt in 1945, have not been curtailed. In translating Soviet terms I have discarded ‘People’s Commissar’ and ‘People’s Commissariat’ in favour of the shorter and more familiar ‘Minister’ and ‘Ministry’, a change the Soviets themselves made in 1946. At a few places where Dr Slavinsky’s account requires some elaboration or qualification, I have added some comments.

A chapter has also been added to take account of materials, mostly archival that became available only after the book had already been published in Russia. Some additional evidence that Stalin’s desire for military glory was becoming obsessional at this time has been included. However, the most important addition is of a finding by two Australian scholars of evidence suggesting that in late 1944 the Soviet Union was passing to the Japanese information obtained by espionage about American, British and Australian force strengths, deployments and intentions in the Pacific. This supports Dr Slavinsky’s contention that Stalin rejected Japan’s requests for mediation because he wanted to enhance his reputation as a military leader, by succeeding where Tsar Nicholas II had failed in 1904–5. To that end he was apparently prepared to pass on information about his allies’ capabilities and intentions, in order to keep Japan in the war until he was ready to attack it.

For students of international relations, the account illustrates the difficulty of creating theories that can accurately model the activities of apparently irrational actors and of leaders who practise deception to the extent that it becomes self-defeating. Germany deceived Japan and Italy into signing the Tripartite Pact in the belief that it was intended to deter the USA, and deceived the Soviet Union by suggesting it would be welcomed as a fourth member of the Pact. Then, without consulting either of its co-signatories, it attacked the Soviet Union, which Article 5 of the Pact

specifically stated was not its target. Japan's unilateral decision to attack the United States, as well as the British and Dutch colonies in South-East Asia, was not based on any evidence of a US intent to attack Japan that needed to be pre-empted. It completely destroyed the ostensible rationale of the Tripartite Pact, and Germany's policy of trying to deter the USA from joining the war. And when the failure of 'blitzkrieg' prompted Germany to seek the Japanese aid against the USSR that it had initially spurned, the distrust each had already sown in the other ensured that each continued to fight a separate and losing war.

Similarly, Hitler's decision to declare war on the United States was not required by the Tripartite Pact. It gave Germany an enemy far stronger than the Japanese ally it had just acquired, and eased Roosevelt's task of concentrating US power first against Germany.

Stalin deceived his allies into cajoling him into a war he was all along determined to enter when the time was ripe. His success enabled him to set a high price of massive material aid, and of acquiescence in his seizing far more territory after three and a half weeks of fighting than his allies that had fought Japan for over three and a half years.

Dr Slavinsky points out that Soviet-period historiography had little to say about the 'Strange Neutrality', and that much of what it did say was tendentious and/or untrue. Western scholarship devoted even less attention to the Japanese–Soviet Neutrality Pact, mainly because of lack of access to Soviet archives. Dr Slavinsky was the first scholar to dive into the flood of material on Soviet–Japanese relations during 1941–5 released from Soviet archives since 1991. His account sheds new light on the ways they developed between the signing of the Pact in April 1941 and the formal Japanese surrender on 2 September 1945. While this translated version was being prepared for publication, Dr Slavinsky died. The account that follows is dedicated to the memory of a notable scholar and valued colleague in the study of the often complex and sometimes turbulent interactions between Japan and Russia. It could not have been completed without the generous help and excellent academic resources provided by the Slavic Research Center, for which I am deeply grateful.

G. Jukes

Slavic Research Center,
Hokkaido University,
Sapporo, Japan,
15 January 2003.

Series editor's preface

The Nissan/RoutledgeCurzon Japanese Studies Series was begun in 1986 and has now passed its sixtieth volume. It seeks to foster an informed and balanced, but not uncritical, understanding of Japan. One aim of the series is to show the depth and variety of Japanese institutions, practices and ideas. Another is, by using comparisons, to see what lessons, positive or negative, can be drawn for other countries. The tendency in commentary on Japan to resort to out-dated, ill-informed or sensational stereotypes still remains, and needs to be combated.

Since the ending of the Cold War international relations in the Asia Pacific have been slowly evolving to conform to new global realities. No doubt the most important adjustment has been towards a world dominated by the United States as the sole 'hyperpower'. But in what takes on the appearance of a unipolar world the United States shows some surprising vulnerabilities. This is most obvious in respect of international terrorism, but also in its failure to construct a convincing coalition to effect regime change in Iraq.

By comparison with the Middle East, the Asia Pacific generally receives less media attention (with the current exception of North Korea). The Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, and then the Middle Eastern crises of the early 2000s (so sharply involving the United States), tended to reduce coverage of the region for a prolonged period. Meanwhile, however, the Asia Pacific was regaining much of its economic dynamism, manifested especially in the spectacular development of the Chinese economy. Japan, after a decade of relative economic stagnation, was gradually resuming its economic growth and showing some signs of greater political activism in relation to external threats. The crisis over North Korean nuclear weapons (real or imagined, but probably real) that emerged in the later months of 2002 gave a sense of urgency to the task of rethinking the international politics of the Asia Pacific region. Despite the extreme reticence of its foreign policy since the 1950s, Japan, as the second largest economy in the world, seemed destined to play a pivotal role in such a reassessment.

The Japanese, being a proud people and heirs to an ancient civilisation,

have long been concerned to map out their own path in the world. It is too simple to assume that they will simply follow a road designed for them by Washington, even though current Government policy is broadly pro-American. There is a pattern in Japanese history whereby adaptation to external norms of behaviour is tempered by the maintenance of structures and practices based on indigenous cultural experience. Little in the currently fashionable debate about globalisation would appear likely to negate this approach.

Japanese reluctance to engage in active foreign policy initiatives emerged as the result of defeat in war, the atomic bombing of two major cities, the Peace Constitution of 1946, widespread pacifist sentiment among the people and reliance on security guarantees provided (in return for military bases) by the United States. There is some evidence today of more positive policies emerging, but foreign policy reticence is deeply entrenched. Indeed, the influence of the War and its aftermath upon Japanese attitudes can hardly be underestimated, and persists even today.

One of the more opaque areas of Japanese external relations during the War was the relationship with the Soviet Union. Until the ending of the Cold War, Soviet archives were effectively closed, so that much on the Soviet side of the equation was a matter for speculation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union access to archives greatly improved, and the veteran Russian diplomatic historian Professor Boris Slavinsky was able to explore them for insights into wartime relations between his own country and Japan. During most of the Asia–Pacific War Japan was protected from Soviet attack by a neutrality pact, though this was broken by Stalin in August 1945. This book concerns the neutrality pact, its negotiation and maintenance, as well as its unilateral violation and the subsequent blitzkrieg invasion by Soviet forces of what had been Japanese territory on the mainland of Asia and offshore islands. Professor Slavinsky tells a gripping and little-known story on the basis of exhaustive archival research. He has filled in one of the major gaps in our understanding of the Asia–Pacific War.

Very sadly, Boris Slavinsky died while the translation of this book, originally published in Russian, was in preparation. The book has been ably translated and adapted by Geoffrey Jukes, a specialist on Russian and Soviet military history based in Australia. As Series editor, I wish to dedicate it to the memory of a fine historian, Boris Slavinsky.

J.A.A. Stockwin

Preface

At the end of the 1980s, while preparing a monograph on the 1951 San Francisco peace conference with Japan,¹ I found N.B. Adyrkhayev's name in the stenographic record among the members of the Soviet delegation. I soon found that he was alive and well, and we met. Again and again.

He had a truly remarkable career. After graduating from the Japanese section of the Institute of Oriental Studies in May 1940, he was recruited by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and sent to the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo, where he worked with no time off, including all the war years, until May 1947. He had excellent Japanese, and was personal interpreter to the Soviet ambassador, Yakov Malik. After he returned to Moscow he often used to interpret for the highest Soviet leaders, for example in 'secret' meetings between Prime Minister Bulganin and Japanese Fisheries Minister Kono,² and at Stalin's April 1951 meeting with Japanese Communists.³

Because of this book's subject, I would like to dwell in some detail on a wide-ranging discussion about the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941, which I had with Adyrkhayev in summer 1990 in the academic journal *Problems of the Far East (Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka)*. We called it 'Diplomatic Trap or Diplomatic Phenomenon?'.⁴ At that time my knowledge of the Pact was superficial.

At the outset I reminded Adyrkhayev that in late 1940 and early 1941 Japan had sought to conclude a non-aggression pact with the USSR, but Moscow had rejected this proposal, and instead insisted on a Neutrality Pact. What motivated the Japanese proposal and the Soviet refusal?

To understand the Japanese position better, [Adyrkhayev began] we must recall what the world situation was at that time. First, in Europe in 1939–40 the war unleashed by Germany was raging. The anti-Hitler countries had suffered severe defeats. In summer 1940 Paris fell, and the British and Dutch forces were seriously mauled. They were compelled to concentrate in Europe, leaving their colonies and possessions in South-East Asia defenceless. All this presented great temptation and

favourable conditions for Japan to seize these areas, rich in various strategic raw materials that Japan always acutely needed. In other words, the conditions were maturing for Japan to establish its domination in Asia in accordance with the 'Tripartite Pact'.

Japanese-American relations, on the other hand, were by then becoming noticeably troubled. Trade between them was shrinking, especially deliveries of American oil and scrap metal. The USA was becoming the main obstacle to Japan's southward penetration. Second, it was understood in Japan that as soon as Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the USSR and USA would become allies, and might act together against Japan.

Taking account of all that, Japan wanted to secure itself from the north, and specifically to that end its then Foreign Minister, Yosuke Matsuoka, sought to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union.

Then I asked whether there was any link between the Tripartite Pact and Japan's effort to conclude a non-aggression or neutrality pact with the USSR. In response Adyrkhayev recalled the fundamental propositions of the Tripartite Pact:

Article 1. Japan recognises and respects the leadership of Germany and Italy in establishing a New Order in Europe.

Article 2. Germany and Italy recognise and respect Japan's leadership in establishing a New Order in Greater East Asia.

Article 3 obliged the signatories to support each other 'by all political, economic and military means, if one of the contracting parties is subjected to attack by any power not at present participant in the European war or Sino-Japanese conflict'.

This was a direct threat to the USSR and USA, the only major states not at war in Europe or involved in the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1940. It was an overt demand: do not obstruct our seizing Europe and Asia, Adyrkhayev emphasised.

But the Tripartite Pact also related directly to the conclusion of a Soviet-Japanese neutrality pact. The Japanese ruling circles, oriented southwards, towards the Europeans' Asian colonies, wanted to secure their northern frontiers by a non-aggression or at least a neutrality pact with the USSR.

I remarked:

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Soviet government was uneasy at Nazi Germany's expansion in Europe. It also had information that

Germany was preparing to attack the USSR, and it would seem that Matsuoka's offer of a non-aggression pact gave us more guarantee of security.

Adyrkhayev replied that indeed the USSR's desire to sign a neutrality pact instead of a non-aggression pact seemed illogical. But as later became clear, this policy was far-sighted, and pursued the following aims. First, we had to free ourselves of the humiliating Japanese oil and coal concessions in North Sakhalin and fishing rights in our territorial waters which had been imposed upon us; second, we had to create the conditions for recovering South Sakhalin. Third, we had somehow to resolve the question of transit for our ships through the straits between the Kurile Islands, then entirely under Japanese control, which closed all exits from the Sea of Okhotsk to the ocean. Fourth, we had to liquidate the focus of permanent tension and military danger on our borders with Manchuria, which Japan had turned into a bridgehead for a war.

We went on to discuss what Japan's attitude to the pact was in practical terms. Adyrkhayev said:

It very soon became clear to us that Japan's leadership did not even intend to adhere to the neutrality pact and fulfil the obligations it had accepted. Just one example. When signing this pact, Matsuoka gave a written promise to liquidate the Japanese oil and coal concessions in North Sakhalin. That was in April 1941, but by June, after Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, Matsuoka had already ceased to think it necessary to fulfil his official promises. Furthermore, in July of that year, a plan, codenamed 'Kantokuen', to attack our country, was adopted at the very highest level in Japan, including by the Emperor.

I objected that this was only a plan, and never implemented. But Adyrkhayev continued to insist that Japan considered the Neutrality Pact a mere piece of paper, and constantly violated it, giving priority to its obligations under the Tripartite Pact. He recalled that at Matsuoka's first meeting with Soviet ambassador Smetanin after the start of the Soviet-German war, Matsuoka said Japan's foreign policy was based on the Tripartite Pact, and therefore, should contradictions arise between it and the Neutrality Pact, the latter would not remain in force.

Even this small part of our discussion disclosed a series of very interesting problems which flowed from the Neutrality Pact. I realised that Adyrkhayev was a 'career diplomat of the Stalinist school', a 'true patriot', who stoutly defended Soviet foreign policy. But many of his thoughts needed rethinking.

His assertion that the concessions in North Sakhalin were imposed on us by force was at odds with the truth. The Soviet side offered them, and they were profitable for us, because they aided the development of Soviet

oil and coal production. Adyrkhayev was silent about the Tripartite Pact's Article Five, which stated that it was not directed against the Soviet Union; and furthermore, Matsuoka, like Ribbentrop, had attempted to recruit the USSR as its fourth member.

So what was the Neutrality Pact? If it was a diplomatic trap, whose trap, Japanese or Soviet? And was there ever such a phenomenon in the history of international relations? For in 1941–5, with the whole world engulfed by war, Japan and the Soviet Union were able to preserve normal, business-like, peaceful relations!

These questions so seized me that I decided to examine them carefully. Besides, the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet denunciation of the Pact was approaching. I wanted to understand how legitimate were Moscow's actions.

World historiography allots only a small space in the international relations system to the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality Pact. The American scholar George Lensen called it 'The Strange Neutrality'.⁵ For whom was it strange? Most of all for the Americans, who tried throughout those years to drag the Soviet Union into the war against Japan. They indeed thought it strange that with all the world at war, the USSR and Japan maintained normal relations.

After my conversation with Adyrkhayev I decided to go deeper into the vicissitudes of pre-war and wartime international affairs in the Far East. The deeper I delved, the more clearly I saw that Soviet historiography of that period was tendentious, based on falsification, tacit suppression of facts, and sometimes even downright lies. Furthermore, it had been rewritten several times, dependent on the state of relations with our main 'class enemy', the United States, and our most important neighbour, China. On the other hand, Soviet foreign policy was traditionally linked to the first person in the state, the First or General Secretary of the Communist Party. In the years that I examined, this was Stalin's foreign policy, structured exclusively on the basis of his personality.

After March 1953, and especially after the Twentieth Party Congress (1956) 'Stalin's personality cult' and repressive policies within the country were condemned. But Soviet foreign policy remained above criticism, roughly on the grounds that because of it we were victors in the Great Fatherland War, the Soviet Union became the world's greatest state, and reinforced its security. The end justified the means!

Today, as a result of democratisation, many former secrets of our foreign policy's history have become available to researchers and the public. They facilitate a different approach to understanding Moscow's actions towards Japan.

I was among the first Russian researchers given access to the Russian Foreign Ministry's Russian Federation Foreign Policy Archive (FPA). Declassification is in progress, and users can be shown documents only after it. Enciphered messages between ambassadors and the People's Com-

missariat of Foreign Affairs remain secret. But in 3 years' work, I was able to examine the files of the Secretariats of People's Commissar (Minister) Molotov, his deputies Lozovskiy, Malik, Vyshinskiy and Gromyko; the Departments dealing with Japan, the USA, China and Korea; the Press Section, International Conferences, and others.

I have also used: the diary notes of K.A. Smetanin and Ya.A. Malik, Soviet ambassadors in Tokyo from 1939 to 1945; notes of their conversations with Japanese Foreign Ministers, their deputies and other important Japanese figures; Soviet ambassadors' reports on the situation in Japan, their evaluation of current political events, analyses of Japanese press items, and their policy recommendations.

Particular value attaches to materials from 'Molotov's Special File', which contains notes of his conversations with Japanese ambassadors Tatekawa and Sato, and materials relating to Foreign Minister Matsuoka's visit to Moscow. I have studied the notes of Molotov's talks with Matsuoka on 24 March, 7, 9 and 11 April 1941.

Thus I was able to study original documents from Matsuoka's visit to Moscow and decisions based on them. I must specify that they are the Soviet version, so it is very important to compare them and supplement missing documents by using other sources. George Lensen⁶ worked with similar documents in the Japanese archives, but since he was forbidden to reveal his source, he mentioned only that they were 'secret'. A Japanese researcher, Kudo Michihiro,⁷ had access to documents from Matsuoka's negotiations in Moscow, and so did some others.

A pleasant surprise was the Foreign Policy Archive's publication of three documents under the heading 'The USSR's Policy in the Far East on the eve of the Great Fatherland War. J.V. Stalin's contacts with Chinese and Japanese politicians'.⁸ They are Stalin's message to Chiang Kai-Shek of 16 October 1940, and notes of his two conversations with Matsuoka, on 24 March and 12 April 1941.

The manuscript of this book was already complete when I became acquainted with these documents in early February 1995. They were extremely important to me, because they confirmed conclusions I had already drawn from other sources. I therefore decided to incorporate and evaluate them, but not otherwise amend my text.

The total of new documents from the Foreign Policy Archive coming into scholarly circulation through publication of this book is about two hundred; but gaps in the FPA's declassified documents should be noted. I was unable to examine the notes of ambassador Smetanin's conversation with Foreign Minister Toyoda on 13 August 1941, at which Smetanin handed him the statement that the USSR would not provide the United States with naval or air bases. The content of the Soviet statement is clear from subsequent conversations but I could not obtain the document itself. There is, apparently, a feeling that its contents might cast a shadow over relations with the USA.

The book has eleven chapters. The first is historiographical, fundamentally describing Soviet publications. In Chapter 2 I analyse the pre-history of the Neutrality Pact, beginning with the Peking Convention of 1925, since problems were created then which the next generation of politicians had to resolve. The core of this chapter is the question of what kind of treaty the USSR and Japan wished to conclude, a Neutrality Pact or a Non-Aggression Pact, and why, a problem little studied in world historiography.

In Chapter 3 there is an account of the two governments' aims in signing the Pact. Here, for the first time, all the documents relating to the Soviet-Japanese negotiations, including Matsuoka's discussions with Stalin, are brought fully into the public domain.

In Chapter 4 I show what a dilemma confronted the Japanese government in determining Japan's future course after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war.

Chapter 5 shows that Moscow knew about the attack on the United States that Japan was preparing, and did not tell Roosevelt. It is also suggested that the NKVD, the predecessor of the KGB, perhaps had a hand in drafting the 'Hull Memorandum' of 26 November 1941, which helped push Japan towards its strike at Pearl Harbor.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the Neutrality Pact in the period of Japanese successes in the South-East Asian war, 1941-2. In those years the Soviet Union had more often to remind Japan of the need to observe the pact than vice-versa.

In Chapter 7 I discuss the serious tests which beset the treaty when fortune began turning its back on Japan. At that time the Japanese government was already seeking a way out of the war, and attempting to maintain relations with the USSR at a normal level, but no higher.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the last year of the war with Germany and the Neutrality Pact. In this period the Soviet Union gave secret undertakings to the USA and Great Britain to join the war against Japan within 2 to 3 months after the defeat of Germany. And although on the surface Soviet-Japanese relations were normal, Moscow had already begun preparing for war.

Chapter 9 deals with the denunciation of the Neutrality Pact. Although the treaty permitted denunciation, it evoked a very pained reaction in Japanese ruling circles, which, nevertheless, hoped the USSR would maintain relations at the level that had existed since 1941.

Chapter 10 discusses Japan's peace initiatives of May-July 1945, aimed at securing Soviet mediation to end the war. Ignorant of the decisions taken at Yalta, the Japanese government vainly hoped that by offering significant concessions to the Soviet Union it could obtain its agreement to mediate a compromise peace.

In the eleventh and final chapter, on the Soviet Union's violation of the Neutrality Pact, I attempt to answer three questions:

- 1 Were there contradictions between the USSR and Japan which could only be resolved by war, that is with Soviet and Japanese blood?
- 2 Who needed the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan?
- 3 Precisely who decided the USSR should enter the war on Japan, i.e. who was guilty of violating the Neutrality Pact?

I also analyse the question whether the Neutrality Pact could have been preserved until it expired, i.e. until 25 April 1946.

Undoubtedly 1941–5 was a difficult period in Soviet–Japanese relations; but both countries were able then to preserve normal, business-like, peaceful relations. It is regrettable that Stalin nevertheless sanctioned violation of the Neutrality Pact, bowed to his Allies’ pressure, and involved the Soviet Union in the war against Japan.

In conclusion I note that readers can acquaint themselves with the socio-political life of wartime Japan, the press of those years, utterances by the highest state and military figures, their views of the world, and their assessments of the international situation, including Japanese–Soviet relations.

The author dedicated the Russian edition of this monograph to the memory of Soviet diplomat Yakov Alexandrovich Malik, who became Soviet ambassador in Tokyo in July 1942, and held that post until the last days of the war. At that time he was only 36 years of age, the youngest ambassador not just of the USSR, but in the entire world (Figure 1).

Malik was one of the most talented Soviet diplomats, distinguished by profound erudition, and by ability to penetrate to the essence of current world problems and foresee the course of historical development. I became acquainted in detail with Malik’s reports and diary notes, made first as Counsellor and then as Ambassador from the end of 1939 to the summer of 1945, and cite them extensively. Of great scholarly value is his report ‘On the Question of Japanese–Soviet relations (now and in the light of the prospects in the Pacific war between Japan, the USA and England)’. It was prepared in July 1944 for the Soviet government, at whose summons he spent almost 3 months in Moscow, where he was received by Stalin.

While working on the book, I had several opportunities to talk to Malik’s grandson, Sergey Yur’evich Malik, who followed in his grandfather’s footsteps by becoming a career diplomat. He told me many interesting facts, and provided a number of photographs from the family album. They are reproduced in this book. It was published in Russia with financial support from Malik’s family.

As already noted, this book has been written on the basis of documents from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In recent years an enormous amount of work has been done in declassifying and providing documents. An ever-increasing number of researchers can work in the Archive’s new Reading Room.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Arthur Stockwin



Figure 1 Yakov A. Malik, Soviet Ambassador to Japan (Malik family album).

for his recommendation of my book for publication, and to Geoffrey Jukes for translating it. I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr Shinjiro Mori, Head of the Moscow bureau of the *Asahi Shimbun*, for photographs from the magazine 'Asahi Gurafu' reproduced in this book.

I express especial thanks to my wife, Ludmila Slavinskaya, for her carrying out the huge task of computer-setting the manuscript and other painstaking assistance, and also to my son Dmitriy Slavinsky for preparing the original proofs.

B.N. Slavinsky
August 1995

1 Historiography of the problem

In Soviet historiography there was not one book entirely devoted to the Japanese–Soviet neutrality pact, even though studies by the American scholar George Lensen¹ and the Japanese researcher Kudo Michihiro² dealt with the subject. The theme is analysed broadly in various Soviet books on Japanese–Soviet relations, but only individual isolated sections deal with it. A few articles have also been published.

The basic source for elucidating Japanese policy towards the USSR, and justifying Soviet policy towards Japan in the pre-war and wartime years, is the ‘Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East’, held during 1946–8 in Tokyo. These total 100,000 pages of text, not counting materials prepared before the trial.

The Soviet Government approached the Tokyo trial very seriously, as the USSR’s position there was radically different from that in the Nuremberg trials of the principal German war criminals. The Soviet Union had a moral right to judge the latter, because they had invaded it. But Japan had not attacked the USSR; quite the reverse, it was the Soviet Union that on 8 August 1945 declared war on Japan, in breach of a Neutrality Pact supposed to remain in force until April 1946. To justify this, Soviet propaganda had to show, first, that Japan from the outset had been insincere in signing the Pact, since it wished to use it to mask preparations to attack the USSR, and second, that over all those years Japan systematically violated the pact by cooperating with Germany.

On Communist Party Central Committee instructions, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, State Security, the Interior, Marine and Fisheries, Red Army General Staff and Frontier Force Headquarters, USSR Procurator’s office and various research institutes prepared dozens of notes, documents and maps. These distorted figures, twisted facts and falsified the history of Soviet–Japanese relations. They were then disseminated and published as separate books.³ In later years, and until quite recently, highly tendentious and maliciously anti-Japanese books were added,⁴ indicating that there are still those who need to foster anti-Japanese attitudes among our people.

The tragedy of post-1945 Soviet–Japanese relations is that the Tokyo trial materials were placed as ‘historical truth’ at the foundations of Soviet

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policy towards Japan. Then accusations of militarism, complicity with American imperialism, territorial ambitions and revanchism, i.e. attempts to revise the results of the Second World War, were added. So images of Japan as aggressive and anti-Soviet were copied from one book to another. The roots of these attitudes go back to pre-war and Second World War years. To restore historical truth and flush out Cold War ideological sediment necessitates careful scholarly analysis of everything written about Soviet–Japanese relations in the post-war years.

Soon after the war, in 1951, a fundamental work *International Relations in the Far East (1870–1945)* was published in the USSR. A team of the most authoritative Soviet scholars of those years examined Soviet–Japanese relations, but touched only indirectly on the Neutrality Pact, which they did not think merited even a separate section, much less a chapter. Here is what they wrote.

The Soviet government, which had been offering Japan a non-aggression pact since 1931, agreed to conclude a neutrality pact with Japan. This was signed on 13 April 1941. It played a positive role in restraining the spread of the war to Soviet Far Eastern borders, even though the Japanese imperialists viewed it as a mere manoeuvre. Foreign Minister Matsuoka, who signed the pact when he came to Moscow from Berlin, already knew of the attack Nazi Germany was preparing against the USSR. News of the signing of the Japanese–Soviet pact evoked extreme dissatisfaction in Washington, where they were very disappointed at the collapse of their hopes that war between Japan and the USSR was imminent.⁴

From there the assertion that for Japan the Neutrality Pact was just a cunning manoeuvre began making its way through Soviet publications.

An entire section was allotted to ‘investigating Japan’s provocative acts and violations of the Soviet–Japanese Neutrality pact’. Although written by ‘respected’ Soviet scholars, the book was weakly argued. Their sources were basically the press and Soviet leaders’ speeches. No archive materials were cited.

The weightiest scholarly work in the Soviet literature is L.N. Kutakov’s *History of Soviet–Japanese Diplomatic Relations*.⁵ Kutakov worked for many years in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, and used archival documents extensively. But the book’s spirit, and the way facts were analysed and conclusions drawn, were intended exclusively to justify all Soviet actions towards Japan. Kutakov expressed no view of his own about any event in Soviet–Japanese relations. Like other Soviet Japanologists, Kutakov justified the USSR’s Japan policy on the basis of the Tokyo trial materials.

G.V. Yefimov and A.M. Dubinskiy’s book *International Relations in the Far East (1917–1945)*, published in 1973,⁶ is considered one of the most ‘authoritative’, and views the Neutrality Pact at the general level of