

Reflections on the 87th Anniversary of **THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT, AUGUST 23, 1939**



*Joseph Stalin and Joachim von Ribbentrop after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in the Kremlin, Moscow, August 23, 1939
(Bundesarchiv Bild 183-H27337)*

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact, was signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939, by German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. Its official title was the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The public non-aggression agreement was accompanied by a secret protocol that divided much of Central and Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence. It removed a major obstacle to Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland and helped pave the way for the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe. The war ultimately claimed tens of millions of lives, including millions murdered under the Nazi and Soviet regimes.

The secret protocol and subsequent German-Soviet agreements allocated territories including Poland, Finland, the Baltic States, and Bessarabia to German or Soviet spheres of influence. Germany invaded Poland from the west on September 1, 1939. Soviet forces invaded Poland from the east on September 17, and Poland was then partitioned between the two powers.

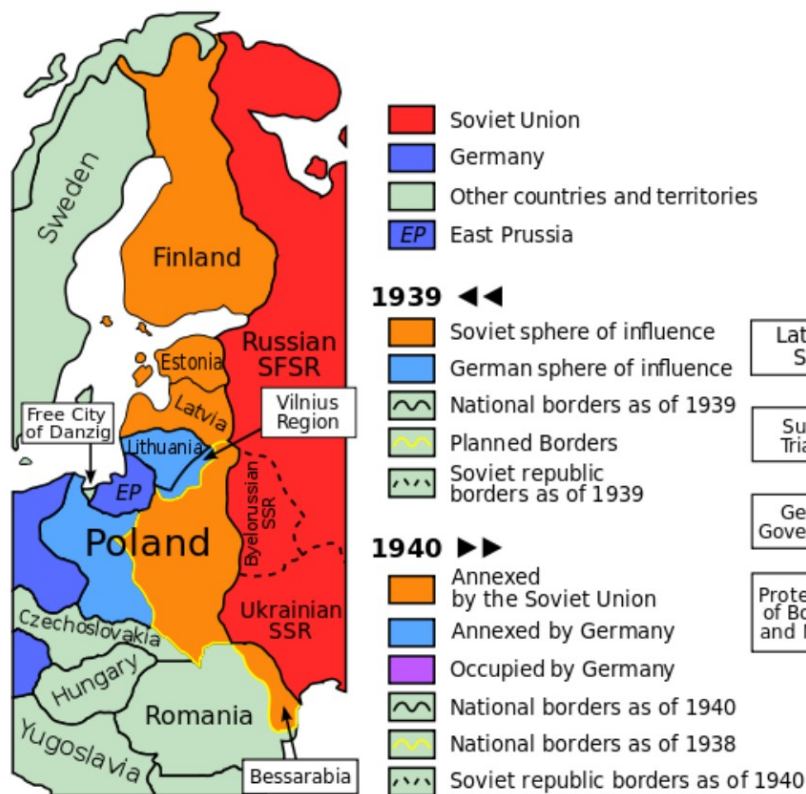
On November 30, 1939, Soviet troops invaded Finland, beginning the Winter War of 1939-1940. In the Baltic States, Soviet pressure led to mutual-assistance treaties in the autumn of 1939 and the stationing of Soviet forces. In June 1940, Soviet troops occupied Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; the three states were subsequently forcibly incorporated into the USSR.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was one of the decisive developments in the collapse of the European order before the Second World War. Its consequences extended far beyond 1939: occupation, territorial changes, mass repression, and the division of Europe shaped the lives of millions for decades. In many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Communist rule and Soviet domination continued for nearly half a century.

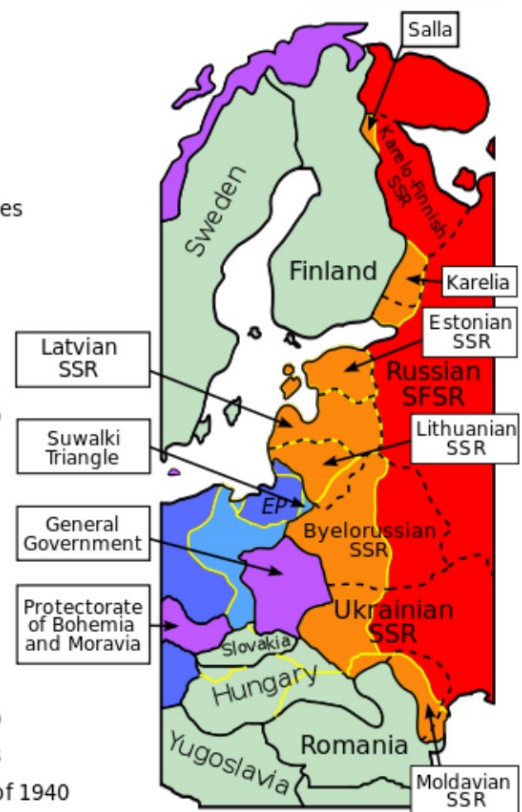
Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and continuing repression in Belarus are stark reminders that aggression, authoritarianism, and the manipulation of history remain present dangers in Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 transformed the political map of Europe, but the struggle to defend national sovereignty, human rights, and democratic freedoms continues.

In 2009, Canada's House of Commons unanimously adopted a resolution designating August 23 as Black Ribbon Day, the National Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Communism and Nazism in Europe.

Planned division of Central Europe according to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact



Actual territorial changes 1939-1940



*Planned and actual territorial changes, 1939-1940, arising from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
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Lest We Forget