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Roger Moorhouse, *The Devils' Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939-1941*. New York: Basic Books, 2014. Pp. xxxiv, 382. ISBN 978-0-465-03075-0.

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The Devils' Alliance deals with the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and its Secret Protocol,¹ which provided the basis for German and Soviet division and annexation of adjacent lands like Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Bessarabian area of Romania. It also details the background and consequences of the pact—including its effects on people in the seized territories. Other major topics are the vital commercial arrangements that accompanied the improved diplomatic relations between the signers, and, in the last chapter, the Nazi conquest, beginning in June 1941, of the territories the USSR had acquired as a result of the 1939 alliance.

Independent historian Roger Moorhouse, like most successful authors of popular books,² writes well, maintaining the reader's interest with a brisk prose style featuring vivid descriptions and concise, apt quotations. These qualities are apparent in the following passage on a crucial Russian-Polish meeting two weeks after the German invasion of Russia.

So, when the Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky, sat down in Whitehall to meet the Polish premier, General Władysław Sikorski, the tension was palpable. The plump, avuncular Maisky and the stern, vain Sikorski were in some sense polar opposites. In his later memoir, Maisky was much amused to relate the story of how Sikorski had arrived preceded by an entourage of adjutants who swept through the building “pushing aside those whom they met” and shouting, “The General is coming! The General is coming!” Upon entering the room, Maisky wrote, Sikorski—in full dress uniform—had glanced toward him, and a slight grimace of surprise, almost of indignation, passed over his face.” He told himself that the general's reaction was due to the “light-heartedness” of his summer suit, but Sikorski's look of contempt was almost certainly not sartorial in origin. (285)

Moorhouse's use of short, telling quotations adds much to his book. He cites not only political figures like Adolf Hitler, Vyacheslav Molotov, Josef Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, and Winston Churchill, but also more ordinary people like the German Jew Victor Klemperer, whose voluminous diary³ remains a valuable primary source. One colorful quotation comes from a young Jew born in Brest in present-day Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire: Menachem Begin, future Israeli prime minister (1977-83), was arrested by Soviet NKVD men in late 1940 in Vilnius, another city that frequently changed hands, but is today the capital of Lithuania. He was told that he had violated article (or section) 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code, but Begin inquired how that could apply to activity he had been accused of while still in what was then Poland. His NKVD interrogator responded “Ach! You are a strange fellow, Menachem Wolfovich.... Section 58 applies to everyone in the world. Do you hear? *In the whole world*. It is only a question of when he will get to us, or we to him” (95). Russian novelist and Nobel laureate, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, later sentenced under the same article, once wrote: “There is no step, thought, action, or lack of action under the heavens which could not be punished by the heavy hand of Article 58. The article itself could not be worded in such broad terms, but it proved possible to interpret it this broadly.”⁴

1. Hereafter, I will refer to the two documents as the “pact” or “alliance.”

2. His previous works include *Killing Hitler: The Third Reich and the Plots against the Führer* (NY: Bantam, 2006) and *Berlin at War: Life and Death in Hitler's Capital, 1939-45* (NY: Basic Books, 2010).

3. *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, 2 vols., trans. Martin Chalmers (NY: Modern Library, 1998/1999).

4. *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (NY: Harper & Row, 1974) 60.

Although Moorhouse's previous books attest to a deep familiarity with German sources, he devotes more space to Soviet oppression than to Nazi brutalities in occupied eastern European territories. His interpretation of Stalin's behavior regarding the Third Reich hews close to the standard scholarly interpretation. In 1939, Stalin, distrusting Britain and France, hoped a war between them and Germany would weaken all three while giving the USSR time to gain strength militarily. The author should have noted, however, that, under the right circumstances, Stalin was quite ready to make a deal with Hitler from 1933 to 1939; it needed only Hitler's change of mind to clear the way for the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Moorhouse also errs in suggesting that world-wide revolution remained one of Stalin's main goals (5, 19).

The Devils' Alliance is, nonetheless, very strong on diplomatic developments in 1933–41, the shocked reaction of people in various nations to the alliance after years of bitter enmity and name-calling between Nazis and Communists, the signatories' improved economic and trade relations during the pact period, which provided raw materials for the German war machine and more advanced technology for the USSR, and the fate of the people of the seized lands, including Jews, who were crushed like nuts between the arms of a nutcracker. Among the book's ancillaries is an appendix (of the Pact and Protocol), a useful chronology, six good maps, many photographs, ample endnotes, and a bibliography of primary and (many more) secondary sources.

I have two general criticisms. First, Moorhouse exaggerates the ignorance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in today's world, and thus the need for his book: he writes that the pact

is simply not part of our collective narrative of World War II. It is my firm conviction that it really should be. It is frankly scandalous that this grim chapter does not find a place in the Western narrative of World War II.... Far from a sideshow or a curiosity, it is of vital importance to our understanding not only of the war but also of the broader story of twentieth-century European history. It fully deserves to be rescued from the footnotes and restored to its rightful place in our collective narrative of World War II in Europe. I can only hope that this book makes some small contribution to that process. (xxiii, xxvi)

Of course, awareness of the pact and its significance will vary according to whom one asks, in Moorhouse's case, his "friends and acquaintances outside history circles" (xxiii). But the audience he and his publisher likely envision for his book—educated people with an amateur interest in history—will already realize that the pact is more than a footnote in history. Moreover, Anthony Read and David Fisher's readable but much longer book⁵ on the same subject and aimed at a similar audience was published in 1989. Though Moorhouse makes use of materials that have appeared since then, he offers little that is new to students and scholars of Nazi-Soviet relations from 1939 to 1941.

My second criticism concerns inaccuracies in Moorhouse's quotations. For example, he quotes Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov's words to the Lithuanian foreign minister⁶ as follows (omissions restored in brackets): "You must take a good look at reality and understand that in [the] future small nations will have to disappear. Your Lithuania, along with the other Baltic nations[, including Finland,] will have to join the glorious family of the Soviet Union. Therefore you should begin [now] to initiate your people into the Soviet system, which in [the] future shall reign everywhere, throughout all Europe"⁷ (86). Besides such lesser slips, Moorhouse makes a more substantial mistake on page 190: in citing a quotation about German noncompliance with the Nazi-Soviet Pact, he attributes the assessment to the NKVD (Soviet political police), whereas his source⁸ actually cites a "contradictory" report from the Soviet embassy in Berlin.

5. *The Deadly Embrace: Hitler, Stalin and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939–41* (NY: Norton, 1989).

6. In June 1940, after Soviet troops had moved into but not yet annexed his country.

7. Romuald Misiunas and Rain Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940–1980* (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1983) 25. The Lithuanian minister, Vincas Krėvė-Mikevičius, provided his version of the discussion in "Conversations with Molotov," *Lituanas* 11 (1965) – www.miwsr.com/rd/1507.htm. Errors appear in quotations from Khrushchev (87, 295), Klemperer (127), Churchill (154, 287), Maisky (156), and from Gabriel Gorodetsky's *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1999) (85, 190, 201).

8. Gorodetsky (ibid.) 56.

Despite these criticisms, this book is a welcome addition to historical literature. Few works treat *both* Nazi and Soviet activities while the pact was in force. And, because of the author's engaging style of presentation, many general readers are likely to become familiar, or more familiar, with the lasting, dire, and far-reaching ramifications of the pact.

In his epilogue, Moorhouse describes the remembrance of the pact among Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians when they broke away from the Soviet Union in 1989–91. These Baltic nations, today members of NATO and witnesses of Russia's annexation of Crimea and encouragement of Ukrainian separatists, remain acutely aware, as must we all, of the "devils' alliance" of 1939.