

Arvydas Anušauskas

LESSONS OF HISTORY:
THE SILENT OCCUPATION
OF 1940

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Dr Arvydas Anušauskas

World War II that broke out just two decades after the end of World War I was an even bloodier clash among countries as it demanded more victims and inflicted greater damage. The war was determined by the aggressive foreign policy pursued by the totalitarian countries and the indecision of democracies and the League of Nations to take action against the aggressors. The situation of 1939 should be taken into consideration when referring to the occupation of Lithuania during World War II. In March 1939, Moscow hosted the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, during which Joseph Stalin said, "A new imperialist war is already in its second year, a war waged over a huge territory stretching from Shanghai to Gibraltar..." According to Stalin, the war was already in progress. Yet there is another message in Stalin's speech that is even more important, "The war has created a new situation with regard to relations between countries. [...] By undermining the basis of the post-war peace regime and overriding the elementary principles of international law, it has cast doubt on the value of international treaties and obligations".

On 23 August 1939, in Moscow, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, and his German counterpart, Joachim von Ribbentrop, concluded a Treaty of Non-aggression between the Soviet Union and Germany, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The contracting parties pledged to refrain from any attack on each other and agreed that neither of them would participate in any grouping of power that was aimed against the other party. The official text of the Treaty was accompanied by the secret additional protocol to rearrange the spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. The signature of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact made war inevitable. Adolf Hitler ordered to attack Poland only one week later. World War II began.

Germany, waging war with Poland, occupied more of the latter's territory than it was intended under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. On 28 September 1939, the

German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty was signed, officially establishing a common border between the countries. To compensate the Soviet Union for the loss of the Voivodships of Lublin and Warsaw, which Germany took under its control, it transferred Lithuania to the Soviet sphere of influence under the Treaty's secret protocol. Stalin treated the pact with Germany as a completely natural and justified, rather than a forced outcome. On 7 September 1939, Georgi Dimitrov, Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, recorded Stalin saying, "The non-aggression pact is to a certain degree helping Germany. [...] There will be no harm if, as a result of the defeat of Poland, we extend the socialist system onto new territories and populations". Stalin's policy was directed exceptionally at satisfying the interests of the Soviet Union. The idea of "the spheres of influence" was the underpinning provision of the policy and virtually destroyed the idea of sovereignty. That is to say, security had to be guaranteed through annexing territories regardless of their sovereignty. The Soviet foreign policy was basically guided by a reasoned *Realpolitik*, which was subordinated to safeguarding the accurately defined geopolitical interests. Stalin was most likely attracted not by Marx's ideas but rather by the words of Lord Henry Palmerston, spoken in 1848, "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow".

In order to put the neutral Baltic States under military and political pressure, the Novgorod Army Operational Group was established in the Leningrad Military District on 13 August 1939. On 14 September 1939, the Group was reorganised into the 8th Army with 100 thousand troops and an additional corps. The total of 135 thousand troops was deployed at the Estonian border. Over 169 thousand troops from the 7th Army stationed in the Kalinin Military District were placed under the command of the Leningrad Military District and deployed at the Latvian border. Under Order No 043 of 26 September 1939 by the People's Commissar for Defence, the Leningrad Military District was instructed to start building up troops on the Estonian-Latvian border and to finish the operation by 29 September 1939. The troops were tasked to occupy Tallinn and Tartu. They also received orders for a speedy occupation of Riga, in case Latvia rendered military assistance to the 7th Army. The Navy was in charge of preventing the Estonian fleet from retreating to Finland and Sweden. Additionally, the 3rd Army, consisting of 169 thousand men and 1 078 tanks, was mobilised against

Lithuania. On 27 September 1939, Stalin had a meeting with Ribbentrop in Moscow and said that Estonia would “temporarily” continue with the existing governing



A column of Red Army troops in Vilnius. September 1939

system; and that, if Latvia refused to enter into a mutual assistance pact on the same conditions as Estonia, the Soviet Army would “manage Latvia in a short period of time”. When assessing the positions of the Baltic States, Stalin noted that “currently there are no attacks from their side since all of them have been greatly intimidated”. In late September 1939, the Soviet Union massed 437 235 soldiers, 3 052 tanks and 3 635 artillery cannons on the border of the Baltic States.

On 3 October 1939, Vyacheslav Molotov, Chairman of the Council of the People’s Commissars of the USSR, warned that if Lithuania refused to conclude a mutual assistance treaty, the Soviet Union would “consider it necessary to ignore Lithuania’s claims of neutrality”. On 10 October 1939, Lithuania was forced into signing the mutual assistance treaty (the Treaty on the Transfer of Vilnius and Vilnius Region to the Republic of Lithuania and on Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Lithuania and the Soviet Union) and into allowing the alien army to enter its territory. The Treaty, however, provided for the guarantees of inviolability of the Lithuanian administrative framework and its economic and social systems. The goal of the Lithuanian authorities

to preserve “the life of the nation and a shade of sovereignty” was achieved but short-lived. Under the mutual assistance treaty, Stalin transferred Vilnius to Lithuania and deployed Soviet army garrisons on the Lithuanian soil thus in advance securing himself a dominant position in further negotiations with Lithuania. The occupation of the Baltic States by the Red Army seemed the only real alternative to the mutual assistance treaty. Upon the conclusion of the mutual assistance treaties, the Soviet contingent in the Baltic States had already numbered as many as 66 946 men, 1 065 tanks, 1 630 cannons, and 526 aircraft.

The USSR leadership officially declared their adherence to the agreement of 10 October 1939 and their benevolence to Lithuania a great many times. At the session of the Supreme Council of 31 October 1939, Molotov claimed that the treaties “represented no interference of the Soviet Union into the affairs of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania” and that the rumours of the sovietisation of those countries were “useful only to our common enemies and to all sorts of anti-Soviet provocateurs”. In his letter to Vyacheslav Molotov dated 20 December 1939, Nikolai Pozdniakov, USSR envoy in Kaunas, wrote, “We have to talk to Lithuanians about their internal affairs at all times and not only in cases beyond our specific interests or political, economic and cultural areas, but also in those cases that highlight objections to the spirit of our mutual relations [...]”. Following the consent by the foreign affairs minister, Lithuanian envoys gathered in Paris on 29 October – 2 November 1939 and drafted a joint memorandum, whereby the deployment of the Red Army units in Lithuania was treated as a direct threat to its statehood. The envoys also recommended establishing a financial foundation to serve the cause of independence, to strengthen the union of the Baltic States, to reinforce the army, and to focus on safeguarding social unity (“All major political parties, groups and movements have to make a joint public declaration stating that they declare a complete truce in wartime and until the crisis ends, without renouncing their ideologies and abandoning their programmes”).

During his attack on Finland in 1939, Stalin received a slap in the face from the West: the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations for its aggressive actions. Because of the war with Finland and greater caution on the part of the Lithuanian government, the USSR’s influence on Lithuania’s internal situation waned. However, after the Winter War ended, the attention of the USSR turned back to the Baltic States. The scenario of the people’s democratic Finland failed, but the same

idea informed the plan for the subjugation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. After the Moscow Peace Treaty was signed with Finland, the Soviet army was moved to the western borders and demobilisation of the reserve force was postponed until 1 July 1940. Incidentally, this was when, on 5 March 1940, the Politburo made the decision to kill 21 000 Polish officers. Neither the liberation of the Poles nor the restoration of Poland was on Stalin's agenda.

In the spring of 1940, the Soviet policy in the Baltic States was clearly adjusted to the German attack in the West. In mid-April, when Germany occupied Denmark and invaded Norway, Ladas Natkevičius, the Lithuanian Envoy in Moscow, felt unfriendliness towards Lithuania in the Kremlin. On 10 May 1940, Germany launched a big offensive in the West and invaded the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. On 13 May 1940, the German troops broke through the Allied forces and invaded northern France, cutting off half a million soldiers of the Allies. Three days later, on 16 May, the *Izvestia* newspaper wrote that "the possibility for small countries to remain neutral and independent is reduced to the minimum. At the time when large states are fighting for their survival, any considerations on law and lawlessness in relations with small countries are naïve, to say the least." On 24 May, the German troops finally tightened the grip over the Allied Forces in northern France and Belgium (the disaster at Dunkirk), which offered a prospect of victory on the Western Front for Germany. The decision to occupy the Baltic States was adopted in Moscow on 24 May 1940. On 25 May 1940, Ladas Natkevičius received from Vyacheslav Molotov a diplomatic note accusing the Lithuanian government of abduction of Red Army soldiers and openly threatening to take "other measures." The Lithuanian government considered the Soviet diplomatic note, dismissed the charges as unfounded, but promised to begin searching for the Red Army soldiers, allegedly gone missing.

As the diplomatic conflict was unfolding, between May and June 1940 immediate preparation for war began. The aggression mechanism had been operating by May 1940. The army headquarters were swarmed with news about large Red Army units being stationed in Belarus, near the Lithuanian border. Starting with 5 June 1940, the Soviet troops deployed in the Baltic States and amounting to roughly 70 000 soldiers were transferred directly under the leadership of Defence Commissar Semyon Timoshenko. The secret archives demonstrate that the Politburo called for additional mobilisation and issued an order for swift concentration of numerous forces on the

Lithuanian border as early as on 4–6 June. On 4 to 7 June 1940, the armed forces of three military districts were concentrated in the border region under the pretext of military training. On 7 June 1940, the day when the Red Army was being pooled at the Lithuanian border for the purpose of invasion, Vyacheslav Molotov and Antanas Merkys embarked on negotiations in Moscow. Lithuania was blamed for having allegedly concluded a secret military union with Latvia and Estonia against the Soviet military alliance and for having thus violated the agreement signed on 10 October 1939. This complaint, just like the first one regarding the abduction of several Red Army soldiers, was not supported by any facts. On 9 June, Moscow signed a decree ordering to set up concentration camps for prisoners of war from the Baltic States. The camps were to accommodate first 50 000 and later 64 000 people.

On 10 June 1940, the military forces of the Soviet Union were deployed in the border region between Druskininkai and Ashmyany, near Lithuania's eastern border. They were comprised of the 11th Cavalry Corps, six divisions, and three tank brigades in full combat readiness. The 3rd Cavalry Corps, five riflemen's divisions, and two tank brigades were stationed in the area between Ashmyany and Daugavpils. A total of

Иди скорее!	Eik greičiau!	Эйк грядічяу!
Иди впереди меня!	Eik paryšakųj manęs!	Эйк пришакийі ма- няс!
Иди сзади меня!	Eik paskui manęs!	Эйк паскųй маняс!
Если побежишь, застрелю!	Jei bėgsi, nušausiu!	Яйі бэгси, нушаусю!
2. УСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ЛИЧНОСТИ ОПРАШИВАЕМОГО.		
Как ваша фами- лия, имя?	Kaip jūsų pavardė, vardas?	Кайп юсу навардэ, вардас?
Какой дивизии?	Kokios divizijos?	Кóкиос дивізінос?
Какой бригады?	Kokios brigados?	Кóкиос бригадос?

A page of the dictionary. Glossary excerpt:

"Faster! Go before me! Follow me! I will shoot if you run!"

Establishing an identity: "What is your name and surname? What division are you in? What brigade?"

221 260 troops, 1 513 tanks, 245 armoured vehicles, 1 140 war planes and 2 946 mortars and cannons in full combat readiness were awaiting orders. A total of 435 000 soldiers, 3 000 tanks, 8 000 canons, and 2 061 planes were stationed on the territory of the Baltic States and all along their borders. The military forces of the Baltic States were significantly smaller. They comprised of 73 000 soldiers in peacetime and 427 000 soldiers after mobilization, 333 000 rifles, 8 325 machine guns, 1 200 canons, 147 tanks, and 292 war planes. In the opinion of the Lithuanian army generals, resistance was unfeasible, given the Soviet army garrisons were deployed in the country and given the Lithuanian Armed Forces were unprepared. Even though, once mobilised, Lithuania's army would have had a sufficient reserve of weapons and ammunition to continue combat operations for two weeks, the military components continued to serve in a regular peacetime mode and the army was neither mobilised nor prepared for defence. On 1 June 1940, the Lithuanian army had 26 084 soldiers whose ammunition stock was 10 to 100 times smaller than that of the invaders.

On 11 June 1940, a meeting was held in Lida under the leadership of Colonel General Dmitry Pavlov, Belarusian Special Military District Commander. The meeting focused on the military action plan for the first three days of the war. The troops were to reach combat readiness by the evening of 13 June 1940. The launch of the attack was scheduled for 9.00 a.m. on 15 June 1940. At that time, the Soviet military divisions and regiments stationed at the eastern border of Lithuania received orders on their tasks during the attack. Upon the receipt of the order to attack, the Soviet planes were to destroy the Lithuanian Air Force in airports and the Soviet paratroopers were to occupy the crossings across the Nemunas River in Alytus and Kaunas. The 214th Airborne Brigade comprising nearly 1 000 paratroopers was to be deployed near Kaunas. All the escape routes for the Lithuanian army were to be cut off. Lithuania was to be occupied in three to four days. The attack was scheduled to begin at 9.00 a.m. on 15 June 1940. While crossing the border, the troops were instructed to "operate quietly and use bayonets; shoot on the spot in case of sudden fire; refrain from attack, bypass and block instead in case of strong resistance." On 13 June, the Politburo issued an order to establish a huge network of hospitals with 25 000 beds. Should "extraordinary actions" be taken, medical institutions were to be established not only in Russia. Reference is made not only to patients but also to the injured. Measures such as sanitary trains and distribution points are normally needed in cases

Прибалтийская кампания (июнь 1940 г.)



The plan of the occupation

of major military action. Notably, the decision concerning this was made on the eve of the ultimatum issued to Lithuania. The Lithuanian troops, drawn away from the Lithuanian state border, were stationed in military garrisons in the central areas of the country. Meanwhile, the Red Army radio stations were waiting for the signal to begin the operation. On 13 June, seven paratroopers appeared near Gaidžiūnai, tasked to make preparations for accommodating a larger airborne force. However, Lithuania was occupied without any battle. This happened owing to the troops mobilised at the borders of the country and the massive political, military, and diplomatic pressures.

Anti-Lithuanian sentiments of the USSR government had thus become more evident. Having prepared to embark on hostilities, the political leadership of the USSR decided to present the Lithuanian government with an ultimatum, which was supposed to make way for aggression. On a late evening of 14 June 1940, when the eyes of the world were focused on France (the Germans occupied Paris on the morning of the same day), Vyacheslav Molotov delivered an ultimatum of the USSR government to Juozas Urbšys [Lithuanian Foreign Minister], who was in Moscow at the time. The Lithuanian administration, which had been accused of breaching the

16

Užrašas

Kaunas

Didesimt ketvirtą valandą Molotov
 įteikė ultimatumą. Dvidešim pramo Skučas
 ir Povilaitis atiduos teisman secundo tuo-
 jaus suformuoti. Lietuvoje sovietams
 priimtas vyriausybę tertio tuojaus sileisti.
 Lietuvoje naujas karinės dalys kurios
 bus sutalpinamos svarbiausiose punktuose
 stop atsakyms laukia ligi šio ryto
 desimtos valandos. Maršas laiku stop
 atsakymu nedavimas skaitomas negia-
 nu atsakymu stop. Ligi desimtos valan-

The telegram by Juozas Urbšys, Lithuanian Foreign Minister, sent to the government on 15 June 1940.

“At midnight, Vyacheslav Molotov handed an ultimatum... take Skučas and Povilaitis to court... Form the government in Lithuania acceptable to the Soviets... Immediately let new military units into Lithuania, to be deployed in the key points... Waiting for reply by 10:00 a.m. at Moscow time the following morning... Failure to reply shall be considered to be a negative reply...”

Treaty on Mutual Assistance, was required to form a new government that would be acceptable to Moscow and to allow free entrance of an unlimited contingent of Red Army troops into the Lithuanian territory. With this ultimatum, the USSR grossly violated all peace and non-aggression treaties that had been signed with Lithuania by then. Molotov insisted that the Lithuanian government replied to the ultimatum by 10 a.m. (9 a.m. local time) the next day. Molotov stated to the Lithuanian diplomats, "Whatever your answer, the troops will enter Lithuania tomorrow anyway."



Red Army troops crossing Lithuania-USSR border. 15 June 1940

The Kremlin's expansionist policy guidelines of the time were clearly revealed in Order No 5258ss by the Political Department of the Red Army, which stipulated the following, "Our mission is clear. We want to ensure security of the USSR and securely lock every sea access to Leningrad and our North-East borders. We will achieve our historical goals by going over the heads of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian anti-popular cliques, and at the same time we will help the working class of these countries to break free. [...] Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia will become Soviet outposts on our sea and land borders. Readiness to attack must be kept in complete secrecy. [...] We will have to quickly disband the army of the enemy, demoralise its rear forces and this way help the leadership of the Red Army to secure complete victory within

the shortest period of time possible and with minimum casualties.”

Groups of NKVD saboteur frontier troops appeared in the Lithuanian border areas. They were supposed to disarm unexpectedly their enemy's border patrols and cut off communications. The invaders were the first to open fire on the headquarters of the Lithuanian border guard service in Ūta (Alytus District) at 3.30 p.m. on 15 June 1940. Six soldiers stormed the border checkpoint and killed Aleksas Barauskas, Chief of Staff and Senior Border Guard Officer. He was the first Lithuanian citizen who was killed by the NKVD. By “operating quietly and using bayonets” while crossing the border, the Red Army units that were mobilised in the Lithuanian border areas, with only an hour left till the invasion, received an order to postpone it for several hours. At its sitting, at 7 a.m. on 15 June



Aleksas Barauskas, a Lithuanian border guard



Aleksas Barauskas, the border guard, who was killed on 15 June 1940

1940, the Lithuanian government decided to satisfy all the Soviet requirements. The government agreed to comply with the ultimatum, which the Soviet Union expected to be put into effect "immediately and unconditionally". The government stated that it would "meet the conditions although they were in contradiction with the Treaty on Mutual Assistance of 10 October 1939". This way the government hoped to preserve Lithuania's independence. But this hope was doomed. The troops of the Soviet Union crossed the border of Lithuania at 3 p.m. on 15 June 1940. At around 7 p.m., Red Army tanks had already reached Kaunas and surrounded the Office of the President, the Government, the Bank of Lithuania and other governmental institutions. In the

Liešuvos tye om kase
 prion h. ter. tye kei sa-
 lavimms, nos je pavika
 ranga so spaly satarilas
 li mtoris na prionms, so her-
 kro tye. akas talytims. Nanjon
 tye pavika sudaryti gen
 Rastimms. Gen Rast nori
 ty mnyk h. h mas kog
 aploki tye cetojo pun kto
 tye kalyng

1940-06-15 6¹⁵ oals

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 STUDY CENTER
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 BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720-1580
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 FAX: (415) 841-2001
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The reply to the ultimatum sent to Moscow; found in the Hoover Institution Archives (US) in 2008

course of the occupation of the Baltic States, the Soviet army lost 58 troops (15 of them committed suicides, 15 – drowned and 28 – died) while 158 injured troops completed the invasion.



Red Army troops crossing Lithuania-USSR border. 15 June 1940



Red Army units marching in the town of Eišiškės on 15 June 1940

Давайте приказ. Принимает майор Румынский.

3-й армии, мотомех[анизированным] (МСД) и танковым частям занять Шавли к 12 часам 16.6.40 года, 23 СД остается на месте, одним полком дивизии занять Ново-Александровск. ^{б)4)б) а)11-я армия^{а)}}, 185 СД выводить в район Поневеж, 123 СД район Укмерге, 84 СД выйти [в] Вильно и стать гарнизоном, заняв все выгодные пункты вокруг города. 21-й танковой бригаде к утру 16.6 – 40 года выйти [в] район Янов, занять. ^{а)11 СК^{а)}}, танковыми бригадами и конницей к утру 16.6 занять район Кайданы, Янов исключительно станция Жеймы, Ковно, ^{б)заяв} занять вокруг Ковно все выгодные пункты^{б)}. КК вести по восточному берегу р. Неман с задачей [к] исходу 18.6. сосредоточить одной дивизией Россены и одной дивизией Тельши. ^{б)5)б) а)16 СК}, оставив незначительные гарнизоны в Алите, Прены, занять гарнизоном Ковно. Частям 2-й танковой бригады занять мосты у Ковно. До подхода 21-й танковой бригады мосты у Янов к утру 16.6 перейти и стать гарнизоном Шавли, обеспечив посадку нашей авиации на аэродромах у Шавли^{а)}. б) Всем мотомех[анизированным] и танковым частям и соединениям иметь с собой один боекомплект и взять максимально возможное количество горючего. 7) Войска армии вести стройным походным порядком с мерами непосредственного охранения. Впереди каждой колонны выделить броневой отряд во главе с расторопным ответственным командиром, который обязан предупреждать литовские власти о немедленном пропуске наших войск. Во избежание нежелательных недоразумений и конфликтов, литовские власти немедленно дают приказ своим войскам и населению о пропуске наших войск.

Командующий войсками БОВО
генерал-полковник танковых войск
Павлов

Член Военного совета
дивизионный комиссар Смокачев

Начальник штаба БОВО
генерал-лейтенант Пуркаев

Order by Col. Gen. Pavlov to occupy the territory of Lithuania

At the 60th birthday anniversary of Kliment Voroshilov on 4 February 1941, after the Baltic States had been occupied, Stalin declared the following, "There are two ways to carry out foreign policy, i.e. either through diplomacy or through armed forces. Our diplomacy functions well. But it would be useless if we did not have a huge and fully modern army." The annexation of the Baltic States by the USSR in 1940 was not grounded in international law and thus the majority of the international community refused to officially accept the occupation. The occupation regime per se had not been disrupted until the restoration of independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1990–1991.

The experience of the Baltic States in 1940 serves as a good lesson. Taking it into account, Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 prove to be a serious and dangerous violation of international law. By annexing Crimea and building up its army by the Ukrainian borders, Russia has not only done harm to Ukraine but has also damaged the system of international agreements. The European Parliament has noted that "Russia's assertion of the right to use all means to protect Russian minorities in third countries [...] is not supported by international law and contravenes fundamental principles of international conduct in the 21st century, while also threatening to undermine the post-war European order." According to Jeffrey D. Sachs, Professor of Economics at Columbia University, if Russia fails to change the course of its policy, we may well have to face global consequences, and international relations will become more tense and full of nationalism. A mistake on any side may lead to a tragic war. If we take a look at the events of the last century leading up to the beginning of World War I, we will always be able to find evidence proving that the only way to ensure security in the world is international law, which is supported by the United Nations and respected by all countries.



The invading army enters Kaunas on 15 June 1940

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Arvydas Anušauskas (born in Vilnius on 29 September 1963) is a historian, a politician, a scriptwriter and a journalist. His research is focused on the history of Lithuania in the 20th century, the history of terror and secret services. He has served as Member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania since 2008; in 2008–2012 he was Chair of the National Security and Defence Committee. Mr Anušauskas is Chair of the Parliamentary Group *For Historical Memory and Justice* and co-founder of the Association of Research into the Soviet Occupation.

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Išleido Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo kanceliarija
Gedimino pr. 53, LT-01109 Vilnius

Spausdino UAB „Petro Ofsetas“
Savanorių pr. 174D, LT-03153 Vilnius