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Seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of the Second World War

## **Letter dated 24 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to transmit herewith an article by the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. V. V. Putin, entitled “Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Great Victory: A Shared Responsibility to History and to the Future” (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 131, and of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* V. Nebenzia



**Annex to the letter dated 24 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council**

**SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT VICTORY:  
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TO HISTORY AND TO  
THE FUTURE**

19 June 2020

Seventy-five years have passed since the end of the Great Patriotic War. Several generations have come of age during that time. The political map of the planet has changed. The Soviet Union that claimed an epic, crushing victory over Nazism and saved the entire world is gone. Even for those who took part in the war, it has become a distant memory. So why is 9 May such a major holiday in Russia, and why does 22 June bring life to a halt and a lump to people's throats?

The usual answer is that the war has left a deep imprint on every family's history. Behind these words, there are fates of millions of people, their suffering and the pain of loss. Behind these words, there is also pride, truth and memory.

For my parents, the war brought the terrible ordeals of the Siege of Leningrad, during which my two-year-old brother Vitya died and my mother miraculously survived. My father, despite being exempt from active duty, volunteered to defend his hometown. He made the same decision as millions of Soviet citizens. He fought at the Nevsky Pyatachok bridgehead and was badly wounded. And the more years pass, the more I feel the need to talk to my parents and learn more details of their lives during the war. Because the opportunity to do that is now gone, I treasure in my heart the conversations I had with my father and mother on this subject, and what little emotion they showed.

I and people of my age believe it is important that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren understand the torment and hardships their forebears had to endure. How and why did they manage to hold out and win? Where did the sheer, unbending willpower that amazed and captivated the whole world come from? Of course, they were defending their homes, children, loved ones and families. But they were all united by a love for their homeland, their motherland. That deep-rooted, deeply personal, feeling is fully reflected in the essence of our people and lies at the core of its heroic, sacrificial fight against the Nazis.

People often wonder: What would today's generation do? How would it act in the face of a crisis? I have seen with my own eyes young doctors and nurses, sometimes fresh graduates, go onto the front lines to save lives. I see our servicemen fighting international terrorism in the North Caucasus, fighting to the bitter end in Syria. They are so young. Many servicemen who were part of the legendary, immortal Sixth Paratroop Company were 19 or 20 years old. But all of them proved that they deserved to inherit the feat of the warriors who defended our motherland during the Great Patriotic War.

This is why I am confident that one of the characteristics of the peoples of Russia is to fulfil their duty without feeling sorry for themselves when the circumstances so demand. Such values as selflessness, patriotism, love for one's home, family and homeland remain fundamental and integral to Russian society to this day. These values are, to a large extent, the backbone of our country's sovereignty.

Nowadays, we have new traditions created by the people, such as the Immortal Regiment. This is the memorial march that symbolises our gratitude, as well as the living connection and the blood ties between generations. Millions of people come out onto the streets carrying the photographs of their relatives who defended their fatherland and defeated the Nazis. This means that their lives, the ordeals and sacrifices they endured, as well as the victory that they passed on to us will never be forgotten.

We have a responsibility to our past and our future to do everything we can to prevent such awful tragedies from happening ever again. That is why I felt that it was my duty to write an article on the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. I discussed this idea on several occasions with world leaders, and they understood. At the summit of Commonwealth of Independent States leaders held at the end of last year, we all agreed on one thing: it is essential to pass on to future generations the memory of the fact that the victory over Nazism was chiefly the work of the entire Soviet people, and that representatives of all republics of the Soviet Union fought side by side together in that heroic battle, both on the frontlines and behind the lines. During that summit, I also talked with my counterparts about the challenging pre-war period.

That conversation caused a stir in Europe and the wider world, proving that revisiting the lessons of the past is necessary and timely. There were also emotional outbursts, poorly disguised insecurities and loud accusations. Acting out of habit, certain politicians rushed to claim that Russia was trying to rewrite history. However, they failed to rebut a single fact or refute a single argument. It is difficult, if not impossible, to argue with the original documents that, incidentally, are to be found in archives not only in Russia, but also abroad.

We therefore need to further examine the reasons behind the world war and reflect on its complicated events, tragedies and victories, as well as its lessons, both for our country and for the entire world. And I would say once again that we must look exclusively to archive material and evidence from people who were there, and that we must reject any ideological or politicized speculation.

I would like to once again recall an obvious fact. The root causes of the Second World War lie mainly in the decisions made after the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles became a symbol of grave injustice for Germany. In concrete terms, the country was to be robbed, being forced to pay the Western allies enormous reparations that drained its economy. French Marshal Ferdinand Foch who served as the Supreme Allied Commander gave a prophetic description of that Treaty: "This is not peace. It is a twenty-year armistice."

It was the national humiliation that provided fertile ground for radical and revenge-seeking feelings in Germany. The Nazis skilfully played on these feelings and built their propaganda, promising to deliver Germany from the "legacy of Versailles" and restore its former power, while all the while pushing the German people into renewed war. Paradoxically, the Western states, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, directly or indirectly contributed to this. Their financial and industrial circles actively invested in German factories and plants manufacturing military goods. In addition, a number of members of the aristocracy and political establishment supported radical, far-right and nationalist movements that were on the rise both in Germany and in Europe.

The "Versailles world order" gave rise to numerous hidden problems and open conflicts whose roots lay in the arbitrary determination of the borders of the new European states by the victors of the First World War. No sooner had those borders been added to the map than territorial disputes and competing claims arose. They became time bombs.

One of the major outcomes of the First World War was the establishment of the League of Nations. There were high expectations for that international organization in terms of ensuring lasting peace and collective security. That progressive idea, had it been followed through consistently, could without exaggeration have prevented the horrors of a global war from happening again.

However, the League of Nations, dominated by France and the United Kingdom, the victorious powers, proved ineffective, and dissolved into empty words. The League of Nations and the European continent in general turned a deaf ear to the repeated calls of the Soviet Union to establish an equitable collective security system, and sign an Eastern European and Pacific pacts capable of halting aggression. These proposals were disregarded.

Moreover, the League of Nations failed to prevent conflicts in various parts of the world. These included the Italian attack on Ethiopia, the Spanish civil war, the Japanese aggression against China and the Austrian Anschluss. Furthermore, in case of the Munich Betrayal involving not just Hitler and Mussolini but also the leaders of Britain and France, Czechoslovakia was taken apart with the full approval of the Council of the League of Nations. I would like to point out in this regard that Stalin, unlike many other contemporary European leaders, did not tarnish himself by meeting personally with Hitler, who at the time in Western circles was considered an entirely respectable politician, and was a welcome guest in European capitals.

In the partition of Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland acted in consort, having decided together in advance who would get what Czechoslovak territories. On 20 September 1938, Polish Ambassador to Germany Józef Lipski informed Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck of the following assurances made by Hitler: "...if a situation of conflict is reached between Poland and Czechoslovakia over our interests in Teschen, the Reich will stand on our [the Polish] side." The Nazi leader even hinted and advised that Poland should take action "only after the Germans occupy the Sudetes."

Poland realized that without Hitler's support its annexationist plans were doomed to fail. I would like to quote in this regard a record of the conversation between German Ambassador to Warsaw Hans-Adolf von Moltke and Józef Beck that took place on 1 October 1938 on the subject of Polish-Czech relations and the position of the Soviet Union in that matter. It says: "Mr Beck expressed real gratitude for the loyal treatment accorded to Polish interests at the Munich Conference, as well as the sincerity of relations during the period of the Czech conflict. The Government and the public [of Poland] fully appreciated the position of the Fuehrer and Reichskanzler."

The partition of Czechoslovakia was brutal and cynical. Munich destroyed even the fragile, formal guarantees that remained on the continent, showing that mutual agreements were worthless. It was the Munich Betrayal that served as the trigger that made major war in Europe inevitable.

Now European politicians, and Polish leaders in particular, would like to keep the Munich Betrayal quiet. Why? Not just because their countries betrayed their commitments and supported the Munich Betrayal, with some even participating in dividing the spoils, but also because it was somewhat embarrassing to recall that, during those dramatic days of 1938, the Soviet Union was alone in standing up for Czechoslovakia.

The Soviet Union, in line with its international obligations, including agreements with France and Czechoslovakia, tried to avert tragedy. Meanwhile, Poland, in pursuit of its interests, was doing its utmost to hamper the establishment of a collective security system in Europe. Writing to the aforementioned Ambassador

Józef Lipski on 19 September 1938, before his meeting with Hitler, Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck said directly "...in the past year, the Polish government has on four occasions rejected the proposal to join the international intervention in defence of Czechoslovakia."

Britain and France – which was at the time the main ally of the Czechs and Slovaks – chose to renege on their guarantees and abandon this Eastern European country to its fate. They went even further by seeking to direct the attention of the Nazis eastward so that Germany and the Soviet Union would inevitably clash and bleed each other dry.

That was the essence of the western policy of "appeasement", which was pursued not only towards the Third Reich but also towards other participants in the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact – fascist Italy and militarist Japan. In the Far East, this policy culminated in the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese agreement of summer 1939, which gave Tokyo a free hand in China. The leading European powers were unwilling to recognise the mortal danger posed to the whole world by Germany and its allies. They were hoping that they themselves would be left untouched by the war.

The Munich Betrayal showed the Soviet Union that Western countries would deal with security issues without taking its interests into account, and might if the opportunity arose create an anti-Soviet front.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union pursued every avenue to create an Anti-Hitler coalition, in spite – I will say it again – of the double-dealing on the part of the Western countries. So it was that the Soviet leadership received detailed information via the intelligence services of behind-the-scenes contacts between Britain and Germany in the summer of 1939. It is worth noting that those contacts were intensive and virtually coincided with the tripartite negotiations among representatives of France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, negotiations which, in contrast, were being deliberately protracted by the Western partners. In this connection, I will cite a document from the British archives. It contains instructions to the British military mission that came to Moscow in August 1939. It directly states that the delegation was to "proceed with negotiations very slowly", and that "the Government of the United Kingdom is not ready to assume any obligations spelled out in detail that might limit our freedom of action under any particular circumstances". I will also note that, unlike the British and French delegations, the Soviet delegation was headed by top commanders of the Red Army, who had the necessary authority to "sign a military convention on the organization of military defence of England, France and the Soviet Union against aggression in Europe."

Poland played its role in the failure of those negotiations, as it did not want to have any obligations to the Soviet side. Under pressure from its Western allies, the Polish leadership even rejected the idea of joint action with the Red Army to fight against the Wehrmacht. Only after learning that Ribbentrop had flown into Moscow did Józef Beck, reluctantly and not directly, but through French diplomats, announce to the Soviet authorities: "... in the event of joint action against the German aggression, cooperation between Poland and the Soviet Union, subject to technical conditions to be agreed, is not out of the question". At the same time, he explained to his colleagues: "... I agreed to this wording only for the sake of easier tactics, and our core position in relation to the Soviet Union is final and remains unchanged."

In these circumstances, the Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany. It was practically the last among the European countries to do so, and was also facing a real threat of war on two fronts – with Germany in the west and with Japan in the east, where intense fighting on the Khalkhin Gol river was already underway.

Many accusations have justifiably been levelled at Stalin and his entourage. We remember the crimes committed by the regime against its own people and the horror of the acts of mass repression. As I have said before, there are many things the Soviet leaders can be reproached for, but poor understanding of the nature of external threats is not one of them. They saw how attempts were made to leave the Soviet Union alone to deal with Germany and its allies. Bearing in mind this real threat, they sought to buy the precious time needed to strengthen the country's defences.

The Non-Aggression Pact signed at that time has given rise to substantial comment and accusations against modern Russia in connection with that period. It is true that Russia is the successor State to the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet period – with all its triumphs and tragedies – is an inalienable part of our thousand-year-long history. However, let me also remind you that the Soviet Union made a legal and moral assessment of the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Supreme Soviet in its resolution of 24 December 1989 officially denounced the secret protocols as “an act of personal power” which in no way reflected “the will of the Soviet people, who bear no responsibility for this collusion.”

Yet other States prefer to forget the agreements carrying the signatures of Nazis and Western politicians. Nor is there any sign of making a legal or political assessment of such cooperation, including some European politicians' silent acquiescence to, and even direct encouragement of, the barbarous plans of the Nazis. It will suffice to remember the cynical words of Polish Ambassador to Germany Józef Lipski during his conversation with Hitler on 20 September 1938: “...for solving the Jewish problem, we [the Poles] will build in his honour ... a splendid monument in Warsaw.”

Furthermore, we do not know if there were any “secret protocols” or annexes to the agreements between a number of countries and the Nazis. We can only take their word for it. In particular, materials pertaining to the secret Anglo-German talks have still not been declassified. As a result, we are urging all States to step up the process of making their archives public and publishing previously unknown documents about the war and pre-war periods, as Russia has been doing it in recent years. In this connection, we are open to broad cooperation and joint research projects with researchers of history.

But let us go back to the events immediately preceding the Second World War. It was naïve to believe that Hitler, once done with Czechoslovakia, would not make new territorial claims. This time the claims involved his recent accomplice in the partition of Czechoslovakia – Poland. Another legacy of Versailles, particularly the fate of the so-called Danzig Corridor, was used as the pretext. The blame for the tragedy that Poland then suffered lies entirely with the Polish leadership of the time, as it had impeded the formation of a military alliance between Britain, France and the Soviet Union and placed its hope in help from its Western partners, throwing its own people under the steamroller of Hitler's machine of destruction.

The German offensive fully adhered to the doctrine of blitzkrieg. Despite the fierce, heroic resistance of the Polish army, on 8 September 1939 – only a week after the war broke out – German troops were on the approaches to Warsaw. By 17 September, Poland's military and political elite had fled to Romania, betraying its people, who continued to fight against the invaders.

Poland's Western allies left its hopes dashed. After war against Germany was declared, French troops advanced only a few tens of kilometres into German territory in what looked like nothing more than a show of action. Moreover, the Anglo-French Supreme War Council, holding its first meeting on 12 September 1939 in the French city of Abbeville, decided to call off the offensive altogether in view of the rapid developments in Poland. That marked the beginning of the infamous Phony War. What Britain and France did was a blatant betrayal of their obligations to Poland.

Later, during the Nuremberg Trials, German generals explained their quick success in the East. Former Chief of the Operations Staff of the German Armed Forces High Command General Alfred Jodl admitted: "... we did not suffer defeat as early as 1939 only because about 110 French and British divisions stationed in the west against 23 German divisions during our war with Poland remained absolutely idle."

I asked for retrieval from the archives of the whole body of materials pertaining to the contacts between the Soviet Union and Germany in the dramatic days of August and September 1939. According to the documents, paragraph 2 of the secret protocol to the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939 stated that, in the event of territorial-political reorganisation of the provinces making up the Polish state, the border between the spheres of interest of the two countries would run "approximately along the Narew, Vistula and San rivers." In other words, the Soviet sphere of influence included not only the territories that were mostly home to Ukrainians and Belorussians, but also the historically Polish lands between the Vistula and Bug. Very few people now know this.

Similarly, very few know that, immediately after the attack on Poland, in the early days of September 1939, Berlin strongly and repeatedly called on Moscow to join the military action. However, the Soviet leadership ignored those calls and planned to avoid involvement in the dramatic developments for as long as possible.

It was only when it became absolutely clear that Great Britain and France would not try to help their ally, and that the Wehrmacht could swiftly occupy all of Poland and proceed to the outskirts of Minsk, that the Soviet Union decided to dispatch Red Army units on the morning of 17 September to what were known as the Eastern Borderlands (Kresy), which nowadays form part of the territories of Belorussia, Ukraine and Lithuania.

Obviously, there were no alternatives left. Otherwise, the Soviet Union would have faced seriously increased risk because – I will say this again – the old Soviet-Polish border ran within only a few tens of kilometres of Minsk, and the country would have entered the unavoidable war with the Nazis from a very disadvantageous strategic position. Millions of people of different origins, including the Jews living near Brest and Grodno, Przemyśl, Lvov and Wilno, would have been left to die at the hands of the Nazis and their local accomplices – anti-Semites and radical nationalists.

The fact that the Soviet Union sought to avoid engaging in the growing conflict for as long as possible and was unwilling to side with Germany explains why the genuine confrontation between Soviet and German troops occurred much farther east than the borders agreed in the secret protocol. It was not on the Vistula river but closer to the Curzon Line, which as far back as 1919 had been recommended by the Triple Entente as the eastern border of Poland.

It is hard to say "it could have been otherwise" of past events. I will only say that, in September 1939, the Soviet leadership had an opportunity to move the western borders of the Soviet Union even further west, all the way to Warsaw, but decided against it.

The Germans suggested formalising the new status quo. On 28 September 1939, in Moscow, Ribbentrop and Molotov signed the Boundary and Friendship Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as the secret protocol on changing the State border, recognized as the de-facto demarcation line where the two armies stood.

In autumn 1939, the Soviet Union, pursuing its strategic military and defensive goals, started the process of incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Their accession to the Soviet Union took place by agreement, with the consent of the elected authorities. This was in line with the international and national law of that time. In

addition, in October 1939, the city of Wilno and the surrounding area, which had previously been part of Poland, were returned to Lithuania. The Baltic republics within the Soviet Union preserved their government bodies and language, and had representation in the higher Soviet government structures.

During all these months, an uninterrupted invisible diplomatic and politico-military struggle and intelligence-gathering process was going on. The authorities in Moscow understood that they were facing a fierce and cruel enemy, and that a covert war against Nazism was already in progress. And there is absolutely no basis for interpreting official statements and formal protocol notes of that time as proof of “friendship” between the Soviet Union and Germany. The Soviet Union had active trade and technical contacts not only with Germany, but with other countries as well. Hitler tried again and again to draw the Soviet Union into Germany’s confrontation with the UK. But the Soviet government stood firm.

The last attempt to persuade the Soviet Union into joint action was made by Hitler during Molotov’s visit to Berlin in November 1940. But Molotov scrupulously followed Stalin’s instructions and limited himself to a general discussion of the German idea of the Soviet Union joining the Tripartite Pact signed by Germany, Italy and Japan in September 1940 and directed against Great Britain and the United States. It was no surprise that as early as 17 November Molotov gave the following instructions to Ivan Maisky, the Soviet plenipotentiary representative in London: “For your information...No agreement was signed or was intended to be signed in Berlin. We just exchanged views in Berlin...and that was all...Apparently, the Germans and the Japanese seem anxious to push us towards the Persian Gulf and India. We declined the discussion of this matter as we consider such advice on the part of Germany to be inappropriate.” And on 25 November, the Soviet leadership put an end to everything by officially proposing to Berlin conditions that were unacceptable to the Nazis, including the withdrawal of German troops from Finland and a mutual assistance agreement between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. Thus it deliberately excluded any possibility of joining the Pact. That position set in stone the Fuehrer’s intention to unleash war against the Soviet Union. By December, putting aside his strategists’ warnings of the catastrophic danger of waging a two-front war, Hitler approved Operation Barbarossa. He did this with the knowledge that the Soviet Union was the major force that opposed him in Europe and that the upcoming battle in the East would decide the outcome of the world war. And he remained convinced that the march on Moscow would be speedy and successful.

And I would like to emphasize that Western countries at the time actually agreed with the Soviet course of action and recognised the Soviet Union’s efforts to ensure its security. As far back as 1 October 1939, Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, said in a radio address that “Russia has pursued a cold policy of self-interest... But that the Russian Armies should stand on this line [meaning the new Western border] was clearly necessary for the safety of Russia against the Nazi menace.” On 4 October 1939, speaking in the House of Lords, Britain’s Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax said, “...it should be recalled that the Soviet government’s actions were to move the border essentially to the line recommended at the Versailles Conference by Lord Curzon... I only cite historical facts and believe they are indisputable.” Prominent British politician and statesman David Lloyd George emphasised, “The Russian Armies occupied the territories that are not Polish and that were forcibly seized by Poland after the First World War... It would be an act of criminal insanity to put the Russian advancement on a par with the German one”.

In informal communications with Soviet plenipotentiary representative Ivan Maisky, high-ranking British politicians and diplomats spoke even more openly. On 17 October 1939, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs R. A. Butler confided to him that British government circles believed there could be no question of returning



Western Ukraine and Belorussia to Poland. According to him, if it had been possible to create an ethnographic Poland of a modest size with a guarantee not only from the Soviet Union and Germany, but also from Britain and France, the British government would have considered itself quite satisfied. On 27 October 1939, Neville Chamberlain's senior adviser Horace Wilson said that "Poland must be restored as an independent state on its ethnographic basis, but without Western Ukraine and Belorussia".

It is worth noting that these conversations also served the purpose of testing the ground for improved British-Soviet relations. These contacts to a large extent laid the foundation for a future alliance and Anti-Hitler coalition. Winston Churchill stood out as a responsible and far-sighted politician and, despite his well-known dislike for the Soviet Union, had been in favour of cooperating with it even in the past. In May 1939, he had said in the House of Commons, "We shall be in mortal danger if we fail to create a Grand Alliance against aggression. The worst folly... would be to... drive away any natural cooperation with Soviet Russia...". And after the start of hostilities in Europe, at his meeting with Ivan Maisky on 6 October 1939, he confided "there are no serious problems between Britain and the Soviet Union and, therefore, no reason for strained or unsatisfactory relations. The British government... is eager to develop... trade relations and is willing to discuss any other measures that might improve the relationship".

The Second World War did not happen overnight, unexpectedly or suddenly. And German aggression against Poland did not come out of nowhere. The war was the result of many trends and factors in the world politics of that time. All of the pre-war events fell into place to form one fatal chain. But the main factors that predetermined the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind were undoubtedly State egoism, cowardice, appeasement of an aggressor that was gaining strength, and the unwillingness of political elites to search for compromise.

It is therefore unfair to claim that the two-day visit to Moscow of Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was the main cause of the Second World War. All the leading countries are to a certain extent responsible for its outbreak. Each of them made fatal mistakes, arrogantly believing that they could outsmart others, secure unilateral advantages for themselves or stay away from the impending global catastrophe. And this short-sightedness, the refusal to create a collective security system, cost millions of lives and resulted in tremendous losses.

In writing this, I by no means intend to take on the role of judge, to accuse or acquit anyone, let alone initiate a new round of international information confrontation about the course of history that could set countries and peoples at loggerheads. I believe that the pursuit of a balanced assessment of the past should be carried out through research by a wide range of respected scholars from a variety of countries. We all need truth and objectivity. I myself always encourage, and always have encouraged, my colleagues to build a calm, open and trust-based dialogue, to look at the common past in a self-critical and unbiased manner. Such an approach will help to avoid the mistakes of the past and to ensure peaceful and productive development for years to come.

However, many of our partners are not yet ready for collaborative effort. On the contrary, pursuing their goals, they are increasing the number and the scope of information attacks against our country, trying to make us justify ourselves, trying to induce guilt and making thoroughly hypocritical and politically motivated statements. Thus, for example, the resolution on the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe adopted by the European Parliament on 19 September 2019 directly accused the Soviet Union – along with the Nazi Germany – of unleashing the Second World War. Needless to say, there is no mention of Munich in it whatsoever.

I believe that such “papers” – for I cannot call this resolution a document – clearly intended to provoke scandal, represent a real danger. After all, the resolution was adopted by a highly respectable institution. And what did it show? Very sadly, it revealed a deliberate policy aimed at destroying the post-war world order. Yet the establishment of that order was a matter of honour and responsibility for a number of the countries whose representatives have now voted in favour of this deceitful resolution. Thus, they challenged the conclusions of the Nuremberg Tribunal and the efforts of the international community to create universal international institutions after the victory of 1945. Let me remind you in this regard that the very process of European integration that led to the establishment of relevant structures, including the European Parliament, was only possible thanks to the lessons learnt from the past and from a careful legal and political evaluation of that past. Anyone who knowingly calls this consensus into question is undermining the foundations of the post-war Europe as a whole.

Apart from posing a threat to the fundamental principles of the world order, this also raises moral and ethical issues. Desecrating and insulting the memory of the period is an act of depravity. Depravity can be deliberate, hypocritical and entirely intentional, as in the case of statements commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of the Second World War that mention all participants in the Anti-Hitler coalition except for the Soviet Union. It can be cowardly, as in the case of monuments erected in honour of those who fought against Nazism being demolished, and those shameful acts being justified by false rallying cries about erasing an unwelcome ideology and alleging occupation. It can also be bloody, as in the case of the killing and burning of the opponents of neo-Nazis and Bandera’s successors. The fact that this depraved behaviour takes different forms does not make it less repulsive.

Neglecting the lessons of history inevitably comes at a heavy cost. We will firmly uphold the truth based on documented historical facts. We will continue to be honest and impartial in talking about the events of the Second World War. This includes a large-scale project to establish in Russia an enormous collection of archival records, film and photographic materials regarding the history of the Second World War and the pre-war period.

This task has already begun. This article has itself drawn on many new, recently discovered or declassified materials. In this connection, I can state with all integrity that there are no archive documents that confirm the assumption that the Soviet Union intended to start a preventive war against Germany. It is accurate to say that the Soviet military leadership followed a doctrine according to which, in the event of aggression, the Red Army would promptly confront the enemy, go on the offensive and wage war on the enemy’s territory. However, such strategic plans did not imply any intention to attack Germany first.

Of course, historians now have available to them military planning documents and letters of instruction from Soviet and German headquarters. Finally, we know the true course of events. From the perspective of this knowledge, many are now arguing about the actions, mistakes and miscalculations of the country’s military and political leadership. In this regard, I will say one thing: along with a huge flow of misinformation of various kinds, Soviet leaders also received true information about acts of aggression being prepared by the Nazis. And in the pre-war months, they took steps to improve the combat readiness of the country, including the secret call-up of some of those liable for military service, and the redeployment of units and reserves from internal military districts to the western borders.

The war did not come as a surprise, people were expecting it, preparing for it. But the Nazi attack was truly unprecedented in terms of its destructive power. On 22 June 1941, the Soviet Union faced the strongest, most mobilised and skilled army

in the world, with the industrial, economic and military potential of almost all of Europe working for it. This deadly invasion involved not just the Wehrmacht, but also Germany's satellites, military contingents of many other States on the European continent.

The most serious military defeats in 1941 brought the country to the brink of catastrophe. Combat power and control had to be restored by extreme means, including nationwide mobilisation and intensification of all the efforts of the State and the people. In summer 1941, millions of citizens, hundreds of factories and industries began to be evacuated under enemy fire to the east of the country. The manufacture of weapons and munitions was launched behind the lines in the shortest possible time, and these supplies had begun to reach the front already in the first winter of the war. By 1943, the Soviet Union had exceeded the military output of Germany and its allies. In the space of eighteen months, the Soviet people had done something that seemed impossible, both on the front lines and behind them. It is still hard to realise, understand and imagine the incredible efforts, courage and dedication that these great achievements demanded.

The tremendous power of Soviet society rose up against the powerful, cold-blooded, Nazi invading machine, which was armed to the teeth. Soviet society stood up, united by the desire to protect its native land and take revenge on the enemy, which had broken and trampled its peaceful existence, plans and hopes.

Of course, during this terrible and bloody war some were overcome by fear, confusion and desperation. There was betrayal and desertion. The harsh splits caused by the revolution and the Civil War, the nihilism, mockery of national history, traditions and faith that the Bolsheviks had tried to impose, especially in the first years after coming to power – all of this had its impact. But the general attitude of Soviet citizens and our compatriots who found themselves abroad was different – to save and protect the motherland. It was a real and irrepressible impulse. People found support in true patriotic values.

The Nazi “strategists” were convinced that a huge multi-ethnic state could easily be brought to heel. They thought that the sudden outbreak of the war, its mercilessness and its unbearable hardships would inevitably disrupt inter-ethnic relations, and that the country could be split into pieces. Hitler clearly stated: “Our policy towards the peoples living in the vastness of Russia should be to promote any form of disagreement and split”.

But from the very earliest days, it was clear that the Nazi plan had failed. The Brest Fortress was protected to the last drop of blood by its defenders representing more than 30 ethnicities. Throughout the war – both in big decisive battles and in the protection of every base of operations, every metre of native land – we see examples of such unity.

The Volga region and the Urals, Siberia and the Far East, the republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia became home to millions of evacuees. Their residents shared everything they had and provided all the support they could. Friendship among peoples and mutual help became an impenetrable fortress for the enemy.

The Soviet Union and the Red Army, no matter what anyone is trying to prove today, made the main and crucial contribution to the defeat of Nazism. These were heroes who fought to the end surrounded by the enemy at Bialystok and Mogilev, Uman and Kiev, Vyazma and Kharkov. They launched attacks near Moscow and Stalingrad, Sevastopol and Odessa, Kursk and Smolensk. They liberated Warsaw, Belgrade, Vienna and Prague. They stormed Koenigsberg and Berlin.

We are standing up for the genuine, unadorned and unvarnished truth about the war. This national, human truth, which is hard, bitter and merciless, has been handed

down to us by writers and poets who walked through the fire and hell of the battlefield. For my generation, as well as for many others, their honest and profound accounts, novels, trenchant soldier's stories and poems have left their mark on our souls forever and have left a legacy – to honour veterans who did everything they could for the victory, and to remember those who died on the battlefield.

To this day, in their simplicity and greatness, the lines of Alexander Tvardovsky's poem "I was killed near Rzhev ...", dedicated to the participants in the bloody and brutal Great Patriotic War battle of the centre of the Soviet-German front line, remain awe-inspiring. Taken alone, the battles for Rzhev and the Rzhev Salient fought between October 1941 and March 1943 claimed 1,342,888 Red Army victims, including those wounded or missing in action. For the first time, I am calling out these terrible, tragic and incomplete figures collected from archive sources. I am doing so to honour the memory of the deeds of known and nameless heroes, who for various reasons were undeservingly and unfairly little-mentioned, or not mentioned at all, in the post-war years.

Let me cite another document. This is a report of February 1945 on reparations from Germany by the Allied Commission on Reparations headed by Ivan Maisky. The Commission's task was to define a formula according to which the defeated Germany would have to compensate the victor powers for the harm they had sustained. The Commission concluded that "the number of soldier-days spent by Germany on the Soviet front is at least 10 times higher than on all other allied fronts. The Soviet front also had to handle four-fifths of German tanks and about two-thirds of German aircraft." In all, the Soviet Union accounted for about 75 percent of all military efforts undertaken by the Anti-Hitler Coalition. During the war, the Red Army "ground up" 626 divisions of the Axis states, of which 508 were German.

On 28 April 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his address to the nation: "These Russian forces have destroyed and are destroying more armed power of our enemies – troops, planes, tanks, and guns – than all the other United Nations put together." Winston Churchill, in his message to Joseph Stalin of 27 September 1944, wrote that "it is the Russian army that tore the guts out of the German military machine...".

That account has resonated throughout the world. Because these words are the great truth, which no one doubted then. Almost 27 million Soviet citizens lost their lives on the fronts, in German prisons, through starvation and bombing, in ghettos and in the Nazi death camp furnaces. The Soviet Union lost one in seven of its citizens, Great Britain one in 127, and the United States one in 320. Unfortunately, this quantification of the Soviet Union's hardest and grievous losses is not exhaustive. We must continue the painstaking work of restoring the names and stories of all who have perished – Red Army soldiers, partisans, underground fighters, prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates, and civilians killed by death squads. It is our duty. And a special role will be played by members of the search movement, military patriotic and volunteer associations, and by projects like the "Pamyat Naroda" (Memory of the People) electronic database, which contains archival documents. And of course close international cooperation is needed for such a common humanitarian task.

The victory was the result of the efforts of all the countries and peoples who fought against a common enemy. The British army protected its homeland from invasion, and fought the Nazis and their satellites in the Mediterranean and North Africa. American and British troops liberated Italy and opened the Second Front. The United States dealt powerful and crushing strikes against the aggressor in the Pacific. We remember the tremendous sacrifices made by the Chinese people and their great

role in defeating Japanese militarists. Let us not forget the fighters of Fighting France, who ignored the shameful capitulation and continued to fight against the Nazis.

We will also always be grateful for the assistance rendered by the Allies in providing the Red Army with munitions, raw materials, food and equipment. And that help was significant – about 7 percent of the total military output of the Soviet Union.

The core of the Anti-Hitler Coalition began to take shape immediately after the attack on the Soviet Union, with unconditional support from the United States and Britain in the Soviet fight against Hitler's Germany. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill formed an alliance of great powers, and agreed to establish coalition diplomacy and a joint strategy in the fight against a common deadly threat. The leaders of the Big Three had a clear understanding that unifying the industrial, resource and military capabilities of the Soviet Union, the United States and the Great Britain would provide unchallenged supremacy over the enemy.

The Soviet Union entirely fulfilled its obligations to its allies and always offered a helping hand. Thus, the Red Army supported the Anglo-American Normandy landing by carrying out a large-scale offensive, Operation Bagration, in Belorussia. In January 1945, having broken through to the Oder, our soldiers put an end to the last powerful offensive of the Wehrmacht on the Western Front in the Ardennes. Three months after the victory over Germany, the Soviet Union, in full accordance with the Yalta agreements, declared war on Japan and defeated the million-strong Kwantung Army.

As early as July 1941, the Soviet leadership declared that “the purpose of the war against fascist oppressors is not only the elimination of the threat looming over our country, but also the provision of help for all the peoples of Europe suffering under the yoke of German fascism.” By mid-1944, the enemy had been expelled from virtually all of the territory of the Soviet Union. However, the enemy had to be finished off in its lair. And so the Red Army started its liberation mission in Europe. It saved entire nations from destruction and enslavement, and from the horror of the Holocaust. They were saved at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers' lives.

It is also important not to forget about the enormous material assistance that the Soviet Union gave the liberated countries, to eliminate the threat of hunger and rebuild their economies and infrastructure. That was being done at a time when thousands of miles of land, all the way from Brest to Moscow and the Volga, lay in ashes. For instance, in May 1945, the Austrian government asked the Soviet Union to provide assistance with food, as it “had no idea how to feed its population in the next seven weeks before the new harvest.” Karl Renner, the State Chancellor of the Provisional Government of the Austrian Republic, described the consent of the Soviet leadership to send food as an act of salvation that the Austrians would never forget.

The Allies jointly established the International Military Tribunal to punish Nazi political and war criminals. Its decisions contained a clear legal definition of crimes against humanity, including genocide, ethnic and religious cleansing, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Directly and unambiguously, the Nuremberg Tribunal also condemned the Nazis' accomplices, collaborators of various kinds.

This shameful phenomenon manifested itself in all European countries. Such figures as Pétain, Quisling, Vlasov, Bandera, their henchmen and followers – though they were disguised as fighters for national independence or freedom from communism – are traitors and butchers. In terms of inhumanity, they often exceeded their masters. In their desire to serve, as part of special punitive groups they willingly executed the most inhuman orders. They were responsible for such bloody events as

the shootings of Babi Yar, the Volhynia massacre, the burning of Khatyn, and acts of annihilation of Jews in Lithuania and Latvia.

Today still, our position remains unchanged – there can be no excuse for the criminal acts of Nazi collaborators, there is no statute of limitations for them. It is therefore bewildering that in certain countries those sullied by cooperation with the Nazis are suddenly being equated with Second World War veterans. I believe that it is unacceptable to equate liberators with occupiers. And I can only regard the glorification of Nazi collaborators as a betrayal of the memory of our fathers and grandfathers. A betrayal of the ideals that united peoples in the fight against Nazism.

At that time, the leaders of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain faced what is without exaggeration a historic task. Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill represented countries with different ideologies, State aspirations, interests and cultures, but they demonstrated great political will, rose above tensions and preferences and put the true interests of peace before everything else. As a result, they were able to come to an agreement and achieve a solution from which all of humanity has benefited.

The victor powers left us a system that has become the quintessence of the intellectual and political quest of several centuries. A series of conferences – Tehran, Yalta, San Francisco and Potsdam – laid the foundation of a world that for 75 years had no global war, despite the most serious of tensions.

Historical revisionism, the manifestations of which we now observe in the West, primarily with regard to the subject of the Second World War and its outcome, is dangerous because it grossly and cynically distorts the understanding of the principles of peaceful development laid down at the Yalta and San Francisco conferences in 1945. The major historic achievement of Yalta and other decisions of that time is the agreement to create a mechanism that would allow the leading powers to remain within the framework of diplomacy in resolving their differences.

The twentieth century brought large-scale and comprehensive global conflicts, and in 1945, nuclear weapons capable of physically destroying the Earth also entered the scene. In other words, the settlement of disputes by force has become prohibitively dangerous. And the victors in the Second World War understood that. They understood and were aware of their own responsibility towards humanity.

Lessons were learned in 1945 from the unfortunate experience of the League of Nations. The structure of the United Nations Security Council was developed in such a way as to make guarantees of peace as concrete and effective as possible. That is how the institution of the permanent members of the Security Council and the right of the veto as their privilege and responsibility came into being.

What is the power of veto in the United Nations Security Council? To put it bluntly, it is the only reasonable alternative to a direct confrontation between major countries. It is a statement by one of the five powers that a decision is unacceptable to it and is contrary to its interests and its view of the right approach. And other countries, even if they do not agree, take this position as a given, abandoning any attempts to translate their unilateral ambitions into action. It means that in one way or another it is necessary to seek compromise.

A new global confrontation, at times very fierce, started almost immediately after the end of the Second World War. The fact that the Cold War did not grow into the Third World War has become a clear testimony of the effectiveness of the agreements concluded by the Big Three. The rules of conduct agreed upon during the creation of the United Nations made it possible to further minimize risks and keep confrontation under control.

Of course, we can see that the United Nations system is currently under strain and is not as effective as it could be. But the United Nations still performs its primary function. The principles of the Security Council are a unique mechanism for preventing a major war or a global conflict.

The calls that have been made quite often in recent years to abolish the power of veto, and to deny special facilities to permanent members of the Security Council, are actually irresponsible. After all, if that happens, the United Nations would in essence become the League of Nations – a forum for empty talk without any leverage on the course of world events, with a well-known ending. That is why the victor powers approached the formation of the new world order with the utmost care, seeking to avoid a repetition of mistakes made by their predecessors.

The creation of the modern system of international relations is one of the major outcomes of the Second World War. Even the most insurmountable tensions – geopolitical, ideological or economic – do not prevent us from finding forms of peaceful coexistence and interaction, if there is the desire and will to do so. Today's world is experiencing a turbulent time. Everything is changing, from the global balance of power and influence to the social, economic and technological foundations of societies, nations and even continents. In the past, shifts of such magnitude have almost never happened without major military conflicts, or without a power struggle to build a new global hierarchy. The wisdom and farsightedness of the political figures of the Allied Powers gave rise to a system that has prevented extreme manifestations of the kind of objective competition that is historically inherent in the development of the world.

It is the duty of all those who carry political responsibility, and primarily representatives of the victor powers of the Second World War, to guarantee that this system is maintained and improved. Today, as in 1945, it is important to demonstrate political will and discuss the future together. Our colleagues – Mr Xi Jinping, Mr Macron, Mr Trump and Mr Johnson – supported the Russian initiative to hold a meeting of the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states that are permanent members of the Security Council. We thank them for this and hope that such a face-to-face meeting will be able to take place as soon as possible.

What is our vision of the agenda for the upcoming summit? First of all, in our opinion, it would be useful to discuss steps to develop collective principles in world affairs. To speak frankly about the issues of preserving peace, strengthening global and regional security, strategic arms control, about joint efforts in countering terrorism, extremism and other major challenges and threats.

A special item on the agenda of the meeting is the situation of the global economy. And above all, overcoming the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Our countries are taking unprecedented measures to protect the health and lives of people and to support citizens who have found themselves in difficult living situations. Our ability to work together and in concert, as real partners, will determine how severe the impact of the pandemic is, and how rapidly the global economy emerges from the recession. The economy must not be turned into an instrument of pressure and confrontation. The issues in demand for discussion include environmental protection and combating climate change, as well as ensuring the security of the global information space.

The agenda proposed by Russia for the upcoming summit of the Five is extremely important and relevant both for our countries and for the entire world. And we have specific ideas and initiatives on all the items.

There can be no doubt that the summit of Russia, China, France, the United States and the United Kingdom will play an important role in finding common

answers to the challenges and threats of our time, and will demonstrate a common commitment to the spirit of alliance, to those high humanist ideals and values for which our fathers and grandfathers fought shoulder to shoulder.

Drawing on a shared recall of history, we can and must trust each other. That will serve as a solid basis for successful negotiations and concerted action for the sake of enhancing the planet's stability and security, and for the sake of prosperity and well-being of all States. Without exaggeration, this constitutes our common duty and responsibility towards the entire world, and towards present and future generations.

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