

Version – 4 December 2007

<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/hlss/history/sovietdiplomats1920s.pdf>

Engaging the World: Soviet Diplomacy and Foreign Propaganda in the 1920s¹

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The 1920s was an era of change and compromise for Soviet diplomacy as the imperatives of Soviet foreign relations were realigned away from revolution towards the pursuit of stable diplomatic relations. Even so, while diplomats and the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (hereafter Narkomindel) took steps to secure formal relations with foreign powers, the Comintern (Third International) continued to engage in foreign propaganda – that is propaganda conducted in foreign states – in an effort to spread the worldwide revolution. These two strains of Soviet foreign affairs were at odds with one another, to the point of being mutually exclusive. This article will examine Soviet diplomacy as it evolved during the 1920s, as well as the problems posed for it by the Comintern. The development of Soviet diplomacy in the decade can be seen to have several distinct aspects: the establishment of trade relations leading to formal recognition, engagement in international conferences and conforming to the norms of diplomatic society, displacing rivals on the international stage, and the harm done to Soviet diplomacy by the Comintern.

Although some elements of the article have been discussed in earlier works, this article differs in a number of ways to previous scholarship on the topic. Accounts have acknowledged the two paths of Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s – both alone and together – and the Soviet drive for normalization in relations with other states. None have dealt satisfactorily with the behavioural aspect of integration, with the need to displace a rival Russian diplomatic body, or with the Narkomindel's powerlessness to change diplomacy or restrict propaganda activity conducted through and outside of diplomacy. Nor have other works addressed the

¹ I am grateful for the advice of Clayton Black, Anthony Heywood, Lars Lih, Glyn Stone, and Olga Velikanova in writing this article.

Soviet acceptance of the rules and norms of diplomatic society, and how Soviet diplomats came into line with them during the 1920s.²

The aims of Soviet diplomacy in the 1920s were to secure recognition from foreign powers, in order to emerge on the diplomatic scene as a fully accepted and functioning state equal to the world's great powers, and to allow the Soviet Union the opportunity to develop economically by opening and maintaining channels for international trade. The extent to which Soviet diplomacy had to change and compromise its revolutionary aspects is central to the realignment of Soviet diplomacy during the 1920s.

In the 1920s there was a change in the attitudes of both the regime and of individual diplomats. Following the civil war, there was a shift in Soviet diplomacy's aims – moving towards a policy designed to gain recognition, and away from the propaganda activities that Soviet diplomatic missions had engaged in immediately following the revolution.³ At the same time, it had become clear to foreign powers that the Soviet state was not going to collapse, as had been hoped, and that there was a very real need, at least on economic grounds, to engage with this new Russia.

The major diplomatic aim of the 1920s for the Soviets was to achieve *de jure* diplomatic recognition by foreign powers. A new respectability – such that the Soviets would be seen as acceptable diplomats, not revolutionaries – was necessary for this. Essential to this was a move away from illegal revolutionary activity, and sustained attempts to disassociate the Soviet state from the Comintern.⁴ The Soviet Union's diplomats were to prove that they could be dealt with, and that they should be considered equal to their foreign counterparts. Even when they flouted

² Other works that deal with Soviet foreign affairs in the period include Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York, 1968); Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World, 1917-1991* (London, 1998); Sergei Blinov, *Vneshniaia politika sovetskoi Rossii: pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury* (Moscow, 1973); Leonid Nezhinskii (ed.), *Sovetskaia vneshniaia politika, 1917-1945 gg: poiski novykh podkhodov* (Moscow, 1992); Alexander Chubar'ian (ed.), *Sovetskaia vneshniaia politika v retrospektive, 1917-1991* (Moscow, 1993).

³ Following the Russian Revolution, Soviet diplomacy had been concerned with the export of revolution. Alastair Kocho-Williams, 'The Culture of Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, Lamsdorf to Litvinov, 1900-1939,' PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2006; Kocho-Williams, *The Russian and Soviet Diplomatic Corps 1900-1939* (forthcoming Palgrave Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations, 2008).

⁴ British Foreign Office to Narkomindel, n.d. (1921 – response to Maxim Litvinov's letter to Foreign Office, 7 September 1921), AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, d. 278, p. 20, l. 23.

convention, they were at pains to deny and to limit the damage they had done.⁵ The 1920s saw the return of Russia as a major power to the European diplomatic arena, albeit a revolutionary one.

One of the first steps towards achieving diplomatic recognition and acceptance in the international community was the establishment of foreign trade. The Soviet state wanted to establish trade with other states for two reasons: Russia had a real need to expand its overseas trade as an economic necessity, and trade could be used as a prelude to formal diplomatic relations with a foreign power. Bolshevik policy rested on building the Soviet economy by catching up with, and eventually overtaking, the western industrial powers. Industry could only grow, however, if Russia was able to import materials needed for this expansion and export the goods produced. In conjunction with this, the desire to expand trade was encouraged by the New Economic Policy (NEP), which promoted the use of market mechanisms, albeit limited in crucial ways, and internal trade in order to modernize and industrialize Russia in the 1920s. This was a product of the realization that the hoped-for worldwide revolution was not going to happen; the Soviet state needed to work on building and strengthening itself, by at least temporarily, establishing a dialogue with foreign imperialist powers through a more traditional approach to diplomacy in order to provide the opportunity to do so. Because of the need for foreign trade, a revised diplomatic approach was required. Gone was the drive to instigate world revolution, which was replaced by a new possibility for peaceful coexistence and good relations with foreign powers, coupled with an expansion in trade. The Narkomindel found it necessary to establish trade relations and to convert its quasi-diplomatic institutions into diplomatic missions in foreign states.⁶

The move towards establishing trade relations as a prelude to more formal diplomatic relations with the capitalist powers was flagged up by the Soviets in 1920

⁵ Litvinov to Foreign Office, 7 September 1921, AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, d. 278. p. 20, l. 23; Edmund Ovey (Foreign Office) to Jan Berzin (Assistant Official Soviet Representative in London), 12 October 1923 (copy), AVP RF, f. 069, op. 7, p. 7, d. 14, l. 30; Sir Austen Chamberlain (British Foreign Secretary) to Arkadii Rozengolz (Deputy Ambassador to Britain), 23 February 1927, AVP RF, f. 04, p. 38, d. 538, l. 1; Politburo Protocol no. 24, 10 March 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162 d. 6 l. 78, reproduced in Grant Adibekov (ed.), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern*, (Moscow, 2003), p. 519.

⁶ Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. XLII, p. 22. Carole Fink, 'The NEP in Foreign Policy: The Genoa Conference and Rapallo,' in Gabriel Gorodetsky (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991: A Retrospective* (London, 1994), pp. 12-13; *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (hereafter *DVP SSSR*), Vol., p. 639; Evgenii Chossudovsky, *Chicherin and the Evolution of Soviet Foreign Policy*, (Geneva 1973) p. 19.

when Foreign Commissar Georgii Chicherin instructed Leonid Krasin to use trade as a means of leverage in negotiations with British Prime Minister, David Lloyd-George.⁷ The conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement in 1921 granted the Soviet state its first recognition by any foreign power, and established a framework for relations between the two states. While the Soviet state saw the trade agreement as being of a ‘temporary and insufficient character’ it nonetheless presented itself as an opportunity for the Soviets to develop diplomatic relations through the establishment of a dialogue with Britain, considered to be the leading capitalist power, based around trade and allowed for the establishment of a trade mission in Britain, with permission to use ciphers, have immunity, issue visas, and enjoy the rights afforded to official representatives of other governments.⁸ This agreement was expanded in 1924 into the Anglo-Soviet General Treaty and Commercial Agreement, granting the Soviet Union *de jure* recognition by Britain.⁹ That the British had decided to enter into formal relations with the Soviet Union provided a stamp of acceptance, meaning that other powers might then see the Soviets as fit to enter into negotiations.

This was a definite strategy and one which shows a change in the way Soviet diplomats were approaching foreign affairs. Krasin pursued Soviet trade and diplomatic interests and espoused the normalization of trade relations with Britain in the belief that the expansion of Russia’s trade with other countries depended on good relations with the leading European economic power.¹⁰ At the same time,

⁷ Georgii Chicherin to Leonid Krasin, 21 June 1920, AVPRF, f. 069, op. 4, p. 3, d. 1, l. 1; Chicherin to Berzin, 30 September 1920, AVPRF, f. 069, op. 4, p. 3, d. 1, l. 3.

⁸ *Trade Agreement between His Britannic Majesty’s Government and the Government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic*, 16 March 1921, Parliamentary Paper 1921, cmd. 1207, pp. 6-7; Litvinov to Johnson (British Official Agent in Moscow), 12 May 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 384, l. 19.

⁹ General Treaty between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 8 August 1924, Parliamentary Paper 1924, cmd. 2260; Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Union of Soviet Republics (RUSSIA Commerce and Navigation), 8 August 1924, Parliamentary Paper, cmd. 2261; Ramsay MacDonald (British Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister) to Chicherin, 1 February 1924, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 4, d. 329, l. 7; Arthur Ponsonby (Parliamentary Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs) to Khristian Rakovsky, 1 February 1924, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 4, d. 329, l. 12; Robert Hodgson (Head of British Trade Mission in Moscow) to Chicherin, 2 February 1924, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 4, d. 329, l. 16.

¹⁰ *DVP SSSR*, vol. 3, pp. 412-3; *The Twelfth Party Congress, April 1923* (Moscow, 1923), p. 113, as quoted in Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, p. 139; Chicherin to Rakovskii, 1 October, 1923, AVP RF f. 069, op. 7, p. 7, d. 14, l. 3; Alexandra Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskii dnevniki* (Moscow, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 58-62; Table compiled by US Diplomatic Service, report 701.6100/5 by Division of Eastern European Affairs, 13 March 1924, National Archives, Washington DC.

Alexandra Kollontai recalled a conversation with General Secretary Josef Stalin in 1922 in which he told her to pursue economic and trade relations with Norway in order that Britain might be brought to an agreement with the Soviet Union.¹¹ Thus, the strategy of pursuing trade as a precursor to further diplomatic recognition can be clearly seen, and achieving agreement with Britain was seen as highly significant in the search for recognition by foreign powers.

While this was a Soviet opinion, the same view – that trade relations would lead to more formal diplomatic agreements – was not necessarily held by the Soviet Union’s prospective suitors. From the British point of view, the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement was motivated by their desire to establish trade with the Soviet state, and did not necessarily pave the way for further recognition.¹² The French economist and politician Eduard Herriot’s visit to the Soviet Union in 1922, and his subsequent recommendation for the establishment of relations with the Soviets, was largely motivated by economic concerns.¹³ It is clear from this that foreign powers were keen to trade with the Soviet state, and not to be excluded from any trade agreements, lest they be left behind by other European powers, but did not see the link between trade and diplomacy in quite the same way as the Soviets.

Despite this discrepancy of opinion, economic factors were to prove useful in the Soviet drive for recognition. It is possible that the Soviets realized, in their Marxist reading of politics, that foreign states in the 1920s were extremely interested in economic power, and that playing on this interest might be a means to exploit the weaknesses of the capitalist imperial powers, not least the divisions between them.¹⁴ In this light it is necessary to examine the first conference of the 1920s that the Soviets attended, thereby embarking on their journey to full recognition.

The Genoa Conference of April 10–May 19, 1922 heralded the Soviet state’s indisputable arrival on the stage of international diplomacy, and revealed much as to how Soviet diplomats were beginning to come into line with the norms of

¹¹ Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskie dnevniki*, vol. 1, p. 415. Kollontai notes that she encouraged Norway to conclude an agreement before Britain did, such that they would have the prestige of concluding the first agreement with the Soviet state.

¹² *Trade Agreement between His Britannic Majesty’s Government and the Government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic*, Parliamentary Paper, 1921 cmd. 1207, p. 2; Arthur Marshall, *Memorandum on the Russian Situation* (London, 1927), p. 1.

¹³ Eduard Herriot, ‘Exportateur Français’ (n.d.), in *Soobshcheniye iz Frantsii*, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 42, p. 259, d. 53619, l. 57.

¹⁴ Richard Day, *The Crisis and the Crash: Soviet Studies of the West (1917-1939)* (London, 1981), p. 63.

diplomatic society, such that they would be accepted into it. The conference was convened to discuss Russia's debts, and potential Soviet repayment of them.¹⁵ From the Soviet point of view, the Genoa Conference presented an opportunity to work towards recognition by foreign powers and a chance to show the world that they had achieved the necessary level of respectability to move in conventional diplomatic circles.¹⁶ Tsarist diplomats, still representing a Russia that no longer existed, clearly felt that the Genoa Conference heralded Soviet recognition by foreign powers, at the expense of continued recognition of Tsarist Russia's remaining missions under the émigré Council of Ambassadors.¹⁷ What Konstantin Nabokov had seen as inevitable in 1919 – that the 'position of diplomats in Entente capitals would soon become untenable' – was now becoming a reality.¹⁸ Although the issue of debts was clearly important for the capitalist powers, in particular Britain and France, the matters discussed at the conference were less important than the fact that the conference included the Soviet Union, and not the Council of Ambassadors.

Initially, it seemed that Vladimir Lenin, the Soviet leader, would lead the delegation to Genoa himself, and his last minute decision not to go demonstrates that he felt little would be gained from the conference politically.¹⁹ Indeed, Chicherin questioned whether a Soviet delegation should be sent at all, given that directions from Lenin, regarding using the conference as an opportunity for propaganda, would

¹⁵ Carole Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921-1922* (London, 1984), p. 148; Fink, 'The NEP in Foreign Policy,' pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ Vladimir Potemkin (ed.), *Istoriia diplomatii*, (3 vols, Moscow 1945) vol.3, p. 161; Chossudovsky, 'Chicherin and the Evolution of Soviet Foreign Policy,' p.16.

¹⁷ Vasilii Maklakov to Boris Bakhmeteff, 24 May 1922, in Oleg Budnitskii (ed.), '*Sovershenno lichno i doveritel'no!*' (3 vols, Moscow 2001-3) vol. 2, pp. 313-20. The Council of Ambassadors, a body of former Tsarist and Provisional Government diplomats centred in Paris, had been established following the October Revolution to continue the representation of Russia, encourage foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War and block Soviet diplomatic recognition. For more see Kocho-Williams, 'Embassy Without Government: The Council of Ambassadors and the Persistence of Tsarist Diplomacy after the Russian Revolution,' *Slavonic and East European Review*, forthcoming 2008; Margarita Kononova, 'Deiatel'nost' diplomatov Tsarskogo i Vremennogo pravitel'stv v 1917-1938 godakh,' *Voprosy istorii* 3, 2002, pp. 105-18; Kononova, *Russkie Diplomaticheskie predstavitel'stva v emigratsii (1917-1925)*, (Moscow, 2004).

¹⁸ Konstantin Nabokov to Donald Nesbitt, 17 September 1919, in Konstantin Nabokoff, *Letters of a Russian Diplomat to an American Friend, 1906-1922* (New York, 1989), p. 371.

¹⁹ The composition of the delegation for the Genoa Conference was discussed by the Politburo on 27 January (Lenin), revisited on 20 February and then finally confirmed on 23 March 1922 (Chicherin and Litvinov); Politburo Protocol no. 92-a, 27-31 January 1922, reproduced in Adibekov *et al.* (eds), *Politburo TsK RKP(B)-BKP(B). Povestki dnya zasedanii. 1919-1952* (3 vols, Moscow 2000), vol. 1, pp. 150; Politburo Protocol no. 100, 20 February 1922, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 157; Politburo Protocol no. 116, 23 March 1922, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 169; Arthur Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff* (New York, 1943), p. 182.

merely serve to disrupt the conference.²⁰ In the end the delegation was led by Chicherin, accompanied by Maxim Litvinov, Adolf Ioffe, Leonid Krasin and Vatslav Vorovsky. Litvinov was personally briefed by Lenin to be cautious and to watch Chicherin, lest he broker a deal that was detrimental to the Soviet state for the sake of achieving further recognition.²¹ The delegation was warned not to be in hurry to conclude any agreements for the sake of re-entry into European diplomacy, although Lenin sanctioned the conclusion of a bona fide treaty with Weimar Germany, with whom preliminary moves had already been made.²² It appears that the Soviets' aim lay in making the Soviet Union's presence felt and demonstrating to the world that Soviet diplomats were equal to their foreign counterparts. Popular opinion, shown in the Soviet press, saw the invitation to Genoa as a 'major moral victory'.²³ By attending the conference, Soviet diplomats were making a statement that Russia had returned to the negotiating table.

The Soviet decision on who should attend the conference sheds light on how Soviet diplomacy was changing. Lenin's attendance, and the use of the conference to disseminate propaganda, were clearly not viable actions within diplomacy and Chicherin, and probably others, realized this. More significant as a sign of the prevailing Soviet diplomatic culture in this instance is that Soviet diplomats, in particular Chicherin, desired Soviet entry into official diplomacy, and Lenin clearly feared that this goal could in fact be harmful to the revolutionary aspirations of the Soviet Union, and be seen as a betrayal of its values and ideology. To be sure though, the very presence of a Soviet delegation at the Genoa Conference which showed itself ready and suitable to be involved in diplomacy with other powers was enough to demonstrate that the Soviet Union's diplomats had acquired an understanding of what was needed for Soviet acceptance into diplomatic society. Thus, it was important that the Soviet delegation sent out the right message to the diplomatic community regarding its intentions, not with respect to foreign policy,

²⁰ Chicherin to Lenin, 30 January 1922, RGASPI, f. 2, op. 2, d. 1106, l. 2-3, reproduced in Richard Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: from the Secret Archive* (London, 1996), p. 196.

²¹ Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff*, p. 182.

²² Lenin, Lev Kamenev, Stalin, Lev Trotsky, and Vyacheslav Molotov to Chicherin and the Soviet Delegation in Genoa, 25 April 1922, RGASPI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 23098, l. 3, reproduced in Pipes (ed.), *The Unknown Lenin*, p. 161; Recollections of Litvinov, in Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff*, pp. 182-3.

²³ Yuri Steklov, 'Editorial,' *Izvestiya*, 11 January 1922, as quoted in Stephen White, *The Origins of Detente: the Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western Relations, 1921-1922* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 109.

but that they were prepared to play by diplomacy's rules, share in its values, and join the international diplomatic community.

A large part of Soviet attendance at Genoa was about sending the diplomatic community the right message, and making a good impression, and as a result they needed to show that they could present themselves successfully to the diplomatic world. The other representatives viewed the Soviet delegation with curiosity. Their outward appearance did not seem to be 'different' – all appeared in conventional diplomatic garb.²⁴ Photographs of Soviet delegates to the Genoa conference show them conforming to the norms of diplomatic dress – top hats and frock coats (see photographs, figs. 1 and 2 below). The adherence to diplomatic dress codes is significant as it demonstrates that the Soviet delegation were making concessions in their dress in order to present themselves as suitable individuals to be involved in diplomacy. As Roland Barthes notes, outward signals such as dress or costume give an indication of what can be expected from an individual and his behaviour.²⁵ That the Soviet delegation were prepared to compromise on dress – Soviet diplomats had previously been instructed in a manner suitable for representatives of a workers' and peasants' state – must have indicated to foreign diplomats at the Genoa Conference that the Soviet Union was serious about joining the ranks of diplomatic society and was prepared to make concessions in order to do so, and signalled that further compliance could be expected.²⁶ Indeed, the Soviet delegates' behaviour did fit with the expectation provided by their dress as, according to Pope who claims his information came from observers at the time, their 'behaviour was formal, stiff, correct' and their 'manners' were impeccable.²⁷ Soviet diplomats had learnt the lessons of the previous years – no longer could they flout convention and they needed to play the part of the diplomat if they were to be accepted by the international diplomatic community. This represents more than just a realization on the Soviet part that they needed to follow certain rules. It was a clear signal that Soviet diplomacy was changing, that domestic desires and international restriction

²⁴ Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff*, p. 183.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris, 1956), p. 17.

²⁶ Semyon Aralov, *Vospominaniia sovetskogo diplomata. 1922-23* (Moscow, 1960), p.15; Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskie dnevniki*, vol. 1, p. 86; Account of Kollontai's meeting with Chicherin following her appointment, RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 31, l. 6; Interview with Barbara Clements (conducted by Sonya Baevsky, Akron, Ohio, September 1976), part II pp.4-5, *Kollontai Oral History Project*, Oral History Research Office, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

²⁷ Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff*, p. 183.

were shaping it, and that ideological concerns were to some extent being sacrificed for pragmatic ends.



Fig. 1.

Soviet delegates en route to Genoa in 1922. From left: Chicherin, Radek, Litvinov, Bratmann-Brodovski (Photograph courtesy of Roger-Viollet)



Fig. 2. Soviet Delegates at the Genoa Conference
(in foreground from left Rudzutak, Chicherin, Krasin, Litvinov, Ioffe)

The effect that the Soviet delegation had at Genoa was enormous. They scored a major coup at the conference – the right to have a seat on each of the four subcommittees, including those not set up to discuss specifically Russian affairs at the conference – effectively reinstating Russia as one of the great powers of Europe. In addition, on 16 April 1922 they secretly signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Weimar Germany, which effectively brought the Genoa conference to a close. Other foreign diplomats were outraged, feeling that the conference had been undermined by Soviet secrecy. The Soviets had gained a resumption of full diplomatic and consular relations with Germany and a regulation of economic relations on a basis of mutual cooperation. According to third-party observers, Rapallo was innocuous and did not represent any concrete alliance. In concluding formal diplomatic relations with Germany, however, the Soviet Union had established itself as the legitimate representative of Russia.²⁸

The conclusion of the Rapallo Treaty and the Soviet behaviour at the Genoa Conference demonstrated that Soviet diplomacy was practical and goal-orientated – the Soviets knew what they wanted to achieve and by this point understood the concessions they needed to make to do so, even if this meant compromising ideals and adhering to diplomacy's rules. In this light, even if Rapallo was of limited significance as an alliance, its significance as a major coup on the road to recognition for the Soviet state is undeniable: it confirmed the reorientation of Soviet diplomacy towards gaining diplomatic status for diplomatic purposes, rather than as a means to further the revolution. Soviet diplomats were keen to secure Russia's re-entry into a world from which she had been excluded, and they were willing to compromise their ideology in order to achieve it.

The Genoa Conference's importance as the beginning of the road to official recognition is signalled not only by the acceptance of Soviet diplomats but also by the evaporation of the remaining power of the Council of Ambassadors. Soviet diplomats had aimed since the revolution to displace Russia's former diplomats and Genoa was the first of several serious blows to the Council's remaining power.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 184; Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia* (London, 1999), p. 151; Alexander Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1941* (New York, 1997); George Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (New York, 1960), pp. 211-2.

²⁹ Trotsky to Russian diplomatic missions 17 November 1917, Russia. Posol'stvo (France) Records, 1916-1924, Box 12, folder 13, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University (hereafter HIA); Litvinov to Rex Leeper, 3 April 1918, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, d. 234, p. 16, l. 23; Berzin to

Not only were their protests at the Soviet presence at Genoa ignored, but they were not invited, even as spectators, as they had been at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.³⁰ They were allowed no advisory committee to consult with the delegates, and were effectively shut out from any discussion of Russian affairs with foreign powers.³¹ When Vasilii Maklakov, former Ambassador to Paris and one of the Council of Ambassadors' central members, tried to advise the French government he was rudely told that they had no need for the advice of émigré 'specialists'.³² Evidently, with the Soviet arrival on the international scene, beginning with the Genoa Conference, the Council of Ambassadors was fast losing its influence upon the capitalist powers.

Meanwhile, as former Tsarist diplomats watched their influence and power slip away, the Soviets were gaining confidence as a result of their involvement at Genoa. They had made their debut on the international diplomatic scene and could now be dealt with at further conferences. This demonstrated the ascendancy of the Narkomindel, and the Soviet Union, in the diplomatic arena. The Hague Conference (June - July 1922) and then the Lausanne Conference (November 1922 - February 1923), convened to discuss the Straits question regarding access to the Black Sea, made clear that foreign powers would from that point negotiate with Soviet, rather than White, representatives regarding Russia.³³ Maklakov was incensed, clearly concerned that this signalled the impending recognition of the Soviet State (both Genoa and The Hague conferences had collapsed, but he believed a discussion of the Straits question was clearly going to result in a treaty). Maklakov voiced concerns

Narkomindel, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 46, p. 281, d. 54035, l. 5; Ludwig Martens to Boris Bakhmeteff, 10 April 1919, Records of Posol'stvo, US, Box 10, folder 13 – Martens, L. - representative of Soviet Russia in the United States, 1919, HIA; Litvinov to Martens regarding relations with the US, 27 May 1919, AVP RF, f. 507, op. 5, p. 2, d. 2, l. 1-3; Martens to Narkomindel 14 June 1919, AVP RF, f. 507, op. 5, p. 2, d. 3, l. 2; Letter from Martens to Narkomindel, 2 July 1919, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 3, p. 7, d. 123, l. 16-17; Bakhmeteff to Maklakov, 17 January 1920 reproduced in Budnitskii (ed.), *'Sovershenno lichno i doveritel'no'*, vol. 2, p.157; Kononova, 'Deiatel'nost' diplomatov', p.109; Dmitrii Abrikossov, *Revelations of a Russian Diplomat: the Memoirs of Dmitrii I. Abrikossov* (Seattle, 1964), p.263.

³⁰ Boris Bakhmeteff, *Oral History*, Bakmeteff Archive, Columbia University (hereafter BAR), pp.409-411.

³¹ Nikolai Girs to Sergei Botkin, 15 March 1922, Botkin Collection, BAR.

³² Maklakov to Bakhmeteff, 5 April 1922, in Budnitskii (ed.), *'Sovershenno lichno i doveritel'no!'* vol. 2, p. 245.

³³ Nadia Tongour, 'Diplomacy in Exile: Russian Émigrés in Paris, 1918-1925,' PhD Thesis, Stanford University, 1979, p. 355.

that the Soviet delegation would give concessions in order to be included as a signatory on a major international treaty, and thereby achieve recognition.³⁴

Despite the fact that Soviet diplomats had clearly become the diplomatic agents of Russia, the Council of Ambassadors refused to cease their attempts to act as Russia's representatives, and continued to have some influence with the French government.³⁵ As the Council of Ambassadors lost any credible influence, however, it was not the Bolsheviks who dealt the Council of Ambassadors its death blow, but rather a French economist and politician, Eduard Herriot. At the invitation of the Soviet leadership, Herriot travelled to Russia, meeting with Soviet officials in September and October 1922.³⁶ Interested in economic issues, he returned to France with recommendations to resume relations with the communist regime in Russia, beginning with the establishment of trade relations and the exchange of missions, but expanding into complete diplomatic relations.³⁷

Despite this, and despite the Soviet participation at international conferences, the Council of Ambassadors continued its attempts to interfere in diplomatic matters, although it was becoming increasingly apparent to the capitalist powers that it was providing a heavily skewed picture of Russia, even to the extent of fabrication. Senator de Monzie, following his visit to the Soviet Union in February 1923, launched an attack on the Council of Ambassadors and their tendency to interfere, asking 'is it too much to expect that Frenchmen should be able to discuss Franco-Russian relations on the basis of French interests, without the blatant interference of Russian refugee elements?' Instead, he asked for 'the freedom to consider the possibility of resuming relations with Russia without having to consult with Mr. Kokovstev or Miliukov', who had 'inordinate influence [...] with the 'Russian Specialists' at the Quai d'Orsay'.³⁸ France remained the last great power in Europe not to recognize the Soviet Union; however, continued association with the Council of Ambassadors was harming French interests by keeping France at a

³⁴ Maklakov to Bakhmeteff, 7 October 1922, in Budnitskii (ed.), *'Sovershenno lichno i doveritel'no!'* vol. 2, p. 339.

³⁵ Kononova, 'Deiatel'nost' diplomatov,' p. 117.

³⁶ Account of first meeting between Herriot, Daladier and Karakhan, 20 September 1922, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 42, p. 259, d. 53619, l. 18.

³⁷ *Soobsheniya iz Frantsii*, 3 November 1922, AVP RF f. 04, op. 42, p. 259, d. 53619, l. 53; Herriot, *Exportateur Français*, in *ibid.*, 1.57; Herriot, *La Russie Nouvelle* (Paris, 1923).

³⁸ E. de Monzie, 'Du Droit pour un Français de penser a la Russie,' in Marc Semenoff (ed.), *Les Ecrits pour et contre, les relations de la France avec les Soviets Russes* (Paris, 1923), as quoted in Tongour 'Diplomacy in Exile,' pp. 366-7; n. 206, p. 501.

distance from others in European diplomacy and in the ‘American camp’, where she could not stay forever.³⁹ The start of the withdrawal of recognition began in December 1922, when the Quai d’Orsay announced that as of 1 January 1923 the names of Russian (i.e. non-Soviet) diplomatic personnel would no longer appear on the Diplomatic Lists. The Council of Ambassadors started to prepare for the official establishment of Franco-Soviet relations, and to address the issue of how to represent émigré matters thereafter. Prior to recognition, the French government assured Maklakov that he would be allowed to retain certain privileges afforded to White Consuls, such as issuing documents and passports (Nansen Passports for stateless individuals) and handling legal questions involving émigré rights.⁴⁰ Despite these last vestiges of diplomatic status, Maklakov was informed on 27 October 1924 that the Soviet state would take possession of the embassy the next day, with France regarding the Soviet Union as the legitimate owners should there be any dispute over ownership.⁴¹ The embassy was swiftly evacuated, leaving the archive behind (to Maklakov’s disappointment), thereby bringing the Council of Ambassador’s official presence in an Entente capital to a close and leaving the former Ambassadors of Russia in a state where ‘all ideals had been compromised, all principles made ridiculous, all leaders dethroned, all hope failed, all unity lost...and the very soil gone from under foot’.⁴² In losing their official position as representatives of Russia, although they continued to serve émigré interests, the former Tsarist diplomats had been totally marginalized.

While the displacement of the Council of Ambassadors as Russia’s representative was clearly a major step in the recognition process, how the process was handled, and indeed the aims of formal acceptance into diplomatic society demonstrated the shift in Soviet diplomacy away from revolution and towards more pragmatic behaviour. Recognition was more than just an aim to be achieved by

³⁹ The ‘American camp’ implies those states that continued to refuse to recognise the Soviet state. The USA formally recognised the Soviet Union in 1934.

⁴⁰ Maklakov to Bakhmeteff, 7 March 1924, in Budnitskii (ed.), *‘Sovershenno lichno i doveritel’no!’* vol. 3, pp.159-160; Herriot, *Exportateur Français* (n.d.), in *Soobsheniya iz Frantsii*, 3 November 1922, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 42, p. 259, d. 53619, l. 57; Maklakov to Bakhmeteff, 21 December 1922, in Budnitskii (ed.), *‘Sovershenno lichno i doveritel’no!’* vol. 2, p. 409; Maklakov to Bakhmeteff, 5 June 1924, in Budnitskii (ed.), *‘Sovershenno lichno i doveritel’no!’* vol. 3, p. 191; Tongour, ‘Diplomacy in Exile,’ pp.377-8.

⁴¹ Maklakov to Kuskova-Prokopich, 12 November 1924, Maklakov personal papers, Box 18, HIA.

⁴² Tongour, ‘Diplomacy in Exile’, n. 265, p. 506; Vadim Bielov, *The White Morning After: the Russian Émigrés at the Crossroad* (Moscow, 1923), p. 3.

diplomats – what lay behind it was the goal of ensuring stability for the Soviet Union with the outside world such that it could develop internally. As can be seen domestically by the end of the Civil War, with the NEP, the failure of the German Revolution of 1923, and with Stalin's proclamation of building of 'socialism in one country', the Soviet regime's priorities had changed. This caused a shift in Soviet diplomacy that is well expressed in the light of the recognition process. Chicherin himself, referring to his Tsarist predecessor, Alexander Gorchakov, sought stability in Soviet international relations such that domestic policies could be acted upon without external distractions.⁴³

The process shows another change in Soviet diplomacy, less policy-based than that mentioned above. While there was a desire to achieve accommodation with the capitalist powers, the means to achieve it were dictated by rules that were beyond the Soviets' power to change. Only by entering into formal diplomacy and following its established rules could Soviet diplomats hope to achieve their ends. Thus, we see Soviet diplomats displaying their mastery of its norms at international conferences and coming into diplomacy expressing their intentions to be dealt with as equals. In doing so, Soviet diplomats elevated themselves into a more suitable position with regard to diplomatic society than they had previously occupied, leading to recognition by other powers.

It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between these two shifts in Soviet diplomacy surrounding the recognition process. Soviet desire to achieve recognition was the catalyst for the realignment, as diplomats came to realize that they needed to pursue a line of traditional diplomacy, and abandon using it for revolutionary purposes, to achieve stability in foreign relations. The goal-orientated approach of the Soviets led them to change, as diplomacy continued to be resistant to any level of change that might be exerted on it. Non-conformism could only lead to Soviet diplomats functioning outside standard diplomatic channels, or only very ineffectively within them, as diplomats and states shunned them as unsuitable. The shift in Soviet diplomacy brought Soviet diplomats in line with diplomatic society as

⁴³ Timothy O'Connor, *Diplomacy and Revolution: G.V. Chicherin and Soviet Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930* (Ames, IA, 1988), p. 9.

they showed themselves capable of adhering to its rules and foreign diplomats became prepared to engage with them.⁴⁴

The biggest obstacle to securing recognition and maintaining good relations with foreign powers remained foreign propaganda conducted by the Comintern, frequently through the Narkomindel. The Soviets had been aware that such behaviour was unacceptable within diplomacy, but had in the immediate post-revolutionary period attempted to subvert diplomacy to revolutionary ends.⁴⁵ The Soviets had also discovered that foreign powers would deny them diplomatic rights and privileges on the basis of the suspicion that they were involved in revolutionary activity, and this had been a common theme of the period following the Revolution. In 1918 Berzin was delayed in Berlin, because the Swiss government would not issue any visas to the staff of the mission without the assurance that there were no agitators among them.⁴⁶ Litvinov was denied the use of telegraphs and ciphers out of fear that he would use them to carry out illicit party business.⁴⁷ Vorovsky was denied the use of ciphers and couriers in Sweden on the grounds that representatives of the Soviet government had abused diplomatic privileges and used them for disseminating propaganda in several countries and held the expectation that Vorovsky's mission to Sweden involved propaganda as one of its chief aims.⁴⁸

The involvement of an individual in propaganda activity was also used by foreign powers as a means to deny them entry into a country to serve as a diplomat. The British Government affirmed in a reply to Krasin (then head of the Soviet Trade Delegation to Britain) that it had 'no intention of debarring any Russian on the ground of his communist opinions provided the agents of the Russian government

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Memorandum on the Russian Situation*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Pravda*, 2 Jan 1925; Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskie dnevniki*.

⁴⁶ Telegram no. 63 from Swiss legation in Berlin to Swiss Ministry of Foreign affairs, 10 May 1918 (received 11 May 1918), in *Documents Diplomatiques Suisses 1848-1945*, Volume 6 (1914-1918) (Bern, 1986), pp. 734-5; Telegram no. 51 from Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Swiss legation in Berlin, 14 May 1918, in *ibid.*, p. 735; Philippe Mercier (Swiss Minister in Berlin) to Francois Calonder (Swiss Premier), 15 May 1918, in *ibid.*, p. 736.

⁴⁷ Maxim Litvinov to Rex Leeper 3 April 1918, AVP RF, f. 04, on. 4, d 234, p. 16, l. 23.

⁴⁸ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Chicherin no. 285/1068, December 1918, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 2, p. 1, d. 1, l. 13; Lundberg to Chicherin, 2 December 1918, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 2, p. 1, d. 2, l. 43; Chicherin to Vorovsky, 19 January 1919, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 3, p. 5, d. 10, l. 12; Chicherin to Vorovsky, 23 January 1919, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 3, p. 5, d. 10, l. 23; Litvinov to Rex Leeper (British Foreign Office) 3 April 1918, AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, d 234, p. 16, l. 23.

comply with the normal conditions for friendly international intercourse'.⁴⁹ Using this as a basis, the British denied Lev Kamenev's re-entry into Britain, stating that Kamenev had 'engaged in almost open propaganda and attempted to subsidise a campaign in England against the British Constitution and British institutions'.⁵⁰ While it is clear from this that the British government felt that they had evidence of Kamenev having been involved in propaganda on their territory, there is a definite sense that they perceived Kamenev as just one example of a Soviet diplomat engaged in illicit propaganda activity at the time. Britain repeatedly demanded that the Soviet state desist from propaganda, both in the British Isles and within the British Empire and Commonwealth.⁵¹

Other instances displayed the suspicion on the part of foreign governments that the spread of revolution was the true aim of the Soviet diplomatic service. This was grounded in prior examples of Soviet diplomacy, where propaganda had been carried out by individuals accredited to the Narkomindel and their beliefs provided foreign host governments with a pretext to control and expel Soviet diplomatic missions from their countries. Prior to granting the Berzin mission the right to enter Switzerland, the Swiss government exhibited a great deal of concern that there might be agitators within the mission's staff and asked for assurances that there would not be.⁵² In a meeting on 17 May 1923, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, and Krasin discussed the issue of suspicion held by the British government that the Soviet Trade Delegation had been engaging in propaganda from the beginning of its existence in Britain. Indeed, the accusation was that the first condition of the Soviet Trade Agreement had been 'systematically violated'. The British government demanded that 'the two Russian officials principally implicated should be disowned and recalled, and an apology offered for their misdeeds'. Refusal would be seen as

⁴⁹ Reply of the British Government to Krasin's note of 19 June 1920, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 17, d. 246, l.12.

⁵⁰ Note from Lord Curzon (British Foreign Secretary), 8 October 1920, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 17, d. 246, l. 19.

⁵¹ Note from Curzon, 8 October 1920, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 17, d. 246, l. 19; Memorandum in reply to Chicherin's memorandum to the Foreign Office of 2 May 1923, June 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 329, l. 71.

⁵² AVP RF, f. 04, op. 46, p. 281, d. 54035, l. 1-2 quoted in Vladimir Sokolov, 'Ya. A. Berzin,' p. 143; Telegram no. 63 from Swiss Embassy in Berlin to Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 May 1918 in *Documents Diplomatiques Suisses*, vol. 6, p. 734; Telegram no. 5163 from Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Swiss Embassy in Berlin, 14 May 1918 in *ibid.*, p. 735; Mercier to Calonder 15 May 1918 in *ibid.*, p. 736.

‘inconsistent with the established canons of international intercourse’ and a rupture of relations was threatened as the likely outcome.⁵³

Suspicion shows itself to have been an almost constant factor in the relationship between Soviet diplomatic missions and their host nations in the early years of Soviet diplomatic activity. In 1923, Litvinov attacked the ‘suspiciousness of the British Government’ towards the Soviet Trade Delegation.⁵⁴ In Switzerland there is clear evidence of the persistent suspicion that the Soviet mission in Bern was engaged heavily in propaganda.⁵⁵ All this created a discourse of suspicion of the Soviet diplomatic service, which was used to hold it in check, while conversely being used by the Soviets to claim that they were being treated unjustly by the host nation.⁵⁶ Foreign powers were concerned about the Soviet subversion of diplomacy, and had good reason to be. By 1924, however, the Narkomindel’s primary concern was establishing diplomatic relations, and the necessary compromise on propaganda had been made. Soviet diplomats were attempting to engage in diplomacy according to its rules, no longer trying to subvert them.

While the Narkomindel and Soviet diplomats had made definite shifts in policy and activities to ensure that their diplomacy was no longer the diplomacy of revolution, the regime had not entirely given up on propaganda being organized through Soviet embassies.⁵⁷ The Comintern, although an agency distinct from the Narkomindel and composed of Communist parties from a wide range of countries, used Soviet diplomatic missions as a means to insert individuals into various places leading to problems and a resentment of propagandists by Soviet diplomats as a result of the challenges it posed to maintaining normal diplomatic relations.

The Narkomindel and Soviet diplomats made concerted and repeated efforts to distance themselves from the Comintern and propaganda activities. As an

⁵³ Minutes of the meeting between Curzon and Krasin, 17 May 1923, 11.30 am, AVP RF, f.04, op. 4, p.23, d.330, l. 2; AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 329, l. 70-1.

⁵⁴ Litvinov to Johnson, 12 May 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 384, l. 21-23.

⁵⁵ Alfred Senn, *Diplomacy and Revolution: the Soviet mission to Switzerland, 1918* (Notre Dame, 1974), pp.147-60.

⁵⁶ Litvinov to Johnson, 12 May 1923, AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 384, l. 27; Chicherin to MacDonald, undated (1923), AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 392, l. 66; Macdonald to Chicherin February 1924, AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 392, l. 8.

⁵⁷ Chicherin to Karakhan, 1 January 1926, No. 1, AVP RF, f. 100, op. 10, p. 123, d. 1, l. 2; ‘Gingering Up by the Cheka: New Jobs for Expert Propagandists,’ and ‘True Communists,’ *Morning Post*, 18 August 1925, as reported in *Obzor Angliskoi pressy*, svodka no. 10, AVP RF, f. 69, op. 13, p. 42, d. 42, l. 11.

institution the Narkomindel was adamant that it could not be connected to the Comintern, instructed diplomats not to be involved in propaganda lest there be an impact on diplomatic relations, and removed all mention of Comintern activities from entries in the publication of *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*.⁵⁸ This was challenging as the Comintern contained a striking number of those who had served in the Narkomindel in its early days, and Soviet diplomats about to assume posts abroad were briefed not only by the Narkomindel, but also by the Comintern.⁵⁹ Additionally, it would appear that no matter how much the Narkomindel and its officials protested that there was no link between the two foreign governments were never convinced by the claims.⁶⁰

The presence of Comintern agencies within embassies caused a great number of problems for the Narkomindel, not to mention clashes between individuals and the two organizations. The major problem arose because the Comintern needed diplomatic immunity and privileges (including the ability to pass materials for its revolutionary activity through diplomatic pouches) in order to carry out its work, while at the same time the Narkomindel needed to distance itself from 'illegal party business'.⁶¹

The tension between the two agencies is clear, and Chicherin himself referred to the Comintern, in his final letter as Foreign Commissar in early July 1930, as the Narkomindel's number one internal enemy ('iz [...] *vnutrennikh vragov – pervyi*').⁶² He attacked the Comintern's involvement in the Narkomindel, claiming that the link between the Comintern and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was never a secret, and that it jeopardized the maintenance of embassies, trade missions, economic arrangements and press agencies.⁶³ Even though he had been a delegate to the First Congress of the Comintern in 1919, he felt from the outset that the Comintern was at loggerheads with the establishment of a traditional

⁵⁸ Chicherin to Kollontai, 4 November 1922, RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 40, l. 1; Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskii dnevnik*, vol. 1, p. 59; *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1948); *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1985-8)

⁵⁹ Grigori Besedovsky, *Revelations of a Soviet Diplomat*, (London, 1931), p. 127.

⁶⁰ Foreign Office to Litvinov, n.d. (1921) AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, d. 278, p. 20, l. 23; Litvinov to Johnson, 12 May 1923, AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 384, l. 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.255; Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskii dnevnik*, vol. 1, p. 36.

⁶² 'Posledniaia sluzhebnaia zapiska G. V. Chicherina,' Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter AP RF, f. 48, op. 1, d. 66, l. 38-71, reproduced in *Istochnik*, 1995, vol. 6, p. 108.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

style of diplomacy and was opposed to the accreditation of one agent per mission.⁶⁴ He had, however, little choice in these matters as the Politburo had ordered that he liaise with Grigorii Zinoviev, head of the Comintern in 1921, in order to attempt to produce a working relationship between the Comintern and the Narkomindel.⁶⁵ Chicherin received a great deal of information regarding the Comintern from the Politburo and there was communication between the Comintern and the Narkomindel on numerous occasions, and from this standpoint it is inconceivable that the Narkomindel was unaware of the Comintern's general activities, although restrictions of circulation of Politburo material and censorship probably meant that the Narkomindel was unaware of the specifics of Comintern activity.⁶⁶ Despite being informed of the Comintern's actions both by the Politburo and by Comintern officials, Chicherin appears to have only tacitly agreed with the Politburo's instructions.⁶⁷ It was of course essential that he played no role in Comintern activity himself in the midst of the drive for recognition, even if he was aware of its presence in his embassies.

Even so, the Narkomindel was unable to limit the damage done to Soviet relations with other powers by the Comintern. The British, concerned about the issue of propaganda directed against Britain and her worldwide interests, accused them of breaking the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement 'almost from the start' and issued repeated warnings that the Soviets should desist from their propaganda activities before matters came to a head with the Curzon Ultimatum of 29 May 1923, which accused the Soviet Union of continuing to engage in propaganda in both Britain and the British Empire, having 'systematically violated' the terms of the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement.⁶⁸ Although the British

⁶⁴ Adibekov (ed.), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ Politburo Protocol no. 55, 25 August 1921, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 194, l. 2 reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁶⁶ Chicherin to Zinoviev, 26 October 1919, RGASPI, f. 324, op. 2, d. 11, l. 50, reproduced in Natalia Lebedeva, Kimmo Rentola, and Tauno Saarela (eds), *Komintern in Finlandia, 1919-1943: dokumenty* (Moscow, 2003), p. 55; Zinoviev to Chicherin, 19 May 1920, RGASPI, f. 324, op. 2, d. 11, l. 54, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 63; A. Chernykh (Soviet Ambassador to Finland) to Chicherin and Comintern, 29 March 1922, RGASPI, f. 516, op. 2, d. 678, l. 151, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 101; Politburo Protocol no. 55, 15 August 1921, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 194, l. 2-4, reproduced in Adibekov (ed.), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern*, pp. 92-3; Politburo Protocol no. 9, 31 May 1923, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162 d., 1, l. 1-2, reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 17-18; Zalkind to Chicherin, 19 July 1925, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 42, p. 264, d. 53729, l. 1-2;

⁶⁷ Ivan Zalkind to Chicherin, 19 July 1925, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 42, p. 264, d. 53729.

⁶⁸ AVP RF, f. 069, op. 7, p. 7, d. 14, l. 30; Text to be telegraphed from Klishko to Chicherin no. 6066, 9 December 1921 (handwritten), AVP RF, f. 069, op. 6, p. 16, d. 81, l. 18; Minutes of meeting

government was aware that there was a drop in propaganda activity as a result of the trade agreement, it had not ceased altogether.⁶⁹ The British appear to have remained concerned that propaganda in Asia, particularly in China, was a serious risk to British interests and they took steps to minimize it. The Curzon Ultimatum must be seen as something of a warning shot from the British, but not one that the Soviets took as seriously as they should have, given the rupture that would eventually occur in Anglo-Soviet relations. The primary reason why the break between Britain and the Soviet Union did not follow immediately on the heels of the Curzon Ultimatum probably had more to do with the Labour Party's accession to power in Britain in 1924 than it did with a decrease in Soviet propaganda.⁷⁰

Although the Narkomindel fiercely protested its lack of involvement in propaganda, there were solid grounds for British suspicions about Soviet revolutionary activity, and indeed it was not unusual for other states to view the Soviets in such a manner. Following the Russian Revolution a number of states had suspected, or had actually caught the Soviets abusing diplomatic privileges for

between Curzon and Krasin, 17 May 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 330, l. 2; Chicherin to Curzon, 9 November 1920, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, d. 245, p. 17, l. 24; Memorandum in reply to Chicherin's memorandum to Foreign Office of 29 May 1923, 5 June 1923, AVPRF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 329, l. 71; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Chicherin no. 285/1068, December 1918, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 2, p. 1, d. 1, l. 13; Reply of the British Government to Krasin's note of 19 June 1920, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 17, d. 246, l.12; Note from Curzon, 8 October 1920, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 17, d. 246, l. 19; Memorandum in reply to Chicherin's memorandum to the Foreign Office of 29 May 1923, 5 June 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 329, l. 71; Foreign Office to Narkomindel n.d. (1921 – responding to Litvinov's letter 7 September 1921), AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, d. 278, p. 20, l. 23; Litvinov to Johnson, 12 May 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 384, l. 21-23; Minutes of the meeting between Curzon and Krasin, 17 May 1923, 11.30 am, AVP RF, f.04, op. 4, p.23, d.330, l. 2; AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 329, l. 70-1; *Trade Agreement between His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic*, Parliamentary Paper, 1921, cmd. 1207, pp.2-3. The significant paragraph from the preamble to the Trade agreement reads: 'That each party refrains from hostile action or undertakings against the other and from conducting outside of its own borders any official propaganda direct or indirect against the institutions of the British Empire or the Russian Soviet Republic respectively, and more particularly that the Russian Soviet Government refrains from any attempt by military or diplomatic or any other form of action or propaganda to encourage any of the peoples of Asia in any form of hostile action against British interests or the British Empire, especially in India and in the Independent State of Afghanistan. The British Government gives a similar particular undertaking to the Russian Soviet Government in respect of the countries which formed part of the former Russian Empire and which have now become independent.'

⁶⁹ Marshall, *Memorandum on the Russian Situation*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Macdonald to Chicherin 1 February 1924, AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 392, l. 8; Chicherin to MacDonal, undated (1924), AVP RF f. 04, op. 4, p. 27, d. 392, l. 66; 'Resolution of the Second Congress of Soviets on *De Jure* Recognition by Britain, February 2 1924,' *The Times*, 4 February 1924 reproduced in Robert Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism and the World: From Revolution to Collapse* (3rd edition, Hanover, NH, 1994), pp. 44-5.

revolutionary ends.⁷¹ Further, the Soviet Trade Delegation in London had been used to get Comintern agents into Britain, as well as to purchase space for its operations, and the regime remained concerned with overseas missions as bastions of revolutionary activity, according to the British and Soviet press.⁷² While Soviet diplomats were aware of the need to steer clear of propaganda and agitation, or to at least keep it hidden, they failed, as had been the case earlier, to be successful in all cases.⁷³

While the Curzon Ultimatum had been a warning about the detrimental impact of Soviet foreign propaganda, the Zinoviev letter of 1924, although a forgery, only served to make matters worse for the Soviets.⁷⁴ When confronted, the Soviets denied the accusations, claiming that they had no knowledge of agents supposedly operating through the Trade Delegation in an illegal manner. Insistent that there was no involvement in anti-British propaganda, the Politburo instructed the Narkomindel to order Krasin to prepare to leave Britain in protest, presumably as they believed there was an impending rupture in diplomatic relations.⁷⁵

There was no rupture at this point, but the events of April and May 1927, following a British accusation in February that the Soviets were conducting ‘anti-British propaganda’, were to prove the reality of the British threat to break off relations if the Soviets continued to be involved in revolutionary work, as the

⁷¹ Senn, *Diplomacy and Revolution*, pp. 96, 161, 181; Interview with Valentina Vasilevskaya (Jan Berzin’s granddaughter), Moscow, 30 March 2004; Litvinov to Rex Leeper 3 April 1918, AVP RF, f. 04, on. 4, d. 234, p. 16, l. 23; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Chicherin no. 285/1068, December 1918, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 2, p. 1, d. 1, l. 13; Lundberg to Chicherin, 23 December 1918, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 2, p. 1, d. 2, l. 43; Chicherin to Vorovsky, 19 January 1919, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 3, p. 5, d. 10, l. 12; Chicherin to Vorovsky, 23 January 1919, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 3, p. 5, d. 10, l. 23.

⁷² ‘Gingering Up by the Cheka: New Jobs for Expert Propagandists,’ and ‘True Communists,’ *Morning Post*, 18 August 1925, as reported in *Obzor Angliskoi pressy*, svodka no. 10, AVP RF, f. 69, op. 13, p. 42, d. 42, l. 11; *Izvestiya*, 12 August 1925 as quoted in *ibid.*, l. 11.

⁷³ Politburo Protocol no. 64, 24 January 1924, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI), f. 17, op. 3, d. 412, l. 8, reproduced in Adibekov (ed), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern: 1919-1943: Dokumenty*, (Moscow, 2004), p. 245; Chicherin to Kollontai, 4 November 1922, RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 40, l. 1; Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskie dnevniki*, vol. 1, p. 36; Chicherin to Berzin, 21 September 1921, AVP RF, f. 069, op. 5, p. 4, d. 3, l. 9-10.

⁷⁴ Christopher Andrew, ‘The British Secret Service and Anglo-Soviet Relations in the 1920s, Part 1: From the Trade Negotiations to the Zinoviev Letter’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1977), pp. 673-706; Gill Bennet, *A Most Extraordinary and Mysterious Business: The Zinoviev Letter of 1924* (London, 1999); Nick Baron, ‘Zinoviev Letter’ in James Millar et al (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, vol. 4, p. 1733.

⁷⁵ Minutes of meeting between Curzon and Krasin, 17 May 1923, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 4, p. 23, d. 330, l. 2; Politburo Protocol no. 9b 31 May 1923, RGASPI f. 17, op. 162, d. 1, l. 1-2, reproduced in Adibekov et al (eds), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Evropa: Resheniia ‘osoboi papki’. 1923-1939* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 17-18.

Comintern had been during the British General Strike of May 1926, in Britain and the British Empire.⁷⁶ On the supposed evidence of Soviet revolutionary activity in China, which had been passed to the Foreign Office, the British raided the premises of the Soviet trading agency Arcos and the Soviet Trade Delegation in London between 12 and 16 May.⁷⁷ The reason for the raid was a missing Air Ministry publication that the Soviets supposedly had in their possession. The police found neither this document nor anything else of any real importance, but claimed to have found a list of ‘illegals’ in the possession of one employee.⁷⁸ The British government subsequently published a White Paper containing documents found during the raid, as well as documents already amassed by the Foreign Office on the basis of which they drew conclusive proof that the Soviet Union was engaged in revolutionary subterfuge through the Trade Delegation and Arcos.⁷⁹ Despite Soviet protests that there was no link between the Soviet Union and the Comintern, and their somewhat ironic complaints that the British had contravened diplomatic immunity in handling the matter, Britain subsequently broke off relations on 28 May 1927, leading to renewed Soviet fears of capitalist encirclement and war and changes in Soviet domestic policy with the abandonment of the NEP and implementation of Stalin’s first Five Year Plan.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Lars Lih *et al.* (eds), *Stalin’s Letters to Molotov 1925-1936* (New Haven, 1995), p. 133; Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919-1933* (Oxford, 2005), p. 537; Politburo Protocol, no. 23, 4 May 1926, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 3, l. 57-8, reproduced in Adibekov *et al.* (eds), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern*, pp. 360-362; Politburo Protocol, no. 24, 5-6 May 1926, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 3, l. 60-3, reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 362-4; Politburo Protocol, no. 25, 7 May 1926, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 3, l. 65-6, reproduced in Adibekov *et al.* (eds), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Evropa: Resheniia ‘osoboi papki’*, pp. 119-20.

⁷⁷ The All Russian Co-operative Society, established in 1920, was a Russian joint stock trading company connected to the Trade Delegation.

⁷⁸ Stanley Baldwin’s statement to the House of Commons, 24 May 1927, as quoted in William and Zelda Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1943), p. 277. For a detailed treatment of the Arcos raid see Harriette Flory, ‘The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1977), pp. 707-24.

⁷⁹ ‘The Russian Trade Organisation and Revolutionary Organisations in the UK’, in National Archives (UK), KV3/17; Coates and Coates, *History of Anglo-Soviet Relations*, pp. 268-9; Extract from a Statement issued by the Soviet Embassy in London, May 15 1927 as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 270.

⁸⁰ Chamberlain to Rozengolz, 23 February 1927, AVP RF, f. 04, p. 38, d. 538, l. 1; Foreign Office to Litvinov, September 1921, AVP RF, f. 04, op. 04, d. 278, p. 20; Politburo Protocol no. 24, 10 March 1928, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162 d. 6 l. 78, reproduced in Adibekov (ed.), *Politbiuro TSK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern*, p. 519. Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, *Raid on Arcos Ltd and the Trade Delegation of the USSR* (London, 1927), p. 50. *Sunday Express*, 29 May 1927 as quoted in Coates and Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations*, p. 285; Lih *et al.* (eds), *Stalin’s Letters to Molotov*, pp. 133-5.

The Narkomindel and Soviet diplomats were driven by the Soviet Union's need in the 1920s to ensure that stable diplomatic relations were established with foreign powers. In turn this need caused a realignment of Soviet diplomacy, as there was a marked shift in the priorities of diplomacy, with a corresponding change in the requirements of diplomatic behaviour. During the 1920s, Soviet diplomats were intent on being properly accepted as members of diplomatic society and as a result needed to present themselves appropriately. Taking the Genoa conference as a turning point, we see Soviet diplomats exhibited a clear awareness, and willingness, to conform to diplomatic conventions, signalling their desire to be taken seriously as diplomats. No longer were the Soviets playing diplomacy by their own rules.

With the change in Soviet diplomatic goals the Narkomindel became far more a diplomatic than a revolutionary agency during the 1920s, and its staff changes reflected this. The recruitment of a new wave of diplomats helped build an institution whose aim was representation and negotiation on behalf of the Soviet Union, rather than an agency charged with furthering the world revolution.⁸¹ This is not to say that revolutionary individuals no longer served in the Narkomindel, but the fact is that they had changed; diplomats who had been revolutionaries, such as Krasin and Berzin, eventually turned their backs on revolutionary activities in order to gain respectability as diplomats.

For the Narkomindel, the 1920s brought a need for professional diplomats – individuals who were capable of fitting into and conforming to the rules of diplomatic society – who understood the priorities of diplomacy and how diplomatic relations should be conducted as a result of training and experience gained through service. In this respect, Soviet diplomats came to resemble the diplomats of other countries as they outwardly displayed themselves to be conforming to its norms and their mastery of diplomatic discourse and were able to displace the Council of Ambassadors that had challenged Soviet recognition following the Revolution.

The expansion of foreign trade should be seen as facilitating Soviet recognition and diplomacy, both in terms of how the Soviet Union was treated by foreign powers and in how it treated its diplomatic agency. Foreign trade was an

⁸¹ Kocho-Williams, 'The Culture of Russian and Soviet Diplomacy'; Stephen Sternheimer, 'Administration for Development: the Emerging Bureaucratic Elite, 1920-1930,' in Walter Pintner and Don Rowney (eds.), *Russian Officialdom: the Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1979), pp. 336, 342.

imperative for the Soviet Union during the 1920s, and it could only be achieved through the establishment, and maintenance, of relations with foreign powers. Soviet diplomats, and the Politburo, were aware that trade relations could be used to provide a basis for formal diplomatic relations and worked towards this. Concurrently with this, foreign powers had a desire to trade with the Soviet Union and so became more disposed to the prospect of entering into official relations. Even countries that had been particularly resistant to Soviet recognition, such as France, took the route of establishing relations with the Soviet Union as a result of a desire to trade. By the end of the 1920s, of the major powers only the United States had refused to recognize the Soviet Union.

Given the desire for stable diplomatic relations the Narkomindel was obliged to abandon the revolutionary activity it had been involved in immediately following the revolution. The Comintern inherited the role that the Narkomindel was obliged to cast off, becoming a representative agency for the revolutionary side of foreign affairs which the Central Committee was unwilling to abandon completely, and a significant number of Soviet diplomats of the post-revolutionary period had been involved in its establishment. During the 1920s, the Comintern presented the Narkomindel with a host of problems, not least as a result of the presence of uncontrollable Comintern agents within foreign missions and the negative impact on diplomacy of Soviet foreign propaganda. The Narkomindel struggled with outside agencies that inserted agents into diplomatic missions.⁸² A lack of control over these individuals was one side of this, but far more important was the harm that individuals working for an agency not concerned with nurturing diplomatic relations could do. What the Narkomindel needed in its missions was individuals focused solely on the furthering of diplomatic relations, and nothing else. The regime was unwilling to abandon all hope of an international revolution, and there was a definite tension between the two aims of Soviet foreign relations in the 1920s as the regime attempted to engage the world on both fronts, culminating in raids on diplomatic premises, a rupture of diplomatic relations with Britain and the war scare of 1927. It

⁸² The OGPU (Soviet secret police 1923-1934) also inserted agents into Soviet missions. While Chicherin called the Comintern the Narkomindel's number one internal enemy, he placed the OGPU as number two. 'Posledniaia sluzhebnaia zapiska G. V. Chicherina', p. 108; Sokolov, 'Neisvestnyi G. V. Chicherin: iz rassekrechennykh arkhivov MID RF,' *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, vol. 2, p. 8.

is clear that Soviet foreign propaganda could only harm relations, and in order to attempt to maintain diplomatic ties the Narkomindel and Soviet diplomats were obliged to take steps to limit the damage. The events of 1927 show that ultimately they were unsuccessful in this role and the Comintern made the Narkomindel's task of carving out a place for the Soviet Union in world affairs on the basis of formal, and friendly, diplomatic relations much more difficult.