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Michael Jabara Carley. *1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1999. xxvii + 325 pp. $28.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56663-252-2.

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Note: H-Diplo recently ran a roundtable discussion on Michael Carley's book 1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II. The participants were William Keylor, Boston University; Igor Lukes, Boston University; Sally Marks, Providence, Rhode Island; and Robert Young, University of Winnipeg. Each part of the roundtable will be posted to the Reviews website as an individual review, with Carley's comments linked to each individual contribution.

The Russian alliance contributed both to keeping a comparatively weakening France in the ranks of the great powers before 1914 and to French survival in the first years of the Great War. Afterwards a shattered France needed the Russian tie more than ever, but ideological factors rendered that politically impossible whereas the eastern alliances with smaller states proved an unsatisfactory substitute, potentially more liabilities than assets. Thus the Nazi challenge impelled Paris to a new Russian pact in 1935, but mutual distrust rendered it stillborn. France's reluctant ally, Britain, had even more strained relations with the Soviet Union. Hostility to a historic rival was both traditional and recent, broken only by a decade of detente from 1907 to 1917; ideology and incidents aggravated the interwar relationship. In his study of the 1939 negotiations among these three powers, Michael Carley asks whether Britain and France really sought to put aside existing distrust and achieve alliance with the Soviet Union against the greatest danger, Nazi Germany. He concludes that their effort was minimal, and he cites British prime minister Neville Chamberlain and interwar anti-communism as two major causes of World War II (pp. 144, 256).

In lively, often colloquial prose, Carley hews closely to his topic, writing essentially out of British and French archival diplomatic files on Russia and the Chamberlain papers, together with recently published Soviet files on Britain and France. He provides a wealth of detail, especially to demonstrate that Chamberlain strongly opposed a Soviet tie, and quantities of translations of Russian documents which every future historian dealing with the subject will need to contemplate. In throwing new light on an old but sometimes neglected aspect of the coming of World War II and in providing much new material for historians to mull, Carley has made an important contribution.

When Carley reaches 1939, the book becomes essentially a study of Anglo-Soviet relations, confirming that here as elsewhere Paris left the lead to London. In describing the 1938 Czech crisis, however, he demonstrates at length that French public statements of support for Prague were mere theater. Perhaps citation of the frank 19 July declaration to the Czechs that France would not honor its alliance and that public assurances to the contrary were designed only to afford Prague time to settle would permit a brisk summary of events until after Godesberg when a second crisis arose because neither broad Czech concessions to the so-called Sudeten German minority nor territorial cession to Germany appeased Hitler. Carley stresses that exclusion from the resulting Munich conference embittered Moscow, allied to both France and Czechoslovakia. He is right about the embitterment and the considerable justification for it, but the point was to have a conference and do a deal to prevent war with Hitler, who indicated that if the Soviet Union were invited, there would be no conference and no deal.

In addressing 1939, Carley never strays from the Anglo-French-Soviet pact negotiations. This provides an admirably clear focus and a wealth of invaluable detail but on occasion has the defects of its virtues in that there is some fuzziness at the edges. It seems odd for one "rat des archives" to urge another to greater reliance on secondary sources, which can be risky. However, few historians can read every relevant file and still complete a book; certainly those lacking long summers and sabbaticals cannot. Carefully selected works of others can flesh out the surrounding circumstances and offer at least partial answers to key questions. Most of the monographs

in question are in Carley's bibliography but are lightly used. The speculations of contemporary diplomats need to be supplemented by the judgment of careful historians who have immersed themselves in the records of a given country.

Britain is a case in point. The Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maiskii, was industrious and well-connected, but foreign secretary Edward Halifax seldom imparted the full story to him (especially of his own growing breach with Chamberlain), and Maiskii was not privy to the inner thoughts of key Tories. This group has been exhaustively studied with the aid of the voluminous Cabinet files and every possible diary and collection of papers. Thus we can now see Chamberlain's global dilemma, his goals, and his responses to Britain's undoubted difficulties. In this context, most historians still consider Chamberlain's policy wrongheaded but not "fatuous" (p. 181). His approach of ensuring Britain's survival as a great and imperial power by purchasing peace through concessions to Germany over rearmament, colonies, and eventually central Europe entailed much less political, economic, and military cost than available alternatives and was supported by most Britons until mid-1938 (at first even by Sir Robert Vansittart, later the Foreign Office's chief anti- appeaser). The difficulty was that Hitler wanted neither a deal nor peace, and that Chamberlain obstinately kept rejecting this reality despite mounting evidence.

In France, alas, there are more self-serving memoirs than collections as valuable as Chamberlain's letters to his sisters. However, a number of able scholars have combed everything available, including diplomatic files on related topics. These provide much useful context, including both policies relevant to the looming crisis and relationships among French leaders. In addition, they could offer insights into how extensive fear of communism was in France. Certainly Edouard Herriot had long favored a Soviet tie, but one wonders about the staunchly conservative peasants of his misleadingly named Radical Socialist party.

Studies of the Third Reich and its leader are particularly useful, for Germany was the inescapable core problem affecting and often generating others. Hitler was the prime mover and determining factor, not least regarding a Soviet alliance with the western powers. Carley has used *Documents on German Foreign Policy* for 1939, but mostly for August. Among other things, use of secondary works would remind us not only of the primacy of the German problem but also of early Russian overtures to the Third Reich and repeated ones from 1935 to 1938.

The Soviet Union is particularly difficult to grapple with, and every useful study is needed. As Carley says, Stalin was crucial –but Narkomindel files tell us what he permitted, not why he permitted it. Biographies could provide at least as much illumination as the guesses of contemporary French diplomats about the depth of his commitment to collective security, and, for example, why he replaced foreign minister Maxim Litvinov with Viacheslav Molotov in early May 1939. This has generally been thought to indicate a policy shift. While not entirely consistent, Carley says Franco-British indifference caused Litvinov's fall but mainly avers that the Soviet Union remained loyal to collective security until 19 August, after the Anglo-French military mission proved to be less than serious. Published studies could also contribute to an examination of whether a more forthcoming Anglo-French policy would have induced the Soviet Union to bear the brunt of the fighting without promise of territorial reward when Hitler offered so much in return for neutrality.

Literature on the smaller states at issue among the powers would be helpful as well to add brief context and clarification. No historian can be expected to read all extant files on Rumania, Czechoslovakia, the imperilled Baltics, Finland, and the Winter War, but secondary works fill some gaps. Attention to Poland is particularly important, for Carley correctly identifies it as the greatest single obstacle to a western-Soviet alliance. He says with reason that Britain and France used Poland as an excuse, but there is more to the matter. As he notes, foreign minister Josef Beck was disliked by contemporaries and most historians, but his unattractiveness did not make Poland's dilemma less acute, and subsequent history suggests that Polish fears were not unfounded. Carley thinks Britain should have forced Poland to accept the Red Army on its soil; in fact, London applied heavy diplomatic pressure but with predictably limited success, especially since its guarantee had already been given, was less than cast-iron, and had little short-term military value. Warsaw understood its peril, but felt entitled to choose its executioner and, as Carley says, saw Germany as the lesser danger. In the event, it proved the briefer one. Other factors enter the equation here, particularly concerning British policy. London and Paris had indeed forced Czechoslovakia to accept amputation of an arm and a leg, but at that point it was still hobbling, not ordered to suicide; 1938 was not 1939, when Anglo-French opinion shifted after Kristallnacht and the occupation of Prague; Poland had a British guarantee as the Czechs had not; and in late July 1939 London and Paris accepted from the Polish government, which knew it faced imminent military destruction, the crucial gift of

Warsaw's pioneering work on the German Enigma coding machine and copies of the machine itself. In the circumstances, pointing a gun at an ally with one hand while grabbing its gift with the other presented problems.

Carley is on firmer ground when he demonstrates, as he does conclusively, the acute Anglo-French distrust of Soviet Russia. Britain and France distrusted each other as well but both assumed that, in the final analysis, the other would be at its side when the crunch came. They did not assume this about the Soviet Union, nor it about them. Britain and France thought Russia would enter the fray only after the capitalist powers had destroyed each other, as had long been Stalin's hope. Carley stresses that the western powers, especially Britain and the United States, feared that war would lead to revolution and the bolshevization of Europe. Events between 1945 and 1950 (including what nearly happened in France and Italy in 1947-8) indicate that this fear was not idle. It is not clear when concern for survival overtook fear of bolshevization, to what degree, in which British and French circles, or when Chamberlain could have carried the mandarins of the Conservative party for a Soviet alliance had he wished it. Carley proves that he did not wish it and blocked a Russian rapprochement. He further indicates that western politicians (if not military attaches) tended to dismiss Russia's potential military contribution of 100 divisions, stressing their lack of offensive capability. He shrewdly points out that Britain and France lacked that as well and were planning a long war. He argues that the purges equally served as an excuse to dismiss the Red Army; perhaps, though, Britain and France had more reason here since 80% of Soviet officers above the rank of captain were removed. In any event, western fear of communism was as much a key fact as the 100 Soviet divisions.

Carley demonstrates that Britain was not serious about an alliance and that the military mission was a hollow gesture, though perhaps it took on some reality for France when Paris reached utter desperation in August. Carley also stresses that Russian distrust of Britain and France was both acute and justified, though reinforced by historic enmity to Britain and chronic suspicion of capitalist motives. One must ask, however, whether western distrust of the Soviet Union was equally justified and examine the underlying motives of Russian policy insofar as one can. Did Stalin really endorse Litvinov's collective security policy or merely use it to gain time and/or as a tactic to other ends? Did he opt for collective security only when Hitler refused him? These questions will be debated at least until more evidence emerges, though it is clear, as Carley says, that Russia aimed to delay war as long as possible – as did Britain.

Carley believes that Moscow was in earnest about the western alliance to and partially through the futile negotiations with the Anglo-French military mission in mid-August, but his account implies that Russia was trying to prevent agreement. He says, "Soviet instructions anticipated every weakness of the Anglo-French delegations, and their scornful tone foretold no good result." (p. 189) The approach seemed designed to cause maximum Anglo-French embarrassment, and one wonders whether Stalin really thought Polish consent to Russian troop transit was obtainable. Moreover, by Carley's account, Moscow agreed to negotiations with Berlin before the first meeting with the mission and offered Germany a pact while still talking to the delegations. Carley argues for a sudden, catastrophic reversal of Russian policy, but when in fact Stalin made his decision is unclear.

Carley also says, "The objectives of Soviet policy were state security and the recovery of the tsars' lost territories." (p. 212) The implications of this undoubtedly sound statement are vast, whether Moscow was impelled by ideology, habitual Russian imperialism, or both. A case can be made for granting Russia its traditional east-central European sphere, as Paul Schroeder has done on H-Diplo in a contemporary context, but a Tory cabinet of the 1930s was unlikely to accord that to a bolshevized historic foe even in an era of extreme danger – especially when it was so much easier to hope that Germany and Russia would devour each other.

Carley displays fairly consistent sympathy for the Russian diplomatic point of view, though he never condones Stalinist brutality, shows much enthusiasm for Molotov, or fully excuses Russian policy. When there is a clash of evidence, he tends to accept the Russian version. He provides a few minimal, unelaborated statements implying Russian annexationism, as above and as in: "The British feared giving the Soviet Union license to threaten Baltic independence or to spread communism" (p. 169) but does not linger. Despite occasional qualification, he assumes that Moscow was serious about collective security throughout. His heroes are Litvinov, Maiskii, and Vansittart, all proponents of the Anglo-French-Soviet alliance and all lacking power. Litvinov was not a Politburo member and served mainly as a high-level functionary until his ouster, Maiskii an emissary with little policy influence, and in 1938 Vansittart had been promoted to oblivion partly because he resisted appeasement of Germany.

Carley says that appeasement was driven by fear both

of the Nazis and of victory over them because such victory required Soviet aid and thus risked spreading communism westward. This is an important insight – and one more reason why Chamberlain favored peace at almost any price. Carley argues that the feared bolshevization occurred because collective security failed and because of the German-Russian pact, adding, "Indeed, anti-communism helped to compromise western security against Nazi Germany." (p. 257) He continues that if collective security had existed in 1939, the victorious Allies and especially the Poles would have blocked Soviet expansion. This seems a bit much to expect of a Poland presumably occupied by the Red Army at the first shot. Why this blocking of Soviet expansion did not occur as a result of collective security in 1941 with the Red Army starting much further east is unclear.

Nonetheless, Carley is right that the events he describes were part of the early Cold War, and his approach is a refreshing antidote to Cold War rhetoric assuming that all double-dealing lay on one side. A thorough exposition of the Russian viewpoint is immensely valuable, and Carley has made a major contribution to our understanding of Litvinov's thinking. Providing the contents of so many Soviet documents to those who do not read Russian is an important service to Clio's practitioners, for it offers a wealth of valuable and revealing detail. Undoubtedly this book will figure prominently in future debates about the origins of World War II.

At the outset, Carley warns that his story is depressing. Indeed it is. One emerges wondering whether Britain was prepared to fight to the last Frenchman, France to the last Russian, and the Soviet Union to the last capitalist. It is salutary to be reminded with considerable verve that Anglo-French hostility to the Soviet Union played a role in the advent of the Russo-German treaty. How large a role is debatable, and many historians will prefer a more nuanced verdict than Carley's assertion that "The Munich crisis and the failure of Anglo-Franco- Soviet negotiations in 1939 led directly to the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact." (p. 258)

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