

August 27, 1989
Special Analysis: USSR: Balts to Mark 1939
Anniversary Tomorrow

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Summary:

An analysis of planned demonstrations in the Baltics and Soviet efforts to dampen local support for opposition movements.

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Special Analysis

USSR:

Balts To Mark 1939 Anniversary Tomorrow

Nationalists in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are planning demonstrations tomorrow to mark the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact. Although Moscow reportedly intends to renounce the treaty, party officials are trying to play down its significance, fearful that radical nationalists in the Baltic and other non-Russian republics will exploit the renunciation in their drive for independence. Pragmatic Baltic leaders are trying to dampen local expectations about what they regard as a largely symbolic issue.

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Popular fronts and independence groups are organizing a human chain that will link the three Baltic capitals for 15 minutes tomorrow evening. More than 600,000 demonstrators are expected to be on hand to cover the some 600 kilometers from Tallinn through Riga to Vilnius. Lithuanian nationalist groups are sponsoring mass meetings tonight and tomorrow afternoon, while the Latvian National Independence Movement today concludes in Riga a two-day international conference—attended by US and West German Government officials—on national self-determination.

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Both Baltic nationalists and sympathetic republic party officials want to keep pressure on Moscow to denounce the 1939 pact and its secret protocols, which they believe led to the Soviet takeover of the region in July 1940. The popular fronts have organized massive petition drives calling for nullifying the pact and withdrawing the "occupation forces." Last week a Lithuanian legislative commission declared the pact and the Soviet takeover illegal, and the Estonian party leader denounced the treaty and called for its abrogation.

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Moscow Gets Cold Feet

The Balts are frustrated by what they regard as Moscow's foot-dragging. The Congress of People's Deputies commission formed in May to investigate the pact was expected to have published its findings earlier this month. By late last month the commission had finished its draft report, which reportedly recommends that Moscow admit the secret protocols exist and nullify the pact. However, President Gorbachev reportedly has delayed announcing the findings until after tomorrow's anniversary. Politburo member and international affairs chief Yakovlev, who chaired the commission, said last week in *Pravda* that the report would be submitted to the Congress this fall.

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Stalin and Hitler Divvy Up Eastern Europe

A treaty of mutual nonaggression between the USSR and Germany was signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939 by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. Additional secret protocols defined the Soviet and German spheres of influence:

- A secret agreement accompanying the original treaty assigned Estonia, Latvia, and Moldavia (then part of Romania) to the USSR.
- Two protocols signed on 28 September 1939 demarcated the border between the USSR and Germany after the collapse of Poland, confirmed the Soviet occupation of the western Ukraine and Belorussia, and assigned Lithuania to the Soviet sphere of influence.

The original versions of the Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact and the secret protocols apparently do not exist, but copy of them are in archives in the West. In June President Gorbachev said no authentic copy could be found in Soviet repositories. Since last year Baltic periodicals have been printing Western versions of the secret agreements, including a photocopy of the 23 August 1939 protocol supplied to the Lithuanian party newspaper by the West German Foreign Ministry. The party journal *Arguments and Facts* recently became the first central publication to print the protocols.

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The delay in publishing the report probably reflects stiffening opposition among leaders in Moscow to Baltic nationalism. They also probably are worried about the consequences of renouncing the pact.

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[redacted]
Yakovlev's lengthy *Pravda* interview and a statement by party international affairs department chief Falin in *Izvestiya* yesterday, have argued that, while Germany and the USSR admittedly cooperated to divide up Eastern Europe, the pact has no bearing on the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in 1940 and that any discussion of their current legal status must consider today's political realities. Foreign Ministry officials reportedly oppose releasing the report because of fears about reactions in Belorussia, the Ukraine, and Moldavia. Moscow also may be concerned about exacerbating tensions in the wake of last week's strikes by Russian workers in Estonia. [redacted]

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Outlook

Moscow's renunciation of the Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact will help the Baltic nationalist movements by supporting their argument for independence. The most radical groups will push for republic referendums on secession from the USSR or the convening of popular congresses to declare independence. Others may call on Moscow to renegotiate the status of the Baltic republics. [redacted]

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More pragmatic nationalists, however, realize that the victory will be largely symbolic and are trying to dampen local expectations. They do not want to jeopardize a long-term strategy for achieving sovereignty by a quixotic demand for immediate independence. The Lithuanian popular front chairman last week urged people not to overestimate the importance of tomorrow's anniversary because annulment of the pact will not change Lithuania's legal status. Lithuanian and Estonian party officials also have recently cautioned that the Baltic republics will have to work within the existing Soviet system to achieve autonomy. [redacted]

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