



Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov (1890-1986)

BY WINSTON CHURCHILL

Lojko | Source Reading | February 16, 2017

The figure whom Stalin had now moved to the pulpit of Soviet foreign policy deserves some description, not available to the British or French Governments at the time. Vyacheslav Molotov was a man of outstanding ability and cold-blooded ruthlessness. He had survived the fearful hazards and ordeals to which all the Bolshevik leaders had been subjected in the years of triumphant revolution. He had lived and thrived in a society where ever-varying intrigue was accompanied by the constant menace of personal liquidation. His cannon-ball head, black moustache, and comprehending eyes, his slab face, his verbal adroitness and imperturbable demeanour, were appropriate manifestations of his qualities and skill. He was above all men fitted to be the agent and instrument of the policy of an incalculable machine. I have only met him on equal terms, in parleys where sometimes a strain of humour appeared, or at banquets where he genially proposed a long succession of conventional and meaningless toasts. I have never seen a human being who more perfectly represented the modern conception of a robot. And yet with all this there was an apparently reasonable and keenly-polished diplomatist. What he was to his inferiors I cannot tell. What he was to the Japanese Ambassador during the years when after the Teheran

Conference Stalin had promised to attack Japan once the German Army was beaten can be deduced from his recorded conversations. One delicate, searching, awkward interview after another was conducted with perfect poise, impenetrable purpose, and bland, official correctitude. Never a chink was opened. Never a needless jar was made. His smile of Siberian winter, his carefully-measured and often wise words, his affable demeanour, combined to make him the perfect agent of Soviet policy in a deadly world.

Correspondence with him upon disputed matters was always useless, and, if pushed far, ended in lies and insults, of which this work will presently contain some examples. Only once did I seem to get a natural, human reaction. This was in the spring of 1942, when he alighted in Britain on his way back from the United States. We had signed the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, and he was about to make his dangerous flight home. At the garden gate of Downing Street, which we used for secrecy, I gripped his arm and we looked each other in the face. Suddenly he appeared deeply moved. Inside the image there appeared the man. He responded with an equal pressure. Silently we wrung each other's hands. But then we were all

together, and it was life or death for the lot. Havoc and ruin had been around him all his days, either impending on himself or dealt by him to others. Certainly in Molotov the Soviet machine had found a capable and in many ways a characteristic representative — always the faithful Party man and Communist disciple. How glad I am at the end of my life not to have had to endure the stresses which he has suffered; better never be born. In the conduct of foreign affairs Mazarin, Talleyrand, Metternich, would welcome him to their company, if there be another world to which Bolsheviks allow themselves to go.

(Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, volume 1: *The Gathering Storm*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948, pp. 368-69.)