

The Soviet Diplomatic Corps and Stalin's Purges

ALASTAIR KOCHO-WILLIAMS

IN the 1930s, Soviet diplomats needed to address new challenges that Stalinism brought, both domestically and internationally. This was particularly the case during the purge era in the second half of the decade when diplomats were faced with the difficulties of representing a regime which had unleashed terror on its people, as well as having to deal with the fear that they too might perish in the purges. Soviet diplomats were stretched in new ways by fear and had the task of limiting the damage the purges caused to the Soviet Union's diplomatic efforts. At the same time, the purges hampered the Narkomindel (Narodnyi komissariat inostrannykh del — Peoples' Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) as it was allowed less scope to formulate foreign policy, and the regime withdrew diplomats and diplomatic apparatus from international society. Ultimately the purges decimated the Narkomindel, rendering it impotent, with talented diplomats replaced by a new wave of officials far less capable than their predecessors and unable to act independently of Stalin and Molotov.

This article considers the effects of the purges on diplomats and on Soviet diplomacy. Some elements of this have been dealt with in previous works on the Narkomindel, notably those of Teddy Uldricks and Sabine Dullin.¹ These have looked at the purge of the Narkomindel and its impact on structure and staffing, particularly with a view to the creation of a Narkomindel firmly under Stalin's control. The current article adds new dimensions to these works, in particular dealing with how the Foreign Commissar Maksim Maksimovich Litvinov and the

Alastair Kocho-Williams is Lecturer in International History at the University of the West of England.

¹ The main works that consider the purge of the Narkomindel are Teddy J. Uldricks, 'The Impact of the Great Purges on the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs', *Slavic Review*, 36, 1977, 2, pp. 187–203 (hereafter, 'The Impact of the Great Purges'), and *Diplomacy and Ideology: The Origins of Soviet Foreign Relations, 1917–1930*, London, 1979 (hereafter, *Diplomacy and Ideology*); Sabine Dullin, 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs: The Fate of an Administration under Stalin, 1930–39', in Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano (eds), *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914–1945*, Milan, 2000, pp. 137–38 (hereafter, 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs'); ead., *Des hommes d'influence: les ambassadeurs de Staline en Europe, 1930–1939*, Paris, 2001 (hereafter, *Des hommes d'influence*); ead., 'Sovetskie diplomati v epoku stalinskikh represii. Novie lyudi?', *Neprikosnovenyi zapas*, 4, 2002, 24, pp. 42–48, and ead., 'Une diplomatie plébéienne? Profils et compétences des diplomates soviétiques, 1936–1945', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 44, 2003, 2–3, pp. 437–64.

Soviet diplomats serving under him responded to the purges, what their opinions of them were, and how they dealt with the challenge of explaining the purges to observers abroad, as well as examining the numbers that perished, what they were accused of, why the Narkomindel was so vulnerable to the purges, how the Narkomindel struggled to function effectively during a difficult time in Soviet foreign relations and how the regime achieved a withdrawal from international affairs.

What is provided here is a case study of a commissariat and its members during Stalin's purges. The situation of the Narkomindel cannot be considered to be typical of the process of the purges in their wider context, nor can it necessarily be seen as indicative of the ways in which the purge swept through Soviet agencies. Indeed, the Narkomindel was somewhat atypical during the purges, in part because of the international prominence of diplomats, and thus we cannot take the number of individuals purged as an indicator of the extent of the purge of certain sectors of society. As such, this article does not attempt to answer the broad questions of the rationale for the purges, but rather addresses their effect on the Soviet Union's diplomats in carrying out their duties, as they were obliged to comply with the rules of Stalinist and diplomatic society. In this respect, the current article differs from previous work on the fate of the Narkomindel during the purges by focusing on the way in which diplomats responded to the pressures of the time, considering the implications for Soviet diplomacy towards the end of the 1930s.

In order to make some sense of the purge of the Narkomindel it needs to be considered, at least in part, as a means for the regime to restrict the Narkomindel in the conduct of Soviet international affairs in the second half of the 1930s, which hampered diplomats' abilities to carry out their duties and led to serious changes in Soviet diplomacy by 1939. In the first half of the 1930s Litvinov had gone to great lengths to create an agency staffed with officials who were able to function on their own initiative.² It would seem, as the 1930s went on and paranoia increased, that this was seen as problematic by the regime, and so there was a desire to limit the freedom that the Narkomindel and its diplomats had gained. The beginning of this was a process of withdrawal of the diplomatic apparatus and, with it, the potential for supposed harm caused through it by contact with foreigners. In the second half of the 1930s, the Soviet Union began a programme of foreign consular closure within its borders, coupled with the closure of some of its own

² Ivan Maiskii typified Litvinov's management of the Narkomindel as that of a factory overseer. Ivan Maiskii, *Vospominaniia sovetskogo posla*, Moscow, 1964, 2 vols, 1, p. 138; id., *Before the Storm: Recollections*, London, 1944, p. 18; Arthur Pope, *Maxim Litvinoff*, New York, 1943, p. 147.

consulates overseas. This seems to have been motivated by the Terror following Sergei Kirov's murder in December 1934.³ Kirov's murder was used by Stalin to promote a threat of counter-revolutionary elements acting within the Soviet Union that needed to be rooted out. The regime sought out class enemies, those guilty of hampering the Soviet Union's economic development, dissidents and spies. Many of those accused in the latter categories were foreign, making them even more suspect. There was also a concern, as the Terror progressed, to restrict the international visibility of the process. In an era of spy scares, the general distrust of foreigners that arose during the Terror only served to further the policy of closing consulates. Claimed as an added dimension was the desire to put the Soviet Union on an equal footing with other powers by having the same number of consulates abroad as foreign powers had within the Soviet Union.⁴

The closures began in February 1936 with the Consulate General in Mukden, China, which was deemed unnecessary. There was a respite until August 1937 when two consulates in Manchukuo were closed, followed by a demand a month later that Japan close its consulates in Odessa and Novosibirsk. During the summer and autumn of 1937, the Soviet Union demanded the closure of fourteen consulates, with further demands in early 1938 that Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Czechoslovakia close theirs. Others had already been closed by Germany and Italy.⁵ This was a programme ordered from above, although it is clear that some diplomats supported the move. On 28 January 1938, closure of the British Consulate in Leningrad was discussed in the Politburo, following notes from Vladimir Petrovich Potemkin advising that such action be taken. On 27 March 1938, the Politburo decided to liquidate the embassy in Vienna, further stressing that it would not be replaced with a consulate. On 23 March 1939, it ordered the closure of the Prague embassy, to be changed to a Consulate-General.⁶ While these

³ Kirov's murder is widely viewed as the event that sparked the terror in the Soviet Union. It remains a matter of debate as to whether Stalin played a role in Kirov's death, or whether he just used it as a pretext to launch a programme of rooting out 'enemies of the people'.

⁴ Henderson to Secretary of State, 361.00/12, 14 May 1937, in United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, Washington, D.C., 1933-1939 (hereafter *FRUS: Soviet Union, 1933-1939*), pp. 374-76; *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR* (hereafter, *DVP SSSR*), Moscow, 21 vols, 1957-77, p. 718, as quoted in Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, Birmingham, 1984, pp. 154-55.

⁵ Eugene Magerovsky, 'The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, 1917-1946', unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1975, p. 337.

⁶ Politburo Protocol no. 57, 28 January 1938, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter, RGASPI), f. 17, op. 162, d. 22, l. 113, reproduced in G. M. Adibekov (ed.), *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Evropa: resheniia 'osoboi papki,' 1923-1939*, Moscow, 2001, p. 358; Politburo Protocol no. 59, 27 March 1938, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 22, l. 159, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 359; Politburo Protocol no. 1, 23 March 1939, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 25, l. 1, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 370.

steps were likely related to the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and Germany's annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938, from the point of view of diplomats it was problematic. In particular Foreign Commissar Litvinov saw this process as damaging to Soviet prestige, in terms of closing the borders, but also because it went against all of the concessions the Narkomindel had worked so hard to achieve. From the point of view of diplomacy, these moves by the Politburo were offensive to the nations with which the Soviet Union had succeeded in establishing a dialogue.

These problems extended even to foreign diplomats. Along with the closure of the consulates and resultant problems for foreigners in receiving visas, issues arose with receiving foreign diplomats in the Soviet Union. Litvinov handled these situations with caution, and requested permission from the Central Committee for such visits.⁷ Soviet diplomats had been deeply aggrieved in the 1920s by the lack of extension of the basic courtesies for diplomats, such as allowing them to enter countries and to be afforded immunity from customs searches.⁸ From his personal understanding of the issue, Litvinov was displeased that the paranoia of the purge era forced the infliction of such diplomatic discourtesies on others, and he feared the potential repercussions for the Soviet Union's diplomatic relations.

These matters placed serious limitations on foreign diplomats working within the Soviet Union. By the end of 1938, the foreign diplomatic community was restricted to Moscow, and the NKVD did its best to isolate foreign diplomats from the Soviet people.⁹ The Soviet Union adopted a policy of containment in order to keep its citizens away from contact with foreigners and to prevent foreign surveillance of the Soviet Union. The restrictions on diplomats and their movements ran counter to accepted norms of diplomacy, and must be seen as further evidence of the harm that the purges and their surrounding paranoia were doing to Soviet diplomatic prestige.

Closing consulates and effectively withdrawing from this aspect of international relations impacted heavily on how the Narkomindel could go about its business. That such a withdrawal was the precise opposite to the intentions of Soviet diplomats at the time is striking, and

⁷ Politburo Protocol no. 67, 18 January 1939, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 24, l. 85, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 368.

⁸ Letter from Maksim Litvinov to Rex Leeper 3 April 1918, Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter, AVP RF), f. 04, op. 4, d. 234, p. 16, l. 23; Telegram from Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Chicherin no. 285/1068, December 1918, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 2, p. 1, d. 1, l. 13; Alastair Kocho-Williams, 'The Culture of Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, Lamsdorf to Litvinov, 1900-1939,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, Manchester, 2006 (hereafter, 'The Culture of Russian and Soviet Diplomacy'), pp. 102-03.

⁹ Nora Murray, *I Spied for Stalin*, New York, 1951 (hereafter, *I Spied for Stalin*), p. 65.

demonstrates the power that Stalin had over the Narkomindel. The regime, however, did not stop with closing consulates as part of the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from international affairs, as it also turned to purging the Narkomindel and its diplomats.

Following the Bukharin trial in March 1938, it was rumoured that there would be a 'special trial of diplomats'.¹⁰ The trial never happened, but the Narkomindel was unable to escape the purges that ravaged the party in the late 1930s. Diplomats were recalled and shot, or else killed trying to escape the clutches of the NKVD.¹¹ The purge of the Narkomindel was, like the closure of the consulates, in part born out of the paranoia that those who had had contact with foreigners had turned against the Soviet Union. With the rash of spy scares accompanying the purges, Soviet diplomats with their foreign contacts became natural suspects for such activity. The purge of the Narkomindel had much to do with the contacts that Soviet diplomats had established during their service abroad, and policies developed during the purges show steps to limit the contact diplomats had with the outside world. In February 1938, there was a move to have all ambassadors serving in Europe and Asia return to Moscow for six weeks every six months, and those in Japan, the US and China every eight months.¹² There was a palpable aura of distrust, and this was only heightened by those who had contacts overseas. Accusations of foreign espionage and international Trotskyism led to diplomats being arrested as enemies of the people.¹³ Much of the suspicion was based upon diplomats' contact with foreigners, in itself frequently damning enough, although charges were often trumped up to make crimes appear worse. At the beginning of the purge of the Narkomindel, Stern had been arrested in Berlin as a Gestapo agent. In Spain the Soviet Embassy was ravaged in late 1937 and early 1938, as almost the entirety of its staff was accused of collaborating with Franco's regime, at a time when the Communists were struggling in the Spanish Civil War. All this highlights the Soviet regime's paranoia and creation of scapegoats and enemies, with

¹⁰ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, London, 1993, p. 423.

¹¹ Aleksandr Barmin, *Memoirs of a Soviet Diplomat: Twenty Years in the Service of the U.S.S.R.*, London, 1938 (hereafter, *Memoirs*), pp. 16–17, 23–24.

¹² Politburo decision, 28 February 1938, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 996, as quoted in Dullin 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs', pp. 137–38.

¹³ Arosev to Khrushchev, 22 March 1937, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter, GARF), f. 5283, op. 1a, d. 342, ll. 41–48, as quoted in Michael David-Fox, 'Stalinist Westerniser? Aleksandr Arosev's Literary and Political Depictions of Europe', *Slavic Review*, 62, 2003, 4, p. 757; Smirnov to Andreev, 22 March 1938, GARF, f. 5283, op. 2a, d. 1, ll. 1–5 as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 757. Arosev had served as attaché in Latvia (1921–22), France (1924–25), Sweden (1926–27), Lithuania (1927–28) and Czechoslovakia (1928–33) before becoming head of the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS) between 1934 and 1937.

particular emphasis on the supposed threat from outsiders and the resulting effect on the Narkomindel.¹⁴

This was problematic for diplomats in the purge era since, by the very nature of their profession, having had contact with foreign societies, they were seen to have been at least partially seduced by capitalist decadence. In Solzhenitsyn's novel *The First Circle*, the diplomat Innokenty Volodin is arrested amidst the typical trappings of capitalism — jazz, fine wines and licentious women.¹⁵ The label 'cosmopolitan' was applied to diplomats as a pejorative term that implied a person was engaged in espionage.¹⁶ Litvinov was frequently labelled an anglophile, largely due to the time he spent as an émigré in London and because his wife was English. The regime launched an assault on individuals engaged in foreign relations over their interests and connections to the world outside the Soviet Union, which can only point to a fear of the cultural contamination of its diplomats as a result of their contact with foreigners and non-Soviet ideas.

Regarding contacts with foreigners, there is an almost complete reversal of what were nominally the principles of Soviet diplomacy. The purge era brought a return to Soviet diplomatic isolation, this time self-imposed as a result of the state's withdrawal from international society. The Soviet Union closed consulates in order to limit contact with the outside world, and the loss of diplomats serving overseas further contributed to this, returning the diplomatic body to the state in which it had been between the Revolution and the Genoa Conference, paralysed by an inability to function in the diplomatic world.¹⁷ In the

¹⁴ Barmin, *Memoirs*, pp. 16–17; Central Committee of the Soviet Union, *Opredelenie* 4k-14849/55, personal papers in Valentina Vasilevskaia's (Jan Antonovich Berzin's granddaughter) possession. Maria Berzin, 'Commentary on the "delo" of Jan Antonovich Berzin', personal papers in Vasilevskaia's possession, p. 2.

¹⁵ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, London, 1968, p. 91. Catriona Kelly discusses the work in her *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*, Oxford, 2001, p. 231.

¹⁶ 'Cosmopolitan' was frequently applied to Jews in Russia, from tsarist times when pogroms had been carried out against them, and had associations with Zionism. During the New Economic Policy (NEP) era there had been an association of Jews with the amassing of wealth and there was a return to the use of it in the Soviet Union during the latter part of Stalin's reign as 'bezrodnyi kosmopolit' (rootless cosmopolitan). That Litvinov and a number of senior diplomats were Jewish should be noted. There is a secondary sense, following the Second World War, that 'cosmopolitans' believed that some aspect of Western technology or society was superior to Soviet and an implication of involvement in espionage.

¹⁷ Following the Russian Revolution the Soviet Union had found itself in a state of diplomatic isolation. To some extent this was imposed by foreign powers, who continued to support diplomats from the former regime, but was also a result of the Soviet adoption of diplomacy as another means to further revolution. This isolation was effectively ended following the Genoa Conference in 1922. For further details, see Kocho-Williams, 'The Culture of Russian and Soviet Diplomacy'; Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*; James D. Armstrong, 'The Diplomacy of Revolutionary States', in Jan Melissen (ed.), *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice*, Basingstoke, 1999 (hereafter, 'The Diplomacy of Revolutionary States'); id., *Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society*, Oxford, 1993.

light of the debate regarding the 'Great Retreat' from socialism and its international aspect, the limiting of diplomatic apparatus was one possible means of ensuring that the Soviet Union became more introverted, and its citizens less able to have contact with the outside world. Although this time the isolation was caused by the purges rather than by foreign powers, the net result was much the same and it is clear that the domestic politics of terror held the Soviet Union's foreign service in limbo.¹⁸

The NKVD directed the purge of the Narkomindel from within. This was not the first instance of secret police monitoring diplomats: the NKVD (and its forerunners) was already involved in policing the Narkomindel and in rooting out individuals who were not adhering to the prescribed line.¹⁹ Most important in the purges, however, was the NKVD's direct involvement in the Narkomindel's personnel department. In 1937 Vasilii Korzhenko, an NKVD agent, took charge of the department in order to direct the purge.²⁰ Korzhenko policed the entire institution, from the cipher clerks to the most senior ambassadors, watching for any deviation from the party line.²¹ Additionally, the Narkomindel passed lists regarding its personnel to the NKVD, at times denouncing officials, thereby abetting the purge.²² The same was true of the Comintern, for whom involvement with foreigners was a similar issue. Both the Narkomindel and the Comintern were at times directly instructed by the Politburo to engage in such list-making, but more frequently acted on their own initiative to demonstrate their vigilance in rooting out potentially dangerous individuals from

¹⁸ Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*, New York, 1946; David Hoffmann, 'Was There a "Great Retreat" from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered', *Kritika*, 5, 2004, 4, pp. 651–74.

¹⁹ Vladimir Sokolov, 'Poslednaia sluzhebnaia zapiska G. V. Chicherina', *Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, f. 48, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 38–71, reproduced in *Istochnik*, 6, 1995 (hereafter, 'Poslednaia sluzhebnaia zapiska G. V. Chicherina'), p. 108; id., 'Neisvestnyi G. V. Chicherin: iz rassekrechennykh arkhivov MID RF', *Noviaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, vol. 2, pp. 105–15; Grigory Besedovsky, *Revelations of a Soviet Diplomat*, London, 1931, p. 69; Viktor Suvorov, *Aquarium: The Career and Defection of a Soviet Military Spy*, London, 1985, p. 121; Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert, *The Diplomats: 1919–1939*, Princeton, NJ, 1953 (hereafter, *The Diplomats*), p. 255n; Walter Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, New York, 2000, p. 38; 'Gingering up by the Cheka', and 'True Communists', 18 August 1925, *Morning Post*, in *Obzor Angliskoi pressy*, Svodka no. 10, AVP RF, f. 69, op. 13, p. 42, d. 42, l. 11; Kocho-Williams, 'The Culture of Russian and Soviet Diplomacy', pp. 152–53.

²⁰ Barmin, *Memoirs*, p. 17.

²¹ Murray, *I Spied for Stalin*, p. 83.

²² Politburo Protocol no. 68, 2–28 February 1939, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 24, l. 104, reproduced in Grant Adibekov, Kiril Anderson and Kiril Shirinia (eds), *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern: 1919–1943: dokumenty*, Moscow, 2004, p. 772.

their organizations.²³ Complicity with the purges, and indeed in some respects helping their course, was almost unavoidable.

Litvinov, while publicly obliged to acknowledge those members of the Narkomindel who disappeared as guilty of being traitors, was clearly displeased by the effect that the purges had on the Narkomindel in the late 1930s.²⁴ In a letter of 3 January 1939 addressed to Stalin, Litvinov expressed his displeasure and frustration, setting out what the purges had done to the staffing and effectiveness of the Narkomindel. The letter is a clear indictment not just of the purge within the Narkomindel, but of Stalin's lack of understanding of diplomatic courtesy. Litvinov appealed to Stalin in the letter about the harm that was being done to the Narkomindel, effectively demonstrating that Soviet diplomacy was being moulded in the period by the actions of Stalin, rather than by the diplomats as they would have desired. The letter clearly shows Litvinov's protests and his readiness to stand up to Stalin in defence of the Narkomindel and Soviet diplomacy.²⁵

At the time of writing, Litvinov identified nine vacant ambassadorial posts in 'Washington, Tokyo, Warsaw, Bucharest, Barcelona, Kaunas, Copenhagen, Budapest and Sofia', and warned of a tenth possible vacancy in Tehran if the ambassador was not allowed to return from Moscow. In some embassies there had 'been no ambassador for over a year', and Litvinov warned that this could be interpreted by foreign powers as a discourtesy, or at the very least an indicator of insufficiently cordial relations. Certainly he was concerned that 'particularly embarrassing and harmful for [Soviet] relations [was] the absence of an ambassador in Warsaw, Bucharest and Tokyo'. Further to this, the vacant posts raised the question of how foreign states and their diplomats saw the purges. Empty ambassadorial posts, while harmful to Soviet prestige, must surely have implied that the Narkomindel was

²³ A list of Communist Party members 'formerly in other parties, having Trotskyist and Rightist tendencies' sent by F. Kotelnikov to the NKVD, 4 September 1936, RGASPI, f. 546, op. 1, d. 376, ll. 30–36, reproduced in William Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–39*, New Haven, CT and London, 2002, pp. 178–84; Denunciations from Walecki to Ezhov, 26 June 1937, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 252, d. 510, ll. 1–10 reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 228–32; Lists of arrested former members and candidate members of the party organization of the ECCI apparatus, 1939, RGASPI, f. 546, op. 1, d. 434, ll. 25–32, reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 309–18.

²⁴ Report of US Ambassador Davies, 4 March 1937, Joseph Davies Papers, Box 7, Manuscript Division, US Library of Congress, as quoted in Hugh Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West: A Political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov*, Boulder, CO, 1992 (hereafter, *Between the Revolution and the West*), pp. 161–62; Aleksandr Barmin, *One Who Survived: The Life Story of a Russian Under the Soviets*, New York, 1945 (hereafter, *One Who Survived*), p. 45; Joseph E. Davies, *Mission to Moscow: A Record of Confidential Dispatches to the Department of State, Correspondence, Current Diary and Journal Entries Including Notes and Comment up to October 1941*, London, 1942, pp. 167, 262.

²⁵ Letter from Litvinov to Stalin, 3 January 1939, *DVP SSSR*, vol. 22, book 1, p. 10 (hereafter, Litvinov to Stalin, 3 January 1939).

unable to manage its personnel effectively, let alone carry out diplomatic negotiations, and was withdrawing from the international stage.²⁶

Litvinov was clearly aware that there were not simply problems of prestige at play here, but also the extent to which the purges hampered diplomats in their duties. As the Soviets had found in the early 1920s when they attempted to abandon ranks and simply rename diplomats *polpred*, it was difficult for a diplomat of a lesser status to receive an audience with a more senior foreign official.²⁷ The situation, Litvinov goes on to say, was little better at the lower levels of diplomatic staffing with the following unfilled posts: '9 for counsellors, 22 for secretaries, 30 for consuls and vice-consuls and 46 for the other political posts in embassies (heads of press department, attachés and secretaries of consulates).'²⁸

Litvinov clearly felt that the purge of the Narkomindel and the problems it engendered were grave indeed. Even the processes that the Central Committee had set in motion to monitor diplomats, notably bringing them back to Moscow every six to eight months, were difficult to follow because of a lack of suitable personnel in embassies.²⁹ The problems, however, were not limited to the foreign missions or the diplomatic staff. Technical officials were lacking, meaning that the Narkomindel was struggling with administration and with communications.

Litvinov's letter shows the hand of the NKVD, and the ways in which they were restricting his organization, although he takes care not to be overly critical of those responsible for conducting the purge of his commissariat. In this Litvinov shows the difference in political climate from when his predecessor, Georgii Chicherin, had criticized the OGPU for hampering the operations of the Narkomindel.³⁰ The NKVD held sway over the Narkomindel, as its permission was needed for individuals to serve abroad, and this, according to the letter, was not granted to as many individuals as Litvinov and the Narkomindel would have liked. Litvinov's letter suggests that he felt that the NKVD was partially to blame for hampering his agency. He implored Stalin to intervene and restore some means for him to replace officials who had been removed as a result of the purges.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Armstrong, 'The Diplomacy of Revolutionary States', p. 53; Craig and Gilbert, *The Diplomats*, pp. 242–23. *Polpred* means plenipotentiary representative and is a contraction of *polmochnyi predstavitel'*.

²⁸ Litvinov to Stalin, 3 January 1939.

²⁹ Politburo decision, 28 February 1938, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 996, as quoted in Sabine Dullin 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs', pp. 137–38.

³⁰ Sokolov, 'Posledniaia sluzhebnaia zapiska G. V. Chicherina', p. 108.

The letter not only gives an impression of what Litvinov believed to be the motives behind the purge of many Narkomindel officials, but also indicates that the problem went deeper than the disappearance of individuals. From his comments, it appears that there was a complete deadlock on moving new staff into the Narkomindel to replace those whom the purge had claimed. The problem in this respect was, in part, created by the NKVD and the Central Committee refusing to give, and in some cases rescinding, clearance for individuals to work abroad or with secret documents, and partially by the difficulty of finding suitable candidates to replace those lost in the purge. This was compounded by the purging of individuals who had not even begun their service, and by problems of recruiting and training new staff, which Litvinov deemed impossible without a change in the 'attitude' of the NKVD and the Central Committee. The letter, as a whole, is a plea from Litvinov that Stalin recognize that the purge of the Narkomindel was extremely problematic for the organization, and for the conduct of Soviet diplomacy.

The purges went beyond the removal of individual diplomats and Narkomindel officials, also restricting the Narkomindel's work, both practically and as a result of the climate of fear. US diplomats complained that their Soviet counterparts became impossible to talk to, and that they were unwilling to give any information, as they were so afraid of making errors for which they would be severely punished.³¹ Internal channels of communication were harmed as the courier service became impotent, and certain embassies lacked technicians to operate telegraph equipment.³²

Shortly before his defection in 1937, Aleksandr Grigor'evich Barmin, who held the post of chargé d'affaires in Athens, observed that he found the Narkomindel in 'a strange torpor', having received no instructions for several months.³³ Barmin remembered that the purges were not discussed within the Greek mission, and the terror process reduced the Narkomindel and the diplomatic corps to the position of silent supplicants. So great was the fear of being recalled that Soviet diplomats began to be perceived as unwilling to make decisions and not to be trusted to convey accurately information to Moscow.³⁴ The Terror paralysed the Narkomindel into a silent and ineffective organization, a far cry from what it had been previously in the decade, and left it bereft of officials in senior posts.

³¹ Henderson to Secretary of State, 10 June 1937, 861.00/11705, in *FRUS: Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, p. 380.

³² Litvinov to Stalin, 3 January 1939.

³³ Barmin, *One Who Survived*, p. 3.

³⁴ Henderson to Secretary of State, 10 June 1937, 861.00/11705, in *FRUS: Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, p. 380.

The letter also highlights the visibility of the purges and the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from international society. Since diplomats occupied high-profile positions which brought them into contact with foreign political officials, the effects of the purge must have been highly obvious as Soviet diplomats began to be swallowed up by the purge and their posts left vacant. In this respect, the purge of the Narkomindel is similar to that of the officer corps of the army.³⁵ The Narkomindel felt a strong need to limit the visibility of the purge; after 1936 it ceased to publish the annual volume it had published since 1925 in the form of *Ezhegodnik NKID/Annuaire Diplomatique*. This move was clearly a step to avoid embarrassment, as the lists of officials included within the volumes began to read more like a casualty list than a list of where various Soviet officials were serving.³⁶ As the *Ezhegodnik* was a publication from the organization itself, rather than from the central government, one can see the Narkomindel's move in stopping its publication as a clear step to limit damage to Soviet prestige abroad during the purge era. Also telling is the removal of purged diplomats from the pages of history. *Diplomaticheskii slovar'* in its first edition in 1948 contains none of the purged diplomats. Some appear in the second edition (1960–64), a few more in the third (1971), but many were only added in the appendix of the 1984–86 edition, following their rehabilitation.³⁷ Additionally, the names of some of the more prominent diplomats who fell victim to the purge were removed from *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*.³⁸

Despite the NKVD's grip on the Narkomindel, Litvinov sought to limit the purge of the diplomatic corps to the extent of his ability. This was not always easy, and his approach to the purges was largely based on prudence, probably to an extent as a result of institutional self-interest lest he be seen to be protecting individuals during the period. He was present at the Central Committee's plenums, which met to decide the fate of accused individuals, invariably voting with the majority for expulsion from the Party and passing the case on to the NKVD. He worked with the Central Committee, seeking approval for individuals to serve overseas or to accompany him to assemblies

³⁵ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, London, 1971 (hereafter, *Let History Judge*), ch. 6.

³⁶ USSR, Narodnyi komissariat po inostrannym delam, *Ezhegodnik Narodnogo komissariata po inostrannym delam: Annuaire diplomatique du Commissariat du peuple pour les affaires étrangères*, 12 vols, Moscow, 1925–36 (hereafter, *Ezhegodnik Narodnogo komissariata*).

³⁷ A. Ia. Vyshinskii and S. A. Lozovskii (eds), *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 2 vols, Moscow, 1948 (hereafter, *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 1948); A. A. Gromyko, I. N. Zemskov, V. M. Khvostov, *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 3 vols, Moscow, 1960–64; A. A. Gromyko, S. A. Golunskii and V. M. Khvostov (eds), *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 3 vols, Moscow, 1985–87 (hereafter, *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 1985–87).

³⁸ Uldricks, 'Impact of the Great Purges', p. 188.

of the League of Nations.³⁹ Litvinov was being extremely cautious, following the direction that the Central Committee had chosen in the late 1930s.

Litvinov continued to place Soviet diplomatic goals above ideological concerns during the purge era, as he had done before, continuing to show that engagement in diplomacy was more important to him than ideology. When the Central Committee tried to recall Boris Efimovich Shtein, Ambassador in Rome, Litvinov told him on several occasions, 'you are needed in Rome, forbidden to come back'.⁴⁰ In part motivated by the need to maintain diplomatic contact in capitals across Europe in the late 1930s, Litvinov was attempting to preserve the Narkomindel and to keep Soviet diplomacy functioning effectively. On occasion he showed his open disagreement with the Central Committee. When the Central Committee denounced Rykov and Bukharin, Litvinov refused to engage in condemning them.⁴¹ Litvinov was concerned that the accusations should be credible, and in this showed the reflex of a diplomat concerned about the Soviet Union's image abroad. That the Soviet Union's image abroad during the purges was important to diplomats is demonstrated by the fact that Litvinov was not the only senior diplomat who attempted to restrict the purge in the Narkomindel. Vladimir Potemkin, appointed Deputy Foreign Commissar in 1937, also questioned the Central Committee's decisions. In March 1938 he requested a review of the decision against Fedor Semenovich Veinberg, whose departure from the Western Department he feared would be catastrophic, both because of his abilities and his standing in the international community.⁴²

³⁹ Expulsion from the party of Rudzutak and Tukhashevskii, 24 May, of Iakir and Uborevich, 30 May 1937, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 615, as quoted in Dullin, 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs', p. 140; Expulsion of Postyshev, 28 February–2 March 1938; expulsion of Egorov, 9–11 January 1939, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 640, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 140; Letter from Litvinov to Kaganovich, 20 August 1936, AVP RF, f. 05, op. 16, p. 114, d. 1, as quoted in *ibid.*; Letter from Litvinov to Stalin, 5 February 1937, AVP RF, f. 05, op. 17, p. 126, d. 1, as quoted in *ibid.*; telegram from Kaganovich to Stalin, 26 August 1936, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 93, l. 11, reproduced in Oleg Khlevniyuk et al. (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska 1931–1936 gg.*, Moscow, 2001, p. 647; letter from Kaganovich to Stalin, 27 August 1936, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 93, l. 115, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 650; Letter from Kaganovich and Molotov to Stalin, 9 September 1936, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 94, l. 80, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 670.

⁴⁰ Zinov'ev Sheinis, 'Sud'ba Diplomata. Shtrikhi k portretu Borisa Shteina', in N. V. Popov (ed.), *Arkhivny raskryvaiut tainy...: Mezhdunarodnye voprosy: sobitiia i liudi*, Moscow, 2001, p. 301.

⁴¹ 'Materialy fevral'sko-martovskogo plenuma TsK VKP(b) 1937 goda', *Voprosy istorii*, 1992, 2–3, pp. 3–4; 4–5, 3–36; 5–6, 3–29.

⁴² Letter from Potemkin to Andreev, 15 March 1938, AVP RF, f. 05, op. 18, p. 138, d. 3, as quoted in Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence*, p. 243. Fedor Semyonovich Veinberg was Deputy Director (1935–37), and then Director (1937–38), of the Narkomindel's Third Western Department.

Some consideration of the extent of the purge in the Narkomindel must be made if its full impact on Soviet diplomacy is to be understood. It is hard to ascertain from available information the full scale of the purge in the Narkomindel, but it seems, according to Uldricks's work in the late 1970s and Dullin's more recent study, that at least 34 per cent of its officials were dismissed. For those holding 'responsible' posts (approximately 100 individuals) the figures are twice as high; 62 per cent fell victim while 16 per cent maintained their posts, and 14 per cent escaped the purge by dying other than in the purges, or through defection. For 8 per cent there is insufficient information to conclude whether they suffered in the purge or not.⁴³

The figures are even higher if one takes only those who held positions in which they were in charge of a department or embassy. The extent to which senior officials and ambassadors perished is easier to ascertain as a result of their higher prominence. From the upper levels of the central bureaucracy, of the twenty-eight senior officials, the Foreign Commissar and his deputies and chiefs of departments, seven were shot, two were relieved of their posts, six were arrested, there are nine on whose fates there is no information, and four survived including Litvinov. Of the thirty-six individuals who held ambassadorial (including *chargé d'affaires* in the absence of an ambassador) posts in Europe between 1936 and 1939, nine were recalled from their posts, six were shot, one died in office, one defected, one was arrested, and nineteen survived. From an aggregate of these together, for those who directed embassies or departments we have a total of sixty-five (Georgii Aleksandrovich Astakhov was appointed from the central Narkomindel to be *chargé d'affaires* in Berlin during the purges), at least half of whom were victims of the purge in some form. From this it can be seen that the risk of falling victim to the purge was proportionally greater with seniority within the Narkomindel. The table and charts show the relative percentages of senior individuals purged in the Narkomindel.

The table below takes into account the individuals' fates on leaving the Narkomindel, except in the cases where they were arrested and subsequently shot. Some were arrested later, and Raskolnikov defected after being recalled from his post.⁴⁴

⁴³ Uldricks, 'Impact of the Great Purges', p. 190; Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence*, p. 240.

⁴⁴ Sources for this analysis are L. S. Ėremina and A. B. Roginskii (eds), *Rasstrebye spiski: Moscow, 1937-1941; 'Kommunarka', Butovo: kniga pamiati zhertv politicheskikh repressii*, Moscow, 2000; *Ezhegodnik Narodnogo komissariata; Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 1948; *Diplomaticheskii slovar'*, 1985-87; Uldricks, 'The Impact of the Great Purges', pp. 190-91; Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence*, pp. 334-38.

Table 1. *Fate of upper-level Narkomindel officials and ambassadors in the purge*

Fate	Upper level officials	Ambassadors
Shot	N. I. Krestinskii (a. June 1937, s. March 1938) B. S. Stomoniakov (r. summer 1938, a. Dec 1938, s. Oct 1941) P. S. Nazarov (a. May 1939, s. July 41) G. N. Laskevich (a. Nov 1937, s. Aug 1938) A. F. Neuman (a. Aug 1937, s. Apr 1938) A. V. Sabanin (a. Sept 1937, s. Aug 1938) M. A. Plotkin (a. May 1939, s. July 1941)	K. K. Iurenev (Germany) (a. Sept 1937, s. Aug 1938) E. A. Asmus (Finland) (a. Aug 1937, s. Dec 1937) A. A. Bekzadian (Hungary) (a. Nov 1937, s. Aug 1938) B. G. Podolskii (Lithuania) (a. Nov 1937, s. July 1938) Y. K. Davtian (Poland) (a. Nov 1937, s. July 1938) L. M. Karkahan (Turkey) (a. June 1937, s. Dec 1937)
Relieved/ recalled	E. E. Herschelmann (Dec 1937) B. M. Mironov (Aug 1937)	A. F. Merekalov (Germany) (May 1939) F. F. Raskol'nikov (Bulgaria) (Dec 1937, d. April 1938) N. S. Tikhmenev (Denmark) (Dec 1937) M. I. Rosenberg (Spain) (Dec 1937) M. V. Kobetskii (Greece) (1937) S. J. Brodovskii (Latvia) (Oct 1937) I. S. Iakubovich (Norway) (1937) M. S. Ostrovskii (Romania) (Dec 1937) B. E. Shtein (Italy) (Feb 1939)
Arrested	V. N. Barkov (May 1939) A. V. Fekhner (Aug 1937) D. G. Stern (June 1937) F. S. Veinberg (May 1939) S. I. Vinogradov (May 1939) E. A. Gnedin (May 1939)	Y. S. Podolskii (Austria) (Nov 1937)
Defected		F. K. Butenko (Romania) (Feb 1938)
Died in office		A. M. Ustinov (Estonia) (Nov 1937)

Table 1. *Continued*

Fate	Upper level officials	Ambassadors
No information	Y. M. Kozlovski	
	V. V. Egoriev	
	N. E. Rivlina	
	L. E. Berejov	
	G. Y. Bejanov	
	Y. S. Ilinskii	
	V. L. Levin	
	B. D. Rosenblum	
	J. M. Morsthein	

Key: a – arrested; r – recalled or relieved; s – shot.

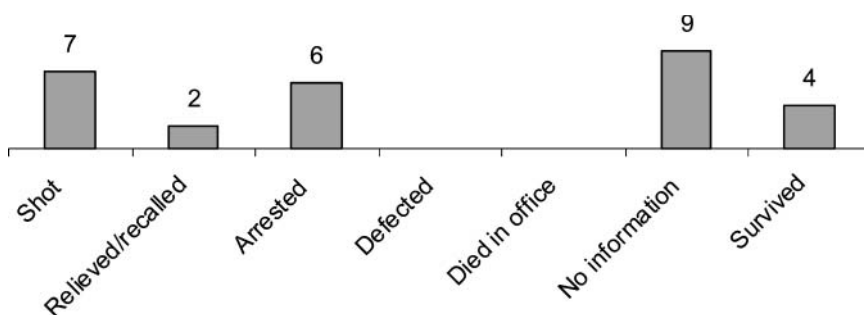


FIGURE 1: Effects of the purges of senior officials in the central Narkomindel

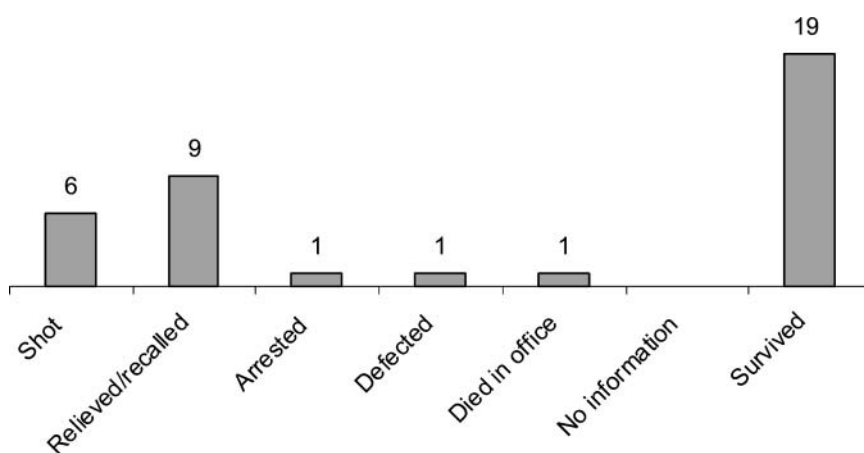


FIGURE 2: Effects of the purges on those holding Ambassadorial posts 1936-39

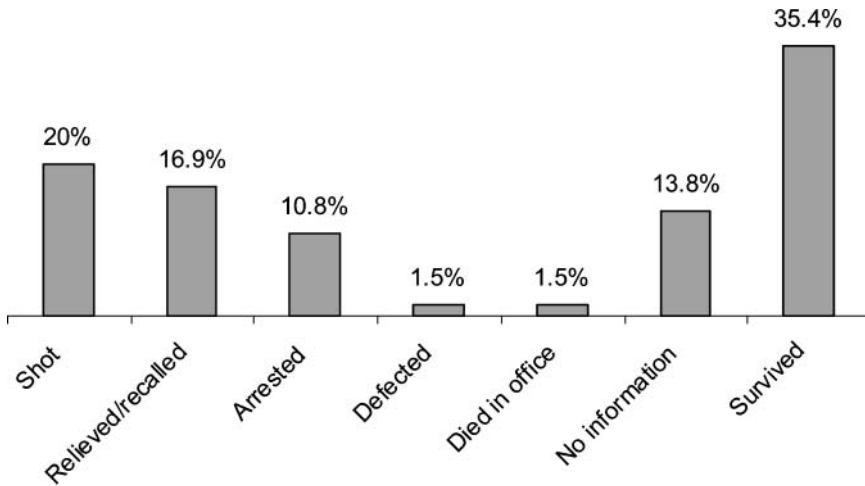


FIGURE 3: Aggregate effect of the purges on Department Chiefs and Ambassadorial posts (100%=65)

As the reshaping of the Narkomindel progressed, the effect on diplomats serving abroad is important, as are their reactions. How concerned were they for their own safety, how did they explain the purges, and how did they represent the Soviet state at the time?

Public support for the purges was the manner in which some Soviet diplomats chose to behave. While this showed the regime that they were loyal, on the basis of the numbers purged it does not appear to have been a good way to avoid being swept up in the purges. It also had the additional dimension of alienating foreign diplomats and even relatively pro-Soviet public opinion as individuals found the purges abhorrent and unjust.⁴⁵ Vociferous support of the purges was not, therefore, a universal approach, nor one that could be deemed to guarantee security. It also had the effect of making the individual appear to the international community to agree with what was going on within the Soviet Union, creating further problems for them in the conduct of diplomacy.

One approach, adopted by Alexandra Kollontai, was silence and withdrawal. Kollontai's appointment books detail her meetings with foreign diplomats and attendance at social occasions. During 1938 she was much more reserved than previously, the appointment book being

⁴⁵ I. Maiskii, *B. Shou i drugie: vospominaniia*, Moscow, 1967, pp. 82–83; 'Memorandum by the Second Secretary of the Embassy in the Soviet Union (Kennan)', 861.00/11675, 13 February 1937, reproduced in *FRUS: Soviet Union, 1933–39*, pp. 362–69; Uldricks, 'The Impact of the Great Purges', p. 189.

half the size from the previous four years, and it is clear that Kollontai dropped out of the active diplomatic circle during 1938. During the first show trial in 1936 her diary writing, which was otherwise almost religiously frequent, stopped for nine months.⁴⁶ One reason for this was the damage that the purge and the Terror had done to the Soviet Union's international image — Kollontai found that problems arose in her interactions with other diplomats.⁴⁷ Her solution seems to have been deliberately to disengage from the diplomatic milieu and remain silent about the atrocities of the purge years in the Soviet Union. For her, at least, silence was the best way to respond to what was happening, as she felt unable to support it. There was a precedent for such behaviour: she had shunned German diplomats after 1933, refusing to acknowledge their presence at functions or to receive them at the embassy. For Kollontai, silence and withdrawal were the best policy when dealing with matters for which she had no taste and which she could not comprehend.

The silence of diplomats such as Kollontai on the purges was also a means of disengaging from aspects of Soviet society, as well as diplomatic circles. By not engaging in the discourse surrounding the purges there was no way to give affirmation to the regime, as one might by 'speaking Bolshevik' and becoming a carrier of the regime's discourse.⁴⁸ Silence on an issue, therefore, was a form of anti-Stalinist behaviour, particularly powerful when translated to the representation of the Soviet Union outside its borders. Diplomats had been made complicit with the purges by having to justify them and by providing information to aid the process, and silence was a means of undoing this. While silence was a weaker form of protest — compared to speaking out against the purges — in the context of the era a diplomat who failed to take the party line risked his or her life, and so silence presented itself as a better option.

Another option, taken by only a few, was to defect. This was a stark way of displaying a lack of support for the purges, as well as being a tactic for self-preservation. In any event, the regime saw defection as a threat to security and took steps to limit its impact on the Soviet Union's

⁴⁶ *Kniga zapisenii iubileinikh dat, visitov, obedy, priemov Kollontai: Diplomaticeskikh, politicheskikh, gosudarstvenikh i drugikh deyateli Shvetsii i poslov raznikh stran v Shvetsii i drugie, 1934–39*, RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 59–64, 67; Alexandra Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskie dnevniki: 1922–1940*, Moscow, 2001, vol. 2; *Diplomaticheskie zapiski, tetrad' trinadtsataya*, RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 25.

⁴⁷ Swedish Press Bulletin no. 3, 7 January 1935, AVP RF, f. 140, op. 19, p. 27, d. 3, ll. 15–16; Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai*, Bloomington, IN and London, 1979, p. 252.

⁴⁸ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley, CA and London, 1995, ch. 5; Jochen Hellbeck, 'Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia', *Kritika*, 1, 2000, 1, pp. 71–96.

international image. The small number of defectors suggests that the steps to limit defection were fairly successful, although another factor must surely have been that it was not necessarily a strategy for avoiding the reach of the NKVD, despite Alexandr Barmin's successful flight on the night he believed he was to be kidnapped.⁴⁹ Fedor Butenko similarly escaped to join a fascist group in Italy, although it was initially claimed that he had been assassinated.⁵⁰ Not all were so fortunate, however, with Fedor Fedorovich Raskol'nikov's death in Paris, allegedly in suspicious circumstances, following his refusal to return to Moscow and defection.⁵¹ Defection was not, from what can be seen in its few instances, a particularly viable option, although it remains unclear how many diplomats may have been apprehended in the process.

There were changes not just for those who already served in the Narkomindel at the outbreak of the purges. In addition to the diplomats accused and killed, the wave of terror had another dimension which seriously harmed the Narkomindel. Diplomats removed during the purges were replaced by individuals who lacked the experience or aptitude to function effectively as diplomats. Individuals from outside the Narkomindel stepped into vacant ambassadorial posts, as well as more minor official positions.⁵² Replacements for diplomats removed during the purges came from two main sources. The first of these sources was the lower levels of the Narkomindel, from which officials moved up into positions vacated higher in the hierarchy. The second source was other commissariats.

This replacement strategy seems to have been a deliberate policy on the part of Stalin and Molotov in the late 1930s as a means of further drawing power away from the Narkomindel and centralizing it. It can be seen in the second wave of purges which swept through the Narkomindel between May and July 1939, following Litvinov's dismissal as Foreign Commissar in May 1939.⁵³ Molotov systematically removed almost all of the personnel who had served in the Chicherin and Litvinov eras. One of the first to go was Korzhenko, who had been brought

⁴⁹ Barmin, *One Who Survived*, pp. 12–16.

⁵⁰ *Izvestia*, 10 February 1938, cited in Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence*, pp. 256–57; Declaration from Litvinov to the Romanian Government, 17 February 1938, published in *Izvestia*, 18 February 1938, cited in *ibid.*, p. 257.

⁵¹ Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence*, p. 21; Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, p. 795.

⁵² Litvinov to Stalin, 3 January 1939.

⁵³ For more on Litvinov's decline, see Albert Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov, Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52, 2000, 1, pp. 33–57; Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Fall of Litvinov: A Revisionist View', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 1992, 4, pp. 639–57; Dullin, 'Litvinov and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs'.

in to direct the purge of the Narkomindel.⁵⁴ US diplomats reported that Molotov replaced 'almost the entire staff', including all but two of the department heads and more than 90 per cent of the minor officials.⁵⁵ Foreigners saw this as being entirely motivated by increasing centralization in foreign affairs as a result of Molotov's appointment and hence a desire to remove every individual connected to the Litvinov administration.⁵⁶ It appears that Stalin and Molotov were attempting to destroy all remnants of the Narkomindel's autonomy, to fill it with inexperienced individuals (most of whom had never had any contact with foreigners), and to concentrate all of the power in Soviet foreign affairs in the hands of the central government.

The purge of the Narkomindel removed diplomats from diplomatic activity not only physically but also psychologically, making them unable to present themselves in it effectively because they were too frightened, or obliged to stay silent on the horrors happening in the Soviet Union. A new generation of diplomats unable to function in diplomacy, coupled with the ravages of the purges, destroyed the Narkomindel, and Soviet diplomacy was reshaped to the point that compliance with the rules of Stalinist society took priority over integration into the diplomatic milieu.

The purges also hampered decision-making in Soviet foreign policy since they caused Soviet diplomats to be pushed out of diplomatic relations with foreign powers. Other states viewed the purges with some distaste, and came to question whether they wished to be involved diplomatically with the Stalinist regime, particularly as Soviet diplomats were no longer considered to be reliable. In addition to this, the purge of the Soviet High Command led Britain and France seriously to doubt the Soviet Union's ability to fight a war with Germany, severely hampering Litvinov's drive for collective security.⁵⁷ That the Soviet Union was not involved at Munich in 1938 shows the culmination of doubts as to whether the Soviets could be trusted to honour their agreements. This severely restricted Soviet foreign policy options as the chances of containing Germany through a tripartite alliance with Britain and France looked bleak. It was surely becoming increasingly clear to the Narkomindel that Britain and France were not interested in collective security and in including the Soviets in a treaty against Hitler, but were rather leaving them to fend for themselves.⁵⁸ In this

⁵⁴ Murray, *I Spied for Stalin*, p. 126.

⁵⁵ Telegram from Grummon to Secretary of State no. 861.021/46, 6 July 1939, reproduced in *FRUS: Soviet Union, 1933-1939*, pp. 770-73.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 772.

⁵⁷ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World 1917-1991*, London and New York, 1997, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁸ W. P. Coates and Zelda Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations*, pp. 590-600; *Daily Telegraph*, 5 December 1938 as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 600; Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West*, pp. 160-64.

way the purges can be seen to have shaped Soviet diplomacy in the late 1930s not just in the way it shaped the diplomatic corps and the ways in which diplomats were able to behave, but also in terms of the options that remained open to the Soviet Union in its foreign policy. The policy of collective security espoused by Litvinov proved unworkable in the face of the purges, and ultimately the only option that remained for the Soviet Union to maintain security in the coming war was to conclude a pact with Nazi Germany.

Effectively crippling the Narkomindel, the purges were at least in part the regime's reaction to a political agency with too much independence and contact with the outside world. While many diplomats before 1936 had had great experience of the world beyond the confines of the Soviet Union, many new appointees in the latter half of the decade had never travelled abroad. The purge of the Narkomindel, while fitting into a broader regime policy, was specifically designed to curb the independence of Soviet diplomats and the Narkomindel, and to bring it under the control of the central government. In this light, Molotov's appointment as Foreign Commissar in 1939 was clearly orchestrated to ensure that Stalin had complete control over the Narkomindel.

The Narkomindel was drastically affected by the purges. After 1936 there was a significant change in Soviet diplomacy, this time imposed by the regime's behaviour rather than as a response to external factors governing integration into diplomatic society that the Soviets had been unable to change during the 1920s and early 1930s. As paranoia regarding Soviet citizens' contact with foreigners rose, so the Narkomindel and its diplomats were withdrawn from the diplomatic field. Personnel and apparatus were removed and not replaced as consulates were closed and the purge swept through the Narkomindel, limiting Soviet engagement in diplomacy. Diplomats, however, remained committed to furthering the Soviet Union's diplomatic efforts and were unhappy at the regime's actions which led to the retreat from international diplomatic society as consulates were closed and vacancies created by the purges were left unfilled.

The purges had other implications for Soviet diplomacy. Obligated to represent the Soviet Union abroad, Soviet diplomats were forced to explain and legitimize the purges to foreigners. Some responded by publicly supporting the purges, while others chose to remain silent. Soviet diplomats, like their counterparts everywhere, needed to represent their country in a positive light, and it is clear that the purges restricted their ability to do this effectively.

At home the situation was also problematic. Litvinov made some bold attempts to limit the damage the purge of the Narkomindel had on Soviet diplomacy, although he was powerless to stop the NKVD

from going about its tasks and was obliged to look on as his agency was rendered impotent and many of the officials of the Narkomindel's formative years were consumed by the purges. Late in the day, perhaps too late, he tried to appeal to Stalin on the grounds of the harm that was being done to Soviet diplomacy, but with little success.

For the Narkomindel and its diplomats, the purges brought the era of relatively 'normal' diplomatic engagement and culture to an end. With the dismissal of Litvinov in May 1939 Stalin had broken Litvinov's Commissariat and rendered Soviet diplomats effectively impotent in international affairs. This clearly did not go unnoticed on the international stage, and had an impact on Soviet prestige as well as the regard in which its remaining diplomats were held. Ultimately, the purges resulted in an ending of traditional diplomacy for the Soviet Union, as heads of state moved to meet directly with Stalin in preference to dealing with ineffective diplomats, leading to the summitry of the Second World War and the Cold War.