**Joachim von Ribbentrop**

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*"Ribbentrop" redirects here. For other people with the surname, see* [*Ribbentrop (surname)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ribbentrop_(surname))*.*

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| **Joachim von Ribbentrop** | |
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| [**Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_German_foreign_ministers) | |
| **In office** 4 February 1938 – 30 April 1945 | |
| [**Führer**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%BChrer) | [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) |
| **Preceded by** | [Konstantin von Neurath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_von_Neurath) |
| **Succeeded by** | [Arthur Seyss-Inquart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Seyss-Inquart) |
| [**German Ambassador to the Court of St. James**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embassy_of_Germany_in_London) | |
| **In office** 1936–1938 | |
| **Appointed by** | Adolf Hitler |
| **Preceded by** | [Leopold von Hoesch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_von_Hoesch) |
| **Succeeded by** | [Herbert von Dirksen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_von_Dirksen) |
| **Personal details** | |
| **Born** | Ulrich Friedrich Wilhelm Joachim Ribbentrop (1893-04-30)30 April 1893 [Wesel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesel), [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire) |
| **Died** | 16 October 1946(1946-10-16) (aged 53) [Nuremberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg), [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupied_Germany) |
| **Political party** | [National Socialist German Workers' Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Socialist_German_Workers%27_Party) (NSDAP) |
| **Spouse(s)** | Anna Elisabeth Henkell (m. 1920) |
| **Relations** | [Rudolf von Ribbentrop](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_von_Ribbentrop) (son) |
| **Children** | 5 |
| **Profession** | Businessman, diplomat |
| **Religion** | [Protestant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant) |
| **Signature** |  |
| **Military service** | |
| **Allegiance** | [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire) |
| **Service/branch** | [Heer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heer) |
| **Unit** | 12th Hussar Regiment |
| **Battles/wars** | [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) |

**Ulrich Friedrich Wilhelm Joachim von Ribbentrop** (30 April 1893 – 16 October 1946) was [Foreign Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_for_Foreign_Affairs_(Germany)) of [Nazi Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany) from 1938 until 1945. A successful businessman, he was appointed German Ambassador to London in 1936.

Ribbentrop first came to [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler)'s notice as a well-travelled businessman with more knowledge of the outside world than most senior Nazis and as an authority on world affairs. He offered his house for the secret meetings in January 1933 that resulted in Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany. He became a close confidant of the Führer, to the disgust of some party members, who thought him superficial and lacking in talent. He was nevertheless appointed Ambassador to the Court of St James's (for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) in 1936 and then Foreign Minister in February 1938.

Before [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), he played a key role in brokering the [Pact of Steel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pact_of_Steel) (with [fascist Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Italy)) and the Soviet–German non-aggression pact, known as the [Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop_Pact). After 1941, Ribbentrop's influence declined.

Arrested in June 1945, Ribbentrop was tried at the [Nuremberg Trials](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_Trials) and convicted for his claimed role in starting World War II and enabling [the Holocaust](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust). On 16 October 1946 he became the first of those sentenced to death to be hanged, given [Hermann Göring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_G%C3%B6ring)'s suicide moments before.

**Early life**

Joachim von Ribbentrop was born in [Wesel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesel), [Rhenish Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhine_Province), to Richard Ulrich Friedrich Joachim Ribbentrop, a career army officer, and his wife Johanne Sophie Hertwig. From 1904 to 1908, Ribbentrop took [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language) courses in a school at [Metz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metz), the [German Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Empire)'s most powerful fortress. A former teacher later recalled that Ribbentrop "was the most stupid in his class, full of vanity and very pushy". His father was [cashiered](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cashiering) from the [German Imperial Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Imperial_Army) in 1908—after repeatedly disparaging [Kaiser Wilhelm II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_II_of_Germany) for his alleged homosexuality—and the Ribbentrop family were often short of money. For the next 18 months, the family moved to [Arosa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arosa), Switzerland, where the children continued to be taught by French and English private tutors, and Joachim Ribbentrop spent his free time skiing and mountaineering. Following the stay in Arosa, Joachim Ribbentrop was sent to England for a year to improve his knowledge of the English language. Fluent in both French and [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language), young Ribbentrop lived at various times in [Grenoble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grenoble), France and [London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London), before travelling to [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada) in 1910.

He worked for the [Molsons Bank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molsons_Bank) on [Stanley Street](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Street,_Montreal) in [Montreal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreal), and then for the engineering firm M. P. and J. T. Davis on the [Quebec Bridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_Bridge) reconstruction. He was also employed by the [National Transcontinental Railway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Transcontinental_Railway), which constructed a line from [Moncton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moncton) to [Winnipeg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnipeg). He worked as a journalist in New York City and Boston, but returned to Germany to heal from [tuberculosis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuberculosis). He returned to [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada) and set up a small business in [Ottawa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottawa) importing German wine and champagne. In 1914, he competed for Ottawa's famous [Minto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minto) ice-skating team, participating in the Ellis Memorial Trophy tournament in Boston in February.

When [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) began, Ribbentrop left Canada (which, as part of the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire), was at war with Germany) for the neutral United States. He sailed from [Hoboken, New Jersey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoboken,_New_Jersey) on 15 August 1914 on the [Holland-America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holland_America_Line) ship *The Potsdam*, bound for [Rotterdam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotterdam). He returned home and enlisted in the 12th [Hussar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hussar) Regiment.

He served first on the [Eastern Front](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Front_(World_War_I)), but was later transferred to the [Western Front](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Front_(World_War_I)). He earned a commission and was awarded the [Iron Cross](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Cross). In 1918 1st Lieutenant Ribbentrop was stationed in [Istanbul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul) as a staff officer. During his time in [Turkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey), he became friends with another staff officer named [Franz von Papen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_von_Papen).

In 1919 Ribbentrop met Anna Elisabeth Henkell ("Annelies" to her friends), the daughter of a wealthy Wiesbaden wine-producer. They married on 5 July 1920, and Ribbentrop travelled Europe as a wine salesman. He and Annelies had five children. In 1925 his aunt, Gertrud von Ribbentrop, adopted him, which allowed him to add the [aristocratic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristocracy) [*von*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Von) to his name.

**Early Nazi career**

In 1928, Ribbentrop was introduced to [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) as a businessman with foreign connections who "gets the same price for German champagne as others get for French champagne". [Wolf-Heinrich Graf von Helldorf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolf-Heinrich_Graf_von_Helldorf), with whom Ribbentrop had served in the 12th Torgau Hussars in the First World War, arranged the introduction. Ribbentrop and his wife joined the [National Socialist German Workers' Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NSDAP) on 1 May 1932. Ribbentrop began his political career that summer by offering to be a secret emissary between Chancellor of Germany [Franz von Papen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_von_Papen), his old wartime friend, and Hitler. His offer was initially refused. Six months later, though, Hitler and Papen accepted his help.

Their change of heart occurred after General [Kurt von Schleicher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_von_Schleicher) ousted Papen in December 1932. This led to a complex set of intrigues in which Papen and various friends of president [Paul von Hindenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_von_Hindenburg) negotiated with Hitler to oust von Schleicher. On 22 January 1933, State Secretary [Otto Meissner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Meissner) and Hindenburg's son [Oskar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oskar_von_Hindenburg) met Hitler, Göring, and Frick at Ribbentrop's home in Berlin's exclusive [Dahlem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dahlem_(Berlin)) district. Over dinner, Papen made the fateful concession that if von Schleicher's government were to fall, he would abandon his demand for the Chancellorship and instead use his influence with president von Hindenburg to ensure that Hitler got the Chancellorship.

Ribbentrop was not popular with the Nazi Party's [*Alte Kämpfer*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alte_K%C3%A4mpfer) (Old Fighters); they nearly all disliked him. British historian Laurence Rees described Ribbentrop as "the Nazi almost all the other leading Nazis hated". [Joseph Goebbels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Goebbels) expressed a common view when he confided to his diary that "Von Ribbentrop bought his name, he married his money, and he swindled his way into office".

During most of the [Weimar Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic) era, Ribbentrop was apolitical and displayed no [anti-Semitic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-semitism) prejudices. A visitor to a party Ribbentrop threw in 1928 recorded that Ribbentrop had no political views beyond a vague admiration for [Gustav Stresemann](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Stresemann), fear of Communism, and a wish to restore the monarchy. Several [Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin) Jewish businessmen who did business with Ribbentrop in the 1920s and knew him well later expressed astonishment at the vicious anti-Semitism Ribbentrop later displayed in the [Third Reich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Reich), saying that they did not see any indications that he had held such views when they knew him. As a partner in his father-in-law's champagne firm, Ribbentrop did business with Jewish bankers, and organized the Impegroma Importing Company ("Import und Export großer Marken") with Jewish financing.

**Early diplomatic career**

**Background**

Ribbentrop became Hitler's favorite foreign-policy adviser, partly by dint of his familiarity with the world outside Germany, but also by flattery and sycophancy. One German diplomat later recalled that "Ribbentrop didn't understand anything about foreign policy. His sole wish was to please Hitler". In particular, Ribbentrop acquired the habit of listening carefully to what Hitler was saying, memorizing the *Führer's* pet ideas, and then later presenting Hitler's ideas as his own – a practice that much impressed Hitler as proving Ribbentrop was an ideal National Socialist diplomat. Ribbentrop quickly learned that Hitler always favored the most radical solution to any problem, and accordingly tended his advice in that direction as a Ribbentrop aide recalled:

When Hitler said 'Grey', Ribbentrop said 'Black, black, black'. He always said it three times more, and he was always more radical. I listened to what Hitler said one day when Ribbentrop wasn't present: 'With Ribbentrop it is so easy, he is always so radical. Meanwhile, all the other people I have, they come here, they have problems, they are afraid, they think we should take care and then I have to blow them up, to get strong. And Ribbentrop was blowing up the whole day and I had to do nothing. I had to break – much better!'

Another factor that aided Ribbentrop's rise was Hitler's distrust of, and disdain for, Germany's professional diplomats. He suspected that they did not entirely support his revolution. But the Foreign Office diplomats loyally served the government and rarely gave Hitler grounds for criticism. The Foreign Office diplomats were ultra-nationalist, authoritarian, and anti-Semitic. As a result, there was enough overlap in values between the two groups to allow most of them to work comfortably for the Nazis. Hitler never quite trusted the Foreign Office and was on the lookout for someone to carry out his foreign-policy goals.

**Undermining Versailles**

The Nazis and Germany's professional diplomats shared the goal of destroying the [Treaty of Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles) and restoring Germany as a great power. In October 1933, German Foreign Minister Baron [Konstantin von Neurath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_von_Neurath) presented a note at the [World Disarmament Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Disarmament_Conference) announcing that it was unfair that Germany should remain disarmed by Part V of the Versailles treaty, and demanded that the other powers either disarm to Germany's level, or that they abolish Part V and allow Germany *Gleichberechtigung* (“equality of armaments”). When France rejected Neurath's note, Germany stormed out of the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations) and the World Disarmament Conference. It all but announced its intention to unilaterally violate Part V. Consequently, there were several calls in France that autumn for a [preventive war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preventive_war) to put an end to the Nazi regime while Germany was still more-or-less disarmed.

But in November, Ribbentrop arranged a meeting between French journalist [Fernand de Brinon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernand_de_Brinon), who wrote for the [*Le Matin*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Matin_(France)) newspaper, and Hitler, during which Hitler stressed what he claimed to be his love of peace and his friendship towards France. Hitler's meeting with de Brinon had a huge effect on French public opinion, and helped to put an end to the calls for a preventive war; it convinced many in France that Hitler was a man of peace who only wanted to do away with Part V.

**Special Commissioner for Disarmament**

In 1934, Hitler named Ribbentrop Special Commissioner for [Disarmament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disarmament). In his early years, Hitler's goal in foreign affairs was to persuade the world that he wished to reduce [military spending](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defence_budget) by making idealistic but very vague disarmament offers (in the 1930s, the term disarmament was used to describe arms-limitation agreements). At the same time, the Germans always resisted making concrete arms-limitations proposals, and they went ahead with increased military spending on grounds that other powers would not take up German arms-limitation offers. Ribbentrop was tasked with ensuring that the world remained convinced that Germany sincerely wanted an arms-limitation treaty while also ensuring that no such treaty was ever developed.

On 17 April 1934, French Foreign Minister [Louis Barthou](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Barthou) issued the so-called "Barthou note," which led to concerns on the part of Hitler that the French would ask for sanctions against Germany for violating Part V of the Versailles treaty. Ribbentrop volunteered to stop the rumored sanctions, and visited London and Rome. During his visits, Ribbentrop met with Simon and [Benito Mussolini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benito_Mussolini), and asked them to postpone the next meeting of the Bureau of Disarmament, in exchange for which Ribbentrop offered nothing in return other than promising better relations with Berlin. The meeting, though, went ahead as scheduled. But because no sanctions were sought against Germany, Ribbentrop could claim success.

**Dienststelle Ribbentrop**

In August 1934, Ribbentrop founded an organization linked to the Nazi Party called the *Büro Ribbentrop* (later renamed the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*). It functioned as an alternative foreign ministry. The *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*, which had its offices directly across from the Foreign Office's building on the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin, had in its membership a collection of [*Hitlerjugend*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitler_Youth) alumni, dissatisfied businessmen, former reporters, and ambitious [Nazi Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Party) members, all of whom tried to conduct a foreign policy independent of, and often contrary to, the Foreign Office.

Ribbentrop engaged in diplomacy on his own. He visited France and met Foreign Minister [Louis Barthou](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Barthou). During the meeting, Ribbentrop suggested that Barthou meet Hitler at once to sign a Franco-German non-aggression pact. Ribbentrop wanted to buy time to complete German rearmament by removing preventive war as a French policy option. The Barthou-Ribbentrop meeting infuriated Neurath because the two had met without bothering to inform the Foreign Office beforehand.

Though the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop* was concerned with German foreign relations with every part of the world, it emphasized [Anglo-German relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-German_relations), as Ribbentrop knew that Hitler favored an alliance with Britain. As such, Ribbentrop worked hard during his early diplomatic career to realize Hitler's dream of an anti-Soviet Anglo-German alliance. Ribbentrop made frequent trips to Britain, and upon his return he always reported to Hitler that most British people longed for an alliance with Germany. In November 1934, Ribbentrop visited Britain, where he met with [George Bernard Shaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw), Sir [Austen Chamberlain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austen_Chamberlain), [Lord Cecil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cecil,_1st_Viscount_Cecil_of_Chelwood), and [Lord Lothian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Kerr,_11th_Marquess_of_Lothian). On the basis of Lord Lothian's praise for the natural friendship between Germany and Britain, Ribbentrop informed Hitler that all elements of British society wished for closer ties with Germany. His report delighted Hitler, causing him to remark that Ribbentrop was the only person who told him "the truth about the world abroad". Because the Foreign Office's diplomats were not so sunny in their appraisal of the prospects for an alliance, Ribbentrop's influence with Hitler increased. Ribbentrop's personality, with his disdain for diplomatic niceties, meshed with what Hitler felt should be the relentless dynamism of a revolutionary regime.

**Ambassador-plenipotentiary at large**

Hitler rewarded Ribbentrop by appointing him *Reich* Minister Ambassador-Plenipotentiary at Large. In that capacity, Ribbentrop negotiated the [Anglo-German Naval Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-German_Naval_Agreement) (A.G.N.A.) in 1935 and the [Anti-Comintern Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Comintern_Pact) in 1936.

**Anglo-German Naval Agreement**

Neurath did not think the A.G.N.A. was possible. So to discredit his rival, he appointed Ribbentrop head of the delegation sent to London to negotiate it. Once the talks began, Ribbentrop issued Sir [John Simon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Simon,_1st_Viscount_Simon) an ultimatum. He informed Simon that if Germany's terms were not accepted in their entirety, the German delegation would go home. Simon was angry with this demand and walked out of the talks. But to everyone's surprise, the next day the British accepted Ribbentrop's demands and the A.G.N.A. was signed in London on 18 June 1935 by Ribbentrop and Sir [Samuel Hoare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Hoare,_1st_Viscount_Templewood), the new British Foreign Secretary. This diplomatic success did much to increase Ribbentrop's prestige with Hitler, who called the day the A.G.N.A. was signed "the happiest day in my life". He believed it marked the beginning of an Anglo-German alliance, and ordered celebrations throughout Germany to mark the event.

Immediately after the A.G.N.A. was signed, Ribbentrop followed up with the next step that was intended to create the Anglo-German alliance, namely the [*Gleichschaltung*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleichschaltung) (co-ordination) of all societies demanding the restoration of Germany's former colonies in Africa. On 3 July 1935, it was announced that Ribbentrop would head the efforts to recover Germany's former African colonies. Hitler and Ribbentrop believed that demanding colonial restoration would pressure the British into making an alliance with the *Reich* on German terms. But there was a difference of opinion between Ribbentrop and Hitler: Ribbentrop sincerely wished to recover the former German colonies, whereas for Hitler, colonial demands were just a negotiating tactic. Germany would renounce its demands in exchange for a British alliance.

**Anti-Comintern Pact**



General [Hiroshi Ōshima](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroshi_%C5%8Cshima), the Japanese Military Attaché and later Ambassador to Germany. Ōshima was one of the few diplomats who were friends with Ribbentrop.

The [Anti-Comintern Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Comintern_Pact) of November 1936 marked an important change in German foreign policy. The Foreign Office had traditionally favored a policy of friendship with China with an [informal Sino-German alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sino-German_cooperation_(1911%E2%80%931941)) being created by the late 1920s. Neurath very much believed in maintaining Germany's good relations with China and mistrusted Japan. Ribbentrop was opposed to the Foreign Office's pro-China orientation and instead favored an alliance with Japan.

To this end, Ribbentrop often worked closely with General [Hiroshi Ōshima](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroshi_%C5%8Cshima), who served first as the Japanese military attaché, and then as Ambassador in Berlin, to strengthen German-Japanese ties despite furious opposition from the [Wehrmacht](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wehrmacht) and the Foreign Office, which preferred closer Sino-German ties. The origins of the Anti-Comintern Pact went back to the summer and fall of 1935, when in an effort to square the circle between seeking a *rapprochement* with Japan and Germany's traditional alliance with China, Ribbentrop and Ōshima devised the idea of an anti-Communist alliance as a way to bind China, Japan, and Germany together. But when the Chinese made it clear that they had no interest in such an alliance (especially given that the Japanese regarded Chinese adhesion to the proposed pact as way of subordinating China to Japan), both Neurath and War Minister [Field Marshal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_Marshal) [Werner von Blomberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner_von_Blomberg) persuaded Hitler to shelve the proposed treaty lest it damage Germany's good relations with China. Ribbentrop for his part, who valued Japanese friendship far more than that of the Chinese, argued that Germany and Japan should sign the pact without Chinese participation. By November 1936, a revival of interest in a German-Japanese pact in both Tokyo and Berlin led to the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in Berlin. When the Pact was signed, invitations were sent to Italy, China, Britain, and Poland to join. But of the invited powers, only the Italians would ultimately sign. The Anti-Comintern Pact marked the beginning of the shift on Germany's part from China's ally to Japan's ally.

**Veterans exchanges**

In 1935, Ribbentrop arranged for a series of much-publicized visits of World War I veterans to Britain, France, and Germany. Ribbentrop persuaded the [British Legion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Legion) (the leading veterans' group in Britain) and many French veterans' groups to send delegations to Germany to meet German veterans as the best way to promote peace. At the same time, Ribbentrop arranged for members of the [*Frontkämpferbund*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stahlhelm,_Bund_der_Frontsoldaten), the official German World War I veterans' group, to visit Britain and France to meet veterans there. The veterans' visits and attendant promises of "never again" did much to improve the "New Germany's" image in Britain and France. In July 1935, Brigadier Sir Francis Featherstone-Godley led the British Legion's delegation to Germany. The [Prince of Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_VIII_of_the_United_Kingdom), the Legion's patron, made a much-publicized speech at the Legion's annual conference in June 1935 stating he could think of no better group of men than those of the Legion to visit and carry the message of peace to Germany, and stated that he hoped that Britain and Germany would never fight again. As for the contradiction between German rearmament and his message of peace, Ribbentrop argued to whoever would listen that the German people had been "humiliated" by the Versailles treaty, that Germany wanted peace above all, and German violations of Versailles were part of an effort to restore Germany's "self-respect". By the 1930s, much of British opinion had been convinced that the treaty was monstrously unfair and unjust to Germany, so as a result, many in Britain like [Thomas Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jones_(T._J.)) were very open to Ribbentrop's message that if only Versailles could be done away with, then European peace would be secured.

**Ambassador to the United Kingdom**

In August 1936, Hitler appointed Ribbentrop [Ambassador](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambassador_(diplomacy)) to the United Kingdom with orders to negotiate the Anglo-German alliance. Ribbentrop arrived to take up his position in October 1936. The two-month delay between his appointment and his arrival owed to the fracas following State Secretary Prince von Bülow's death. His time in London was marked by an endless series of social gaffes and blunders that worsened his already poor relations with the British Foreign Office.

To help with his move to London, and with the design of the new German Embassy Ribbentrop had built (the existing Embassy was insufficiently grand for him), he, at his wife's suggestion, hired a Berlin interior decorator named [Martin Luther](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_(diplomat)). Luther proved to be a master intriguer and became Ribbentrop's favorite hatchet man.

Ribbentrop did not understand the King's limited role in government; he thought King [Edward VIII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_VIII_of_the_United_Kingdom) could dictate British foreign policy. He convinced Hitler that he had Edward's support; but this, like his belief that he had impressed British society, was a tragic delusion. Ribbentrop often woefully misunderstood both British politics and society. During the [abdication crisis of December 1936](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdication_crisis_of_1936), Ribbentrop reported to Berlin that the reason the crisis had occurred was an anti-German Jewish-Masonic-reactionary conspiracy to depose Edward (whom Ribbentrop represented as a staunch friend of Germany), and that civil war would soon break out in Britain between the King's supporters and those of Prime Minister [Stanley Baldwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Baldwin)'s. Ribbentrop's civil-war statements were greeted with incredulity by those British people who heard them.

Ribbentrop's habit of summoning tailors from the best British firms, making them wait for hours and then sending them away without seeing him with instructions to return the next day, only to repeat the process, did immense damage to his reputation in British high society. London's tailors retaliated for this abuse by telling all their well-off clients that Ribbentrop was impossible to deal with. In an interview, his secretary Reinhard Spitzy stated "He [Ribbentrop] behaved very stupidly and very pompously and the British don't like pompous people". In the same interview, Spitzy called Ribbentrop "pompous, conceited and not too intelligent", and stated he was an utterly insufferable man to work for. In addition, the fact that Ribbentrop chose to spend as little time as possible in London in order to stay close to Hitler irritated the British Foreign Office immensely, as Ribbentrop's frequent absences prevented the handling of many routine diplomatic matters. ([Punch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punch_(magazine)) referred to him as the *"Wandering Aryan"* for his frequent trips home.) As Ribbentrop alienated more and more people in Britain, Göring warned Hitler that Ribbentrop was a "stupid ass". Hitler dismissed Göring's concerns: "but after all, he knows quite a lot of important people in England", leading Göring to reply "*Mein Führer*, that may be right, but the bad thing is, they know *him*".

In February 1937, Ribbentrop committed a notable social gaffe by unexpectedly greeting King [George VI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_VI_of_the_United_Kingdom) with a stiff-armed Nazi salute: the gesture nearly knocked over the King, who was walking forward to shake Ribbentrop's hand. Ribbentrop further compounded the damage to his image and caused a minor crisis in Anglo-German relations by insisting that henceforward all German diplomats were to greet heads of state with the "German greeting", who were in turn to return the fascist salute. The crisis was resolved when Neurath pointed out to Hitler that under Ribbentrop's rules, if the Soviet Ambassador were to give the communist clenched-fist salute, then Hitler would be obliged to return it. On Neurath's advice, Hitler disavowed Ribbentrop's demand that King George receive and give the "German greeting".

Most of Ribbentrop's time was spent either demanding that Britain sign the [Anti-Comintern Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Comintern_Pact) or that London return the former German colonies in Africa. But he also devoted considerable time to courting what he called the "men of influence" as the best way to achieve an Anglo-German alliance. Ribbentrop believed the British aristocracy comprised some sort of secret society that ruled from behind the scenes, and if he could befriend enough members of Britain's "secret government", he could bring about the alliance. Almost all of the initially favorable reports Ribbentrop provided to Berlin about the alliance's prospects were based on friendly remarks about the "New Germany" from various British aristocrats like Lord Londonderry and Lord Lothian; the rather cool reception that Ribbentrop received from British Cabinet ministers and senior bureaucrats did not make much of an impression on him at first. In 1935, Sir [Eric Phipps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Phipps), the [British Ambassador to Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Ambassadors_from_the_United_Kingdom_to_Germany), complained to London about Ribbentrop's British associates in the [Anglo-German Fellowship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-German_Fellowship), that they created "false German hopes as in regards to British friendship and caused a reaction against it in England, where public opinion is very naturally hostile to the Nazi regime and its methods". In September 1937, the British Consul in [Munich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munich), writing about the group Ribbentrop had brought to the Nuremberg Party Rally, reported that there were some "serious persons of standing among them" and that an equal number of Ribbentrop's British contingent were "eccentrics and few, if any, could be called representatives of serious English thought, either political or social, while they most certainly lacked any political or social influence in England". In June 1937, when [Lord Mount Temple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilfrid_Ashley,_1st_Baron_Mount_Temple), the Chairman of the Anglo-German Fellowship, asked to see the British Prime Minister [Neville Chamberlain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neville_Chamberlain) after meeting Hitler in a visit arranged by Ribbentrop, [Robert Vansittart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Vansittart,_1st_Baron_Vansittart), the British Foreign Office's Undersecretary wrote a memo stating that:

"The P.M. [Prime Minister] should certainly not see Lord Mount Temple – nor should the S[ecretary] of S[tate]. We really must put a stop to this eternal butting in of amateurs – and Lord Mount Temple is a particularly silly one. These activities – which are practically confined to Germany – render impossible the task of diplomacy.

After Vansittart's memo, members of the Anglo-German Fellowship ceased to see Cabinet ministers after going on Ribbentrop-arranged trips to Germany.

In February 1937, before a meeting with the [Lord Privy Seal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Privy_Seal), [Lord Halifax](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._F._L._Wood,_1st_Earl_of_Halifax), Ribbentrop suggested to Hitler that Germany, Italy, and Japan begin a worldwide propaganda campaign with the aim of forcing Britain to return the former German colonies in Africa. Hitler turned down this idea of Ribbentrop's, but nonetheless during his meeting with Lord Halifax, Ribbentrop spent much of the meeting demanding that Britain sign an alliance with Germany and return the former German colonies. The German historian [Klaus Hildebrand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaus_Hildebrand) noted that as early as the Ribbentrop–Halifax meeting the differing foreign policy views of Hitler and Ribbentrop were starting to emerge with Ribbentrop more interested in restoring the pre-1914 German *Imperium* in Africa than conquest of Eastern Europe. Following the lead of [Andreas Hillgruber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andreas_Hillgruber), who argued that Hitler had a *Stufenplan* (stage by stage plan) for world conquest, Hildebrand argued that Ribbentrop may not have fully understood what Hitler's *Stufenplan* was, or alternatively in pressing so hard for colonial restoration was trying to score a personal success that might improve his standing with Hitler. In March 1937, Ribbentrop attracted much adverse comment in the British press when he gave a speech at the [Leipzig Trade Fair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leipzig_Trade_Fair) in Leipzig, where he declared that German economic prosperity would be satisfied either "through the restoration of the former German colonial possessions, or by means of the German people's own strength". The implied threat that if colonial restoration did not occur, then the Germans would take back by force their former colonies attracted a large deal of hostile commentary on the inappropriateness of an Ambassador threatening his host country in such a manner.

His negotiating style, a mix of bullying bluster and icy coldness coupled with lengthy monologues praising Hitler, alienated many. The American historian [Gordon A. Craig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_A._Craig) once observed that of all the voluminous memoir literature of the diplomatic scene of 1930s Europe, there are only two positive references to Ribbentrop. Of the two references, General [Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Geyr_von_Schweppenburg), the German military attaché in London, commented that Ribbentrop had been a brave soldier in World War I, while the wife of the Italian Ambassador to Germany, Elisabetta Cerruti, called Ribbentrop "one of the most diverting of the Nazis". In both cases the praise was limited, with Cerruti going on to write that only in the Third Reich was it possible for someone as superficial as Ribbentrop to rise to be a minister of foreign affairs, while Geyr von Schweppenburg called Ribbentrop an absolute disaster as Ambassador in London. The British historian/television producer [Laurence Rees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence_Rees) noted for his 1997 series [*The Nazis: A Warning from History*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Nazis:_A_Warning_from_History) that every single person interviewed for the series who knew Ribbentrop expressed a passionate hatred for him. One German diplomat, Herbert Richter, called Ribbentrop "lazy and worthless" while another, Manfred von Schröder, was quoted as saying Ribbentrop was "vain and ambitious". Rees concluded that "No other Nazi was so hated by his colleagues".

In November 1937, Ribbentrop was placed in a highly embarrassing situation when his forceful advocacy of the return of the former German colonies led to the British Foreign Secretary [Anthony Eden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Eden) and the French Foreign Minister [Yvon Delbos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yvon_Delbos) offering to open talks on returning the former German colonies, in return for which the Germans would make binding commitments to respect their borders in [central](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Europe) and eastern Europe. Since Hitler was not interested in obtaining the former colonies, especially if the price was a brake on expansion into eastern Europe, Ribbentrop was forced to turn down the Anglo-French offer that he had largely brought about. Immediately after turning down the Anglo-French offer on colonial restoration, Ribbentrop for reasons of pure malice ordered the *Reichskolonialbund* to increase the agitation for the former German colonies, a move which exasperated both the Foreign Office and [Quai d'Orsay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quai_d%27Orsay).

Ribbentrop's inability to achieve the alliance that he had been sent out for frustrated him, as he feared it could cost him Hitler's favor, and it made him a bitter [Anglophobe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglophobia). As the Italian Foreign Minister, Count [Galeazzo Ciano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galeazzo_Ciano), noted in his diary in late 1937, Ribbentrop had come to hate Britain with all the "fury of a woman scorned".Ribbentrop (and Hitler for that matter) never understood that British foreign policy aimed at the [appeasement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appeasement) of Germany, not an alliance.

When Ribbentrop travelled to Rome in November 1937 to oversee Italy's adhesion to the Anti-Comintern Pact, he made clear to his hosts that the pact was really directed against Britain. As Count Ciano noted in his diary, the Anti-Comintern Pact was "anti-Communist in theory, but in fact unmistakably anti-British". Believing himself to be in a state of disgrace with Hitler over his failure to achieve the British alliance, Ribbentrop spent December 1937 in a state of depression, and together with his wife, wrote two lengthy documents for Hitler denouncing Britain. In the first of his two reports to Hitler, which was presented on 2 January 1938, Ribbentrop stated that "England is our most dangerous enemy". In the same report, Ribbentrop advised Hitler to abandon the idea of a British alliance, and instead embrace the idea of an alliance of Germany, Japan, and Italy, to destroy the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire).

Ribbentrop wrote in his "Memorandum for the *Führer*" that "a change in the status quo in the East to Germany's advantage can only be accomplished by force", and that the best way to achieve this change was to build a global anti-British alliance system. Besides converting the Anti-Comintern Pact into an anti-British military alliance, Ribbentrop argued that German foreign policy should work to "furthermore, winning over all states whose interests conform directly or indirectly to ours". By the last statement, Ribbentrop clearly implied that the Soviet Union should be included in the anti-British alliance system he had proposed.

**Foreign Minister of the *Reich***

In early 1938 Hitler asserted his control of the military-foreign policy apparatus by, in part, sacking Neurath. On 4 February 1938, Ribbentrop succeeded Neurath as Foreign Minister. Ribbentrop's appointment was generally taken at the time and since as indicating that German foreign policy was moving in a more radical direction. In contrast to Neurath's cautious and less bellicose nature, Ribbentrop unequivocally supported war in 1938–39.

Ribbentrop's time as Foreign Minister can be divided into three periods. In the first, from 1938 to 1939, he tried to persuade other states to align themselves with Germany for the coming war. In the second, from 1939 to 1943, Ribbentrop attempted to persuade other states to enter the war on Germany's side or at least maintain pro-German neutrality. In the final phase, from 1943 to 1945, he had the task of trying to keep Germany's allies from leaving her side. During the course of all three periods, Ribbentrop met frequently with leaders and diplomats from Italy, Japan, [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania), Spain, [Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria), and Hungary. During all this time, Ribbentrop feuded with various other Nazi leaders. As time went by, Ribbentrop started to oust the Foreign Office's old diplomats from their senior positions and replace them with men from the *Dienststelle*. As early as 1938, 32% of the offices in the Foreign Ministry were held by men who previously served in the *Dienststelle*.

One of Ribbentrop's first acts as Foreign Minister was to achieve a total [volte-face](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volte-face) in Germany's Far Eastern policies. Ribbentrop was instrumental in February 1938 in persuading Hitler to recognize the Japanese [puppet state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puppet_state) of [Manchukuo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchukuo) and to renounce German claims upon her former colonies in the Pacific, which were now held by Japan. By April 1938, Ribbentrop had ended all German arms shipments to China and had all of the [German Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Army_(Wehrmacht)) officers serving with the [Kuomintang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuomintang) government of [Chiang Kai-shek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Kai-shek) recalled (with the threat that the families of the officers in China would be sent to concentration camps if the officers did not return to Germany immediately). In return, the Germans received little thanks from the Japanese, who refused to allow any new German businesses to be set up in the part of China they had occupied, and continued with their policy of attempting to exclude all existing German (together with all other Western) businesses from Japanese-occupied China. At the same time, the ending of the informal Sino-German alliance led Chiang to terminate all of the concessions and contracts held by German companies in Kuomintang China.

**Munich Agreement and Czechoslovakia's destruction**



The French Premier [Édouard Daladier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89douard_Daladier) (center) with Ribbentrop at the [Munich Summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munich_Agreement) 1938

Baron [Ernst von Weizsäcker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_von_Weizs%C3%A4cker), (the State Secretary 1938–1943) opposed the general trend in German foreign policy towards attacking Czechoslovakia: he feared that it might cause a general war that Germany would lose. Weizsäcker had no moral objections to the idea of destroying Czechoslovakia; he was only opposed to the timing of the attack. Weizsäcker favored the idea of a "chemical" destruction of Czechoslovakia in which Germany, Hungary, and Poland would close their frontiers to destabilize Czechoslovakia economically. He strongly disliked Ribbentrop's idea of a "mechanical" destruction of Czechoslovakia via war, which he saw as too risky. But despite all of their reservations and fears about Ribbentrop—whom they saw as recklessly seeking to plunge Germany into a general war before the *Reich* was ready—neither Weizsäcker nor any of the other professional diplomats were prepared to confront their chief.

Before the Anglo-German summit at Berchtesgaden on 15 September 1938, Henderson and Weizsäcker worked out a private arrangement that Hitler and Chamberlain were to meet with no advisers present as a way of excluding the ultra-hawkish Ribbentrop from attending the talks. Hitler's interpreter [Paul Schmidt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Schmidt_(translator)) later recalled that it was "felt that our Foreign Minister would prove a disturbing element" at the Berchtesgaden summit. In a moment of pique at his exclusion from the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting, Ribbentrop refused to hand over to Chamberlain Schmidt's notes of the summit, a move which caused much annoyance on the British side. Ribbentrop spent the last weeks of September 1938 looking forward very much to the German-Czechoslovak war he expected to break out on 1 October 1938. Ribbentrop regarded the [Munich Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munich_Agreement) as a diplomatic defeat for Germany, as it deprived Germany of the opportunity to wage the war to destroy Czechoslovakia that Ribbentrop wanted to see; the [Sudetenland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudetenland) issue, which was the ostensible subject of the German-Czechoslovak dispute, had been just a pretext for German aggression. During the Munich Conference, Ribbentrop spent much of his time brooding unhappily in the corners. Ribbentrop told the head of Hitler's Press Office, Fritz Hesse, that the Munich Agreement was "first-class stupidity…All it means is that we have to fight the English in a year, when they will be better armed…It would have been much better if war had come now". Like Hitler, Ribbentrop was determined that in the next crisis, Germany would not have its professed demands met in another Munich-type summit, and that the next crisis to be caused by Germany would result in the war that Chamberlain had "cheated" the Germans out of at Munich.



Baron [Ernst von Weizsäcker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_von_Weizs%C3%A4cker), the State Secretary of the *Auswärtiges Amt* 1938–43

In the aftermath of Munich, Hitler was in a violently anti-British mood caused in part by his rage over being "cheated" out of the war to "annihilate" Czechoslovakia that he very much wanted to have in 1938, and in part by his realization that Britain would neither ally herself nor stand aside in regard to Germany's ambition to dominate Europe. As a consequence, after Munich, Britain was considered to be the main enemy of the *Reich*, and as a result, the influence of ardently Anglophobic Ribbentrop correspondingly rose with Hitler.

Partly for economic reasons, and partly out of fury over being "cheated" out of war in 1938, in early 1939, Hitler decided to destroy the rump state of Czecho-Slovakia (as Czechoslovakia had been renamed in October 1938). Ribbentrop played an important role in setting in motion the crisis that was to result in the end of Czecho-Slovakia by ordering German diplomats in [Bratislava](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bratislava) to contact Father [Jozef Tiso](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jozef_Tiso), the Premier of the Slovak regional government, and pressuring him to declare independence from [Prague](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prague). When Tiso proved reluctant to do so on the grounds that the autonomy that had existed since October 1938 was sufficient for him, and to completely sever links with the Czechs would leave Slovakia open to being annexed by Hungary, Ribbentrop had the German Embassy in [Budapest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest) contact the Regent, Admiral [Miklós Horthy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikl%C3%B3s_Horthy). Admiral Horthy was advised that the Germans might be open to having more of Hungary restored to former borders, and that the Hungarians should best start concentrating troops on their northern border at once if they were serious about changing the frontiers. Upon hearing of the Hungarian mobilization, Tiso was presented with the choice of either declaring independence with the understanding that the new state would be in the German sphere of influence, or seeing all of Slovakia absorbed into Hungary. When as a result, Tiso had the Slovak regional government issue a declaration of independence on 14 March 1939, the ensuing crisis in Czech-Slovak relations was used as a pretext to summon the Czecho-Slovak president [Emil Hácha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emil_H%C3%A1cha) to Berlin over his "failure" to keep order in his country. On the night of 14–15 March 1939, Ribbentrop played a key role in the German annexation of the Czech part of Czecho-Slovakia by bullying the [Czechoslovak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia) president Hácha into transforming his country into a German [protectorate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protectorate) at a meeting in the [Reich Chancellery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reich_Chancellery) in Berlin. On 15 March 1939, German troops occupied the Czech area of Czecho-Slovakia, which then became the [*Reich* Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protectorate_of_Bohemia_and_Moravia). On 20 March 1939, Ribbentrop summoned the Lithuanian Foreign Minister [Juozas Urbšys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juozas_Urb%C5%A1ys) to Berlin and informed him that if a Lithuanian plenipotentiary did not arrive at once to negotiate turning over the [Memelland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaip%C4%97da_Region) to Germany the Luftwaffe would raze [Kaunas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaunas) to the ground. As a result of Ribbentrop's [ultimatum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1939_German_ultimatum_to_Lithuania) on 23 March, the Lithuanians agreed to return Memel (modern Klaipėda, Lithuania) to Germany.

In March 1939, Ribbentrop assigned the largely ethnic Ukrainian [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpathian_Ruthenia) region of Czecho-Slovakia, which had just proclaimed its independence as the Republic of [Carpatho-Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpatho-Ukraine), to Hungary, which then proceeded to annex it after a short war. The significance of this lies in that there had been many fears in the Soviet Union in the 1930s that the Germans would use [Ukrainian nationalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_nationalism) as a tool for breaking up the Soviet Union. The establishment of an autonomous Ukrainian region in Czecho-Slovakia in October 1938 had promoted a major Soviet media campaign against its existence on the grounds that this was part of a Western plot to support separatism in the [Soviet Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Soviet_Socialist_Republic). By allowing the Hungarians to destroy Europe's only Ukrainian state, Ribbentrop had signified that Germany was not interested (at least for the moment) in sponsoring Ukrainian nationalism. This in turn helped to improve German-Soviet relations by demonstrating that German foreign policy was now primarily anti-Western rather than anti-Soviet.

Initially, Germany hoped to transform Poland into a satellite state, but by March 1939 German demands had been rejected by the Poles three times, which led Hitler to decide, with enthusiastic support from Ribbentrop, upon the destruction of Poland as the main German foreign policy goal of 1939. On 21 March 1939, Hitler first went public with his demand that Danzig rejoin the *Reich* and for "extra-territorial" roads across the [Polish Corridor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_Corridor). This marked a significant escalation of the German pressure on Poland, which until then had been confined to private meetings between German and Polish diplomats. That same day, on 21 March 1939, Ribbentrop presented a set of demands to the Polish Ambassador Józef Lipski about Poland allowing the Free City of Danzig to return to Germany in such violent and extreme language that it led to the Poles to fear their country was on the verge of an immediate German attack. Ribbentrop had used such extreme language, in particular his remark that if Germany had a different policy towards the Soviet Union then Poland would cease to exist, that it led to the Poles ordering partial [mobilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobilization) and placing their armed forces on the highest state of alert on 23 March 1939. In a protest note at Ribbentrop's behavior, Colonel Beck reminded the German Foreign Minister that Poland was an independent country and was not some sort of German protectorate which Ribbentrop could bully at will. Ribbentrop in turn sent out instructions to the German Ambassador in Warsaw, Count Hans-Adolf von Moltke, that if Poland agreed to the German demands, then Germany would ensure that Poland could partition Slovakia with Hungary and be ensured of German support for annexing the Ukraine. If the Poles rejected his offer, then Poland would be considered an enemy of the *Reich*. On 26 March, in an extremely stormy meeting with the Polish Ambassador Józef Lipski, Ribbentrop accused the Poles of attempting to bully Germany by their partial mobilization and violently attacked them for only offering consideration of the German demand about the "extra-territorial" roads. The meeting ended with Ribbentrop screaming that if Poland were to invade the Free City, then Germany would go to war to destroy Poland. When the news of Ribbentrop's remarks was leaked to the Polish press despite Colonel Beck's order to the censors on 27 March, it caused anti-German riots in Poland with the local N.S.D.A.P headquarters in the ethnically mixed town of Lininco destroyed by a mob. On 28 March, Colonel Beck told Moltke that if any attempt to change the status of Danzig unilaterally would be regarded by Poland as a *casus belli*. Though the Germans were not planning an attack on Poland in March 1939, Ribbentrop's bullying behavior towards the Poles destroyed whatever faint chance there was of Poland allowing Danzig to return to Germany.

The German occupation of the Czech area of Czecho-Slovakia on the Ides of March, in total contravention of the Munich Agreement that had been signed less than six months before, infuriated British and French public opinion and lost Germany all sympathy. Such was the state of public fury that it appeared possible for several days afterwards that the Chamberlain government might fall due to a backbencher rebellion. Even Ribbentrop's standard line that Germany was only reacting to an unjust Versailles treaty, and really only wanted peace with everyone, which had worked so well in the past, failed to carry weight. Reflecting the changed mood, the Conservative M.P [Alfred Duff Cooper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Duff_Cooper) wrote in a letter to *The Times*:

“Some of us are getting rather tired of the sanctimonious attitude which seeks to take upon our shoulders the blame for every crime committed in Europe. If Germany had been left stronger in 1919 she would sooner have been in a position to do what she is doing today”.

Moreover, the British government had genuinely believed in the German claim that it was only the Sudetenland that concerned them, and that Germany was not seeking to dominate Europe. By occupying the Czech part of Czecho-Slovakia, Germany lost all credibility with its claim to be only righting the alleged wrongs of Versailles. Shortly afterwards, false reports spread in mid-March 1939 by the Romanian minister in London, Virgil Tilea, that his country was on the verge of an immediate German attack, led to a dramatic U-turn in British policy of resisting commitments in eastern Europe. Ribbentrop denied correctly that Germany was going to invade [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania), but since his denials were issued in almost identical language to the denials that he had issued in early March, when he denied that anything was being planned against the Czechs, this increased rather than diminished the "Romanian war scare" of March 1939. From the British point of view, it was regarded as highly desirable to keep Romania and its oil out of German hands; since Germany had hardly any natural supplies of oil, the ability of the Royal Navy to successfully impose a blockade represented a British trump card both to deter war, and if necessary, win a war. If Germany were to occupy oil-rich Romania, this would undercut all of the British strategic assumptions based on Germany's need to import oil from the Americas. Since Poland was regarded as the East European state with the most powerful army, it became imperative to tie Poland to Britain as the best way of ensuring Polish support for Romania, since it was the obvious *quid pro quo* that Britain would have to do something for Polish security if the Poles were to be induced to do something for Romanian security. On 31 March 1939, the British Prime Minister Chamberlain announced before the House of Commons the British "guarantee" of Poland, which committed Britain to go to war to defend Polish independence, though pointedly the "guarantee" excluded Polish frontiers. As a result of the "guarantee" of Poland, Hitler began to speak with increasing frequency of a British "encirclement" policy, and used the “encirclement” policy as the excuse for denouncing in a speech before the *Reichstag* on 28 April 1939 the A.G.N.A and the Non-Aggression Pact with Poland.

In late March, Ribbentrop had the German chargé d'affaires in Turkey, [Hans Kroll](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Kroll), start pressuring Turkey into an alliance with Germany. The Turks assured Kroll that they had no objection to Germany making the Balkans their economic sphere of influence, but would regard any move to make the Balkans into a sphere of German political influence as most unwelcome.

In April 1939, when Ribbentrop announced at a secret meeting of the Foreign Office's senior staff that Germany was ending talks with the Poles and was instead going to destroy Poland in an operation late that year, the news was greeted joyfully by those present. [Anti-Polish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Polish_sentiment) feelings had long been rampant in the agency, and so in marked contrast to their cool attitude about attacking Czechoslovakia in 1938, diplomats like Weizsäcker were highly enthusiastic about the prospect of war with Poland in 1939. Professional diplomats like Weizsäcker who had never accepted the legitimacy of Poland, which they saw as an "abomination" created by the Versailles treaty, were whole-hearted in their support of a war to wipe Poland off the map. This degree of unity within the German government with both the diplomats and the military united in their support of Hitler's anti-Polish policy, which stood in contrast to their views the previous year about destroying Czechoslovakia, very much encouraged Hitler and Ribbentrop with their chosen course of action.

In April 1939, Ribbentrop received intelligence that Britain and [Turkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey) were negotiating an alliance intended to keep Germany out of the Balkans. On 23 April 1939 the Turkish Foreign Minister [Şükrü Saracoğlu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9E%C3%BCkr%C3%BC_Saraco%C4%9Flu) told the British Ambassador of his nation's fears of Italian claims of the Mediterranean as [*Mare Nostrum*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mare_Nostrum) and German control of the Balkans, and suggested an Anglo-Soviet-Turkish alliance as the best way of countering the Axis. As the Germans had broken the Turkish diplomatic codes, Ribbentrop was well aware as he warned in a circular to German embassies that Anglo-Turkish talks had gone much further "than what the Turks would care to tell us". Ribbentrop appointed von Papen Germany's ambassador in [Ankara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ankara) with instructions to win Turkey to an alliance with Germany. Ribbentrop had been attempting to appoint Papen as an Ambassador to Turkey since April 1938. His first attempt ended in failure when the Turkish president [Mustafa Kemal Atatürk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustafa_Kemal_Atat%C3%BCrk), who remembered Papen well with considerable distaste from World War I, refused to accept him as Ambassador, complaining in private the nomination of Papen must have been meant as some sort of German sick joke. The German Embassy in Ankara had been vacant ever since the retirement of the previous ambassador [Friedrich von Keller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_von_Keller_(diplomat)) in November 1938, and Ribbentrop was only able to get the Turks to accept Papen as Ambassador when the Turkish Foreign Minister [Şükrü Saracoğlu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9E%C3%BCkr%C3%BC_Saraco%C4%9Flu) complained to Kroll in April 1939 about when the Germans were ever going to send a new ambassador. Papen's attempt to address Turkish fears of Italian expansionism by getting Ribbentrop to have Count [Galeazzo Ciano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galeazzo_Ciano) promise the Turks that they had nothing to fear from Italy backfired when the Turks found the Italo-German effort to be both patronizing and insulting.

Instead of focusing on talking to the Turks, Ribbentrop and Papen became entangled in a feud over Papen's demand that he by-pass Ribbentrop and send his dispatches straight to Hitler. As a former Chancellor, Papen had granted this privilege of by-passing the Foreign Minister while he was Ambassador to Austria. Ribbentrop's friendship with Papen, which went back to 1918, ended over this issue. At the same time, Ribbentrop took to shouting at the Turkish Ambassador in Berlin, Mehemet Hamdi Arpag, as part of the effort to win Turkey over as a German ally. Ribbentrop believed that Turks were so stupid that only by shouting at them could one make them understand. One of the consequences of Ribbentrop's heavy-handed behavior was the signing of the Anglo-Turkish alliance of 12 May 1939.

From early 1939 onwards, Ribbentrop had become the leading advocate within the German government of reaching an understanding with the Soviet Union as the best way of pursuing both the short-term anti-Polish, and long-term anti-British foreign policy goals. Ribbentrop first seems to have considered the idea of a pact with the Soviet Union after an unsuccessful visit to [Warsaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw) in January 1939, when the Poles again refused Ribbentrop's demands about Danzig, the "extra-territorial" roads across the Polish Corridor and the Anti-Comintern Pact. During the [Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact negotiations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop_Pact_negotiations), Ribbentrop was overjoyed by a report from his Ambassador in Moscow, Count [Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Werner_von_der_Schulenburg), of a speech by the Soviet leader [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin) before the 18th Party Congress in March 1939 that was strongly anti-Western, which Schulenburg reported meant that the Soviet Union might be seeking an accord with Germany. Ribbentrop followed up Schulenburg's report by sending Dr. Julius Schnurre of the Foreign Office's trade department to negotiate a German-Soviet economic agreement. At the same time, Ribbentrop's efforts to convert the Anti-Comintern Pact into an anti-British alliance met with considerable hostility from the Japanese over the course of the winter of 1938–39, but with the Italians Ribbentrop enjoyed some apparent success. Because of Japanese opposition to participation in an anti-British alliance, Ribbentrop decided to settle for a bilateral German-Italian anti-British treaty. Ribbentrop's efforts were crowned with success with the signing of the [Pact of Steel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pact_of_Steel) in May 1939, though this was accomplished only by falsely assuring Mussolini that there would be no war for the next three years.

**Pact with the Soviet Union and the outbreak of World War II**



Stalin and Ribbentrop at the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact, 23 August 1939

Ribbentrop played a key role in the conclusion of a Soviet-German [non-aggression pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-aggression_pact), the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov-Ribbentrop_Pact), in 1939, and in the diplomatic action surrounding the attack on Poland. In public, Ribbentrop expressed great fury at the Polish refusal to allow for Danzig's return to the *Reich*, or to grant Polish permission for the "extra-territorial" highways, but since these matters were only intended after March 1939 to be a pretext for German aggression, Ribbentrop always refused in private to allow for any talks between German and Polish diplomats about these matters. It was Ribbentrop's fear that if German-Polish talks did take place, there was the danger that the Poles might back down and agree to the German demands as the Czechoslovaks had done in 1938 under Anglo-French pressure, and thereby deprive the Germans of their excuse for aggression. To further block German-Polish diplomatic talks, Ribbentrop had the German Ambassador to Poland, Count Hans-Adolf von Moltke, recalled, and refused to see the Polish Ambassador, [Józef Lipski](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%B3zef_Lipski). On 25 May 1939, Ribbentrop sent a secret message to Moscow to tell the Soviet Foreign Commissar, [Vyacheslav Molotov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vyacheslav_Molotov), that if Germany attacked Poland "Russia's special interests would be taken into consideration".

Throughout 1939, in private, Hitler always referred to Britain as his main opponent, but portrayed the coming destruction of Poland as a necessary prelude to any war with Britain. Ribbentrop informed Hitler that any war with Poland would last for only 24 hours, and that the British would be so stunned with this display of German power that they would not honor their commitments. Along the same lines, Ribbentrop told the Italian Foreign Minister Count [Galeazzo Ciano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galeazzo_Ciano) on 5 May 1939 "It is certain that within a few months not one Frenchman nor a single Englishman will go to war for Poland"

Ribbentrop supported his analysis of the situation by only showing Hitler diplomatic dispatches that supported his view that neither Britain or France would honor their commitments to Poland. In this, Ribbentrop was particularly supported by the German Ambassador in London, [Herbert von Dirksen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_von_Dirksen), who reported that Chamberlain knew "the social structure of Britain, even the conception of the British Empire, would not survive the chaos of even a victorious war", and so would back down over Poland. Furthermore, Ribbentrop had the German Embassy in London provide translations from pro-appeasement newspapers like the [*Daily Mail*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daily_Mail) and the [*Daily Express*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daily_Express) for Hitler's benefit, which had the effect of making it seem that British public opinion was more strongly against going to war for Poland then was actually the case. The British historian Victor Rothwell wrote that the newspapers that Ribbentrop used to provide his press summaries for Hitler, such as the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*, were out of touch not only with British public opinion, but also with British government policy in regard to Poland. The press summaries Ribbentrop provided were particularly important, as Ribbentrop had managed to convince Hitler that the British government secretly controlled the British press, and just as in Germany, nothing appeared in the British press that the British government did not want to appear. Furthermore, the Germans had broken the British diplomatic codes and were reading the messages between the Foreign Office in London to and from the Embassy in Warsaw. The decrypts showed that there was much tension in Anglo-Polish relations with the British pressuring the Poles to allow Danzig to rejoin the *Reich* and the Poles staunchly resisting all efforts to pressure them into concessions to Germany. On the basis of such decrypts, Hitler and Ribbentrop believed that the British were bluffing with their warnings that they would go to war to defend Polish independence. During the summer of 1939, Ribbentrop sabotaged all efforts at a peaceful solution to the Danzig dispute, leading the American historian [Gerhard Weinberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerhard_Weinberg) to comment that "perhaps Chamberlain's haggard appearance did him more credit than Ribbentrop's beaming smile" as the countdown to a war that would kill millions inexorably gathered pace.

[Neville Chamberlain's European Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neville_Chamberlain%27s_European_Policy) in 1939 was based upon creating a "peace front" of alliances linking Western and eastern European states to serve as a "tripwire" meant to deter any act of German aggression. The new "containment" strategy adopted in March 1939 comprised giving firm warnings to Berlin, increasing the pace of British rearmament and attempting to form an interlocking network of alliances that would block German aggression anywhere in Europe by creating such a formidable deterrence to aggression that Hitler could not rationally chose that option. Underlying the basis of the "containment" of Germany was the so-called "X documents" provided by [Carl Friedrich Goerdeler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Friedrich_Goerdeler) over the course of the winter of 1938–39 which suggested that the German economy, under the strain of massive military spending was on the verge of collapse, and which led British policy-makers to the conclusion that if Hitler could be deterred from war and if his regime was "contained" long enough, then the German economy would collapse, and with it, presumably the Nazi regime. At the same time, British policy-makers were afraid if Hitler were "contained", and faced with a collapsing economy he would commit a desperate "mad dog act" of aggression as a way of lashing out. Hence, the emphasis on pressuring the Poles to allow the return of Danzig to Germany as a way of peacefully resolving the crisis by allowing Hitler to back down without losing face. As part of a dual strategy to avoid war via deterrence and appeasement of Germany, British leaders warned that they would go to war if Germany attacked Poland while at the same time tried to avoid war by holding unofficial talks with such would be peace-makers like the British newspaper proprietor [Lord Kemsley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gomer_Berry,_1st_Viscount_Kemsley), the Swedish businessman [Axel Wenner-Gren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axel_Wenner-Gren) and another Swedish businessmen [Birger Dahlerus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birger_Dahlerus) who attempted to work out the basis for a peaceful return of Danzig.

In May 1939, as part of his efforts to bully Turkey into joining the Axis, Ribbentrop had arranged for the cancellation of the delivery of 60 heavy howitzers from the [Škoda Works](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%A0koda_Works), which the Turks had paid for in advance. The German refusal either to deliver the artillery pieces or refund the 125 million *Reichsmarks* the Turks had paid in advance for them was to be a major strain on German-Turkish relations in 1939, and had the effect of causing Turkey's politically powerful army to resist Ribbentrop's entreaties to join the Axis. As part of the fierce diplomatic competition in [Ankara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ankara) in the spring and summer of 1939 between von Papen on the one hand, and on the other the French Ambassador, [René Massigli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Massigli), and the British Ambassador, Sir [Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hughe_Knatchbull-Hugessen), to win the allegiance of Turkey to either the Axis or the Allies, Ribbentrop suffered a major reversal in July 1939 when Massigli was able to arrange for major French arms shipments to Turkey on credit, to replace the weapons the Germans refused to deliver to the Turks.

In June 1939, [Franco-German relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-German_relations) were strained when the head of the French section of the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*, [Otto Abetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Abetz), was expelled from France following allegations that he had bribed two French newspaper editors to print pro-German articles. Ribbentrop was enraged by Abetz's expulsion, and attacked Count Johannes von Welczeck, the German Ambassador in Paris, over his failure to have the French re-admit Abetz. In July 1939, Ribbentrop's claims about Bonnet's alleged statement of December 1938 were to lead to a lengthy war of words via a series of letters to the French newspapers between Bonnet and Ribbentrop over just what precisely Bonnet had said to Ribbentrop.

On 11 August 1939, Ribbentrop met the Italian Foreign Minister, Count [Galeazzo Ciano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galeazzo_Ciano), and the Italian Ambassador to Germany, Count [Bernardo Attolico](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bernardo_Attolico&action=edit&redlink=1), in [Salzburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salzburg). During that meeting, both Ciano and Attolico were horrified to learn from Ribbentrop that Germany planned to attack Poland that summer, and that the Danzig issue was just a pretext for aggression. When Ciano asked if there was anything Italy could do to broker a Polish-German settlement that would avert a war, he was told by Ribbentrop that "We want war!". Ribbentrop expressed his firmly held belief that neither Britain nor France would go to war for Poland, but if that should occur, he fully expected the Italians to honor the terms of the [Pact of Steel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pact_of_Steel) (which was both an offensive and defensive treaty), and declare war not only on Poland, but on the Western powers if necessary. Ribbentrop told his Italian guests that "the localization of the conflict is certain" and "the probability of victory is infinite". Ribbentrop brushed away Ciano's fears of a general war because "France and England cannot intervene because they are insufficiently prepared militarily and because they have no means of injuring Germany". Ciano complained furiously that Ribbentrop had violated his promise given only that spring, when Italy signed the [Pact of Steel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pact_of_Steel), that there would be no war for the next three years. Ciano said that it was absurd to believe that the *Reich* could attack Poland without triggering a wider war and that now the Italians were left with the choice of either going to war when they needed three more years to rearm or being forced into the humiliation of having to violate the terms of the Pact of Steel by declaring neutrality (which would make the Italians appear cowardly). Ciano complained in his diary that his arguments "had no effect" (*niente da fare*) on Ribbentrop, who simply refused to believe any information that did not fit in with his preconceived notions. Despite Ciano's efforts to persuade Ribbentrop to put off the attack on Poland until 1942, so as to allow the Italians time to get ready for war, Ribbentrop was adamant that Germany had no interest in a diplomatic solution of the Danzig question and only wanted a war to wipe Poland off the map. The Salzburg meeting marked the moment when Ciano's dislike of Ribbentrop was transformed into outright hatred, and of the beginning of his disillusionment with the pro-German foreign policy that he had championed up to that time.

On 21 August 1939, Hitler received a message from Stalin reading "The Soviet Government has instructed me to say they agree to Herr von Ribbentrop's arrival on 23 August". That same day, Hitler ordered German mobilization. The extent that Hitler was influenced by Ribbentrop's advice can be seen in Hitler's orders for a limited mobilization against Poland alone. Weizsäcker recorded in his diary throughout the spring and summer of 1939 repeated statements from Hitler that any German-Polish war would be only a localized conflict and provided that the Soviet Union could be persuaded to stay neutral, there was no danger of a general war. Hitler believed that British policy was based upon securing Soviet support for Poland, which led him to perform a diplomatic U-turn and support Ribbentrop's policy of rapprochement with the Soviet Union as the best way of ensuring a local war. This was especially the case as decrypts showed the British military attaché to Poland arguing that Britain could not save Poland in the event of a German attack, and only Soviet support offered the prospect of Poland holding out.

The signing of the Non-Aggression Pact in Moscow on 23 August 1939 was the crowning achievement of Ribbentrop's career. Ribbentrop flew to Moscow, where, over the course of a thirteen-hour visit, Ribbentrop signed both the Non-Aggression Pact and the secret protocols, which partitioned much of eastern Europe between the Soviets and the Germans. Ribbentrop had only expected to see the Soviet Foreign Commissar [Vyacheslav Molotov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vyacheslav_Molotov), and was most surprised to be holding talks with [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin). During his trip to Moscow, Ribbentrop's talks with Stalin and Molotov proceed very cordially and efficiently with the exception of the question of [Latvia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvia), which Hitler had instructed Ribbentrop to try to claim for Germany. When Stalin claimed Latvia for the Soviet Union, Ribbentrop was forced to telephone Berlin for permission from Hitler to concede Latvia to the Soviets. After finishing his talks with Stalin and Molotov, Ribbentrop, at a dinner with the Soviet leaders, launched into a lengthy diatribe against the British Empire, with frequent interjections of approval from Stalin, and then exchanged toasts with Stalin in honor of German-Soviet friendship. For a brief moment in August 1939, Ribbentrop convinced Hitler that the Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union would cause the fall of the Chamberlain government, and lead to a new British government that would abandon the Poles to their fate. Ribbentrop argued that with Soviet economic support (especially in the form of oil), Germany was now immune to the effects of a British naval blockade, and as such, the British would never take on Germany. On 23 August 1939 at a secret meeting of the *Reich'*s top military leadership at the Berghof, Hitler argued neither Britain nor France would go to war for Poland without the Soviet Union, and fixed "X-Day", the date for the invasion of Poland for 26 August. Hitler added that "My only fear is that at the last moment some *Schweinehund* will make a proposal for mediation". Unlike Hitler, who saw the Non-Aggression Pact as merely a pragmatic device forced on him by circumstances, namely the refusal of Britain or Poland to play the roles Hitler had allocated to them, Ribbentrop regarded the Non-Aggression Pact as integral to his anti-British policy.

The signing of the [Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop_Pact) on 23 August 1939 not only won Germany an informal alliance with the Soviet Union, but also neutralized Anglo-French attempts to win Turkey to the "peace front". The Turks always believed that it was essential to have the Soviet Union as an ally to counter Germany, and the signing of the German-Soviet pact undercut completely the assumptions behind Turkish security policy. The Anglo-French effort to include the Balkans into the "peace front" had always rested on the assumption that the cornerstone of the "peace front" in the Balkans was to be Turkey, the regional super-power. Because of the Balkans were rich in raw materials like iron, zinc and above all oil that could help Germany survive a British blockade, it was viewed as highly important by the Allies to keep German influence in the Balkans to a minimum, hence British efforts to link British promises to support Turkey in the event of an Italian attack in exchange for Turkish promises to help defend Romania from a German attack. British and French leaders believed that the deterrent value of the "peace front" could be increased if Turkey were a member and if the [Turkish Straits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_Straits) were open to Allied ships. This would not only allow the Allies to send over the [Black Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea) troops and supplies to Romania, but also through Romania to Poland.

On 25 August 1939, Ribbentrop's influence with Hitler wavered for a moment when the news reached Berlin of the ratification of the [Anglo-Polish military alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Polish_military_alliance) and a personal message from Mussolini telling Hitler that Italy would dishonor the Pact of Steel if Germany attacked Poland. This was especially damaging to Ribbentrop, as he always assured Hitler that "Italy's attitude is determined by the Rome-Berlin Axis". As a result of the message from Rome and the ratification of the Anglo-Polish treaty, Hitler cancelled the invasion of Poland which was planned for 26 August, and instead ordered it held back until 1 September in order to give Germany some time to break up the unfavorable international alignment. Though Ribbentrop continued to argue that Britain and France were bluffing, both he and Hitler were prepared as a last resort to risk a general war by invading Poland. Because of Ribbentrop's firmly held views that Britain was Germany's most dangerous enemy and that an Anglo-German war was thus inevitable, it scarcely mattered to him when his much desired war with Britain came. The Greek historian Aristotle Kaillis wrote that it was Ribbentrop's influence with Hitler together with his insistence that the Western powers would in the end not go to war for Poland that was the most important reason why Hitler did not cancel [*Fall Weiß*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_Wei%C3%9F_(1939)) all together instead of postponing "X-day" for six days. Ribbentrop told Hitler that his sources showed that Britain would only be militarily prepared to take on Germany at the earliest in 1940 or more probably 1941, so this could only mean that the British were bluffing. Even if the British were serious in their warnings of war, Ribbentrop took the view that since a war with Britain was inevitable, the risk of a war with Britain was an acceptable one and accordingly he argued that Germany should not shy away from such challenges.

On 27 August 1939, Chamberlain sent the following letter to Hitler, which was intended to counteract reports Chamberlain had heard from intelligence sources in Berlin that Ribbentrop had convinced Hitler that the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov-Ribbentrop_Pact) would ensure that Britain would abandon Poland. In his letter to Hitler, Chamberlain wrote:

"Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet Agreement, it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public repeatedly and plainly and which they are determined to fulfil.

It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding.

If the case should arise, they are resolved, and prepared, to employ without delay all the forces at their command, and it is impossible to foresee the end of hostilities once engaged. It would be a dangerous illusion to think that, if war once starts, it will come to an early end even if a success on any one of the several fronts on which it will be engaged should have been secured"

Ribbentrop for his part told Hitler that Chamberlain's letter was just a bluff, and urged his master to call it.



The British Ambassador to Germany, [Sir Nevile Henderson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevile_Henderson), in 1937. Though Henderson was a leading supporter of appeasement, his relations with Ribbentrop were extremely poor throughout his ambassadorship. On the night of 30–31 August 1939, he and Ribbentrop almost came to blows.

On the night of 30–31 August 1939, Ribbentrop had an extremely heated exchange with the British Ambassador, [Sir Nevile Henderson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevile_Henderson), who objected to Ribbentrop's demand, given at about midnight, that if a Polish plenipotentiary did not arrive in Berlin that night to discuss the German "final offer", then the responsibility for the outbreak of war would not rest on the *Reich*. Henderson stated that the terms of the German "final offer" were very reasonable, but argued that Ribbentrop's time limit for Polish acceptance of the "final offer" was most unreasonable, and furthermore, demanded to know why Ribbentrop insisted upon seeing a special Polish plenipotentiary and could not present the "final offer" to [Józef Lipski](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%B3zef_Lipski) or provide a written copy of the "final offer". The Henderson-Ribbentrop meeting became so tense that the two men almost came to blows. The American historian [Gerhard Weinberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerhard_Weinberg) described the Henderson-Ribbentrop meeting in this way:

"When Joachim von Ribbentrop refused to give a copy of the German demands to the British Ambassador [Henderson] at midnight of 30–31 August 1939, the two almost came to blows. Ambassador Henderson, who had long advocated concessions to Germany, recognized that here was a deliberately conceived alibi the German government had prepared for a war it was determined to start. No wonder Henderson was angry; von Ribbentrop on the other hand could see war ahead and went home beaming."

As intended by Ribbentrop, the narrow time limit for acceptance of the "final offer" made it impossible for the British government to contact the Polish government in time about the German offer, let alone for the Poles to arrange for a Polish plenipotentiary envoy to arrive in Berlin that night, thereby allowing Ribbentrop to claim that the Poles had rejected the German "final offer". As it was, a special meeting of the British cabinet called to consider the "final offer", they declined to pass on the message to Warsaw under the grounds this was not a serious proposal on the part of Berlin. The "rejection" of the German proposal was one of the pretexts used for the German aggression against Poland on 1 September 1939. The British historian D.C. Watt wrote "Two hours later, Berlin Radio broadcast the sixteen points, adding that Poland had rejected them. Thanks to Ribbentrop, they had never even seen them". On 31 August, Ribbentrop met with Attolico to tell him that Poland's "rejection" of the "generous" German 16-point peace plan meant that Germany had no interest in Mussolini's offer to call a conference about the status of Danzig. Besides the Polish "rejection" of the German "final offer", the aggression against Poland was justified with the [Gleiwitz incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleiwitz_incident) and other SS-staged incidents on the German-Polish border.

As soon as the news broke in the morning of 1 September 1939 that Germany had invaded Poland, the Italian dictator [Benito Mussolini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benito_Mussolini) launched another desperate peace mediation plan intended to stop the German-Polish war from becoming a world war. Mussolini's motives were in no way altruistic, but he was instead motivated entirely by a wish to escape the self-imposed trap of the Pact of Steel, which had obligated Italy either to go to war at a time when the country was entirely unprepared or to suffer the humiliation of having to declare neutrality, which make him appear cowardly. The French Foreign Minister [Georges Bonnet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Bonnet) acting on his own initiative told the Italian Ambassador to France, Baron Raffaele Guariglia, that France had accepted Mussolini's peace plan. Bonnet had [Havas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havas) issued a statement at midnight on 1 September saying: “The French government has today, as have several other Governments, received an Italian proposal looking to the resolution of Europe's difficulties. After due consideration, the French government has given a "positive response". Though the French and the Italians were serious about Mussolini's peace plan, which called for an immediate ceasefire and a four-power conference *à la* Munich to consider Poland's borders, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax stated that unless the Germans withdrew from Poland immediately, then Britain would not attend the proposed conference. Ribbentrop finally scuttled Mussolini's peace plan by stating that Germany had utterly no interest in a ceasefire, in a withdrawal from Poland and in attending the proposed peace conference.

When on the morning of 3 September 1939 Chamberlain followed through with his threat of a British declaration of war if Germany attacked Poland, a visibly shocked Hitler asked Ribbentrop "Now what?", a question to which Ribbentrop had no answer except to state that there would be a "similar message" forthcoming from the French Ambassador Robert Coulondre, who arrived later that afternoon to present the French declaration of war. Weizsäcker later recalled that "On 3 Sept., when the British and French declared war, Hitler was surprised, after all, and was to begin with, at a loss". The British historian [Richard Overy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Overy) wrote that what Hitler thought he was starting in September 1939 was only a local war between Germany and Poland, and his decision to do so was largely because he vastly underestimated the risks of a general war. In part due to Ribbentrop's influence, it has been often observed that Hitler went to war in 1939 with the country he wanted as his ally – namely the United Kingdom – as his enemy, and the country he wanted as his enemy – namely the Soviet Union – as his ally.

After the outbreak of World War II, Ribbentrop spent most of the Polish campaign travelling with Hitler. On 27 September 1939, Ribbentrop made a second visit to Moscow, where at meetings with the Soviet Foreign Commissar [Vyacheslav Molotov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vyacheslav_Molotov) and [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin), he was forced to agree to revising the Secret Protocols of the Non-Aggression Pact in the Soviet Union's favor, most notably agreeing to Stalin's demand that [Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuania) go to the Soviet Union. The imposition of the British blockade had made the *Reich* highly dependent upon Soviet economic support, which placed Stalin in a strong negotiating position with Ribbentrop. On 1 March 1940, Ribbentrop received [Sumner Welles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumner_Welles), the American Under-Secretary of State, who was on a peace mission for president [Franklin D. Roosevelt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin_D._Roosevelt), and did his best to abuse his American guest. Welles asked Ribbentrop under what terms Germany might be willing to negotiate a compromise peace, before the [Phony War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoney_War) became a real war. Ribbentrop told Welles that only a total German victory "could give us the peace we want". Welles reported to Roosevelt that Ribbentrop had a "completely closed and very stupid mind". On 10 March 1940, Ribbentrop visited Rome where he met Mussolini, who promised him that Italy would soon enter the war. For his one-day Italian trip, Ribbentrop was accompanied by a staff of thirty-five, including a gymnastics coach, a masseur, a doctor, two hairdressers, plus various legal and economic experts from the Foreign Office. After the Italo-German summit at the Brenner Pass on 18 March 1940, which was attended by Hitler and Mussolini, Count Ciano wrote in his diary: "Everyone in Rome dislikes Ribbentrop". On 7 May 1940, Ribbentrop founded a new section of the Foreign Office, the *Abteilung Deutschland* (Department of Internal German Affairs), under [Martin Luther](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_(diplomat)), to which was assigned the responsibility for all anti-Semitic affairs. On 10 May 1940, Ribbentrop summoned the Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourg ambassadors to present them with notes justifying the German invasion of their countries, several hours after the Germans had invaded those nations. Much to Ribbentrop's fury, someone leaked the plans for the German invasion to the Dutch Embassy in Berlin, which led Ribbentrop to devote the next several months to conducting an unsuccessful investigation into who leaked the news. This investigation tore apart the agency as colleagues were encouraged to denounce each other.

In early June 1940, when Mussolini informed Hitler that he at long last would enter the war on 10 June 1940, Hitler was most dismissive, in private calling Mussolini a cowardly opportunist who broke the terms of the Pact of Steel in September 1939 when the going looked rough, and was only entering the war in June 1940 after it was clear that France was beaten and it appeared that Britain would soon make peace. Ribbentrop, though he shared Hitler's assessment of the Italians, nonetheless welcomed Italy coming into war partially because it seemed to affirm the importance of the Pact of Steel, which Ribbentrop had negotiated and partly because with Italy now an ally, the Foreign Office had more to do. Ribbentrop championed the so-called [Madagascar Plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_Plan) in June 1940 to deport all of Europe's Jews to [Madagascar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar) after the presumed imminent defeat of Britain.

**Relations with wartime allies**

Ribbentrop, a [Francophile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francophile), argued that Germany should allow [Vichy France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vichy_France) a limited degree of independence within a binding Franco-German partnership. To this end, Ribbentrop appointed a colleague, [Otto Abetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Abetz), from the *Dienststelle* Ambassador to France with instructions to promote the political career of [Pierre Laval](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Laval), who Ribbentrop had decided was the French politician most favorable to Germany. The Foreign Office's influence in France varied, as there were many other agencies competing for power there. But in general, from late 1943 to mid-1944, the Foreign Office was second only to the SS in terms of power in France.

From the latter half of 1937, Ribbentrop had championed the idea of an alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan that would partition the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) between them. After signing the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, Ribbentrop expanded on this idea for an Axis alliance to include the Soviet Union to form a [Eurasian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasia) bloc that would destroy maritime states such as Britain. The German historian [Klaus Hildebrand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaus_Hildebrand) argued that besides Hitler's foreign policy program, there were three other factions within the Nazi Party who had alternative foreign policy programs, whom Hildebrand dubbed the agrarians, the revolutionary socialists, and the Wilhelmine Imperialists. Another German diplomatic historian, Wolfgang Michalka argued that there was a fourth alternative Nazi foreign policy program, and that was Ribbentrop's concept of a Euro-Asiatic bloc comprising the four totalitarian states of Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy and Japan. Unlike the other factions, Ribbentrop's foreign policy program was the only one that Hitler allowed to be executed during the years 1939–41, though it was more due to the temporary bankruptcy of Hitler's own foreign policy program that he had laid down in [*Mein Kampf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mein_Kampf) and [*Zweites Buch*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zweites_Buch) following the failure to achieve an alliance with Britain, than to a genuine change of mind. Ribbentrop's foreign policy conceptions differed from Hitler's in that Ribbentrop's concept of international relations owed more to the traditional Wilhelmine [*Machtpolitik*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_politics) than to Hitler's racist and Social Darwinist vision of different "races" locked in a merciless and endless struggle over [*Lebensraum*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebensraum). The different foreign-policy conceptions held by Hitler and Ribbentrop were illustrated in their reaction to the [Fall of Singapore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Singapore) in 1942: Ribbentrop wanted this great British defeat to be a day of celebration in Germany, whereas Hitler forbade any celebrations on the grounds that Singapore represented a sad day for the principles of [white supremacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_supremacy). Another area of difference was that Ribbentrop had an obsessive hatred for Britain – which he saw as the main enemy – and the Soviet Union as important ally in the anti-British struggle; whereas Hitler saw the alliance with the Soviet Union as only tactical, and was nowhere as anti-British as his Foreign Minister.

In August 1940, Ribbentrop oversaw the [Second Vienna Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Vienna_Award), which saw about 40% of [Transylvania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transylvania) region of Romania returned to Hungary. The decision to award so much of Romania to the Hungarians was Hitler's, as Ribbentrop himself spent most of the Vienna conference loudly attacking the Hungarian delegation for their coolness towards attacking Czechoslovakia in 1938 and then demanding more than their fair share of the spoils. When Ribbentrop finally got around to announcing his decision, the Hungarian delegation who had expected Ribbentrop to rule in favor of Romania broke out in cheers while the Romanian foreign minister [Mihail Manoilescu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihail_Manoilescu) fainted. Without perhaps realizing it, Ribbentrop by placing Romania within the German sphere of influence undermined the main rationale for co-operation with the Soviet Union, since control of Romanian oil meant that Germany was no longer dependent upon Soviet oil.

In the fall of 1940, Ribbentrop made a sustained but unsuccessful effort to have Spain enter the war on the Axis side. During his talks with the Spanish foreign minister, [Ramón Serrano Súñer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram%C3%B3n_Serrano_S%C3%BA%C3%B1er), Ribbentrop affronted Súñer with his tactless behavior, especially his suggestion that Spain cede the [Canary Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canary_Islands) to Germany. An angry Súñer replied that he would rather see the Canaries sink into the Atlantic then cede an inch of Spanish territory. An area where Ribbentrop enjoyed more success arose in September 1940, when he had the Far Eastern agent of the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*, Dr. [Heinrich Georg Stahmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Georg_Stahmer), start negotiations with the Japanese foreign minister, [Yōsuke Matsuoka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y%C5%8Dsuke_Matsuoka), for an [anti-American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Americanism) alliance (the German Ambassador to Japan, General [Eugen Ott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugen_Ott_(ambassador)), was excluded from the talks on Ribbentrop's orders). The end result of these talks was the signing in Berlin on 27 September 1940 of the [Tripartite Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripartite_Pact) by Ribbentrop, Count Ciano, and Japanese Ambassador [Saburo Kurusu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saburo_Kurusu).

In October 1940, *Gauleiters* Josef Bürckel and Robert Wagner oversaw the almost total expulsion of the Jews into unoccupied France; they deported them from the parts of Alsace-Lorraine that had been annexed that summer to the *Reich*, but also from their *Gaues* as well. Ribbentrop treated in a "most dilatory fashion" the ensuing complaints by the Vichy French government over the expulsions.

In November 1940, during the visit of the Soviet Foreign Commissar [Vyacheslav Molotov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vyacheslav_Molotov) to Berlin, Ribbentrop tried hard to get the Soviet Union to sign the [Tripartite Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripartite_Pact). Ribbentrop argued that the Soviets and Germans shared a common enemy in the form of the British Empire, and as such, it was in the best interests of the Kremlin to enter the war on the Axis side. He proposed that, after the defeat of Britain, they could carve up the territory in the following way: the Soviet Union would have India and the Middle East, Italy the Mediterranean area, Japan the British possessions in the Far East (presuming of course that Japan would enter the war), and Germany would take central Africa and Britain. Molotov was open to the idea of the Soviet Union entering the war on the Axis side, but demanded as the price of entry into the war that Germany recognize Finland, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Hungary and Yugoslavia as within the exclusive Soviet sphere of influence. Ribbentrop's efforts to persuade Molotov to abandon his demands about Europe as the price of a Soviet alliance with Germany were entirely unsuccessful. After Molotov left Berlin, the Soviet Union indicated that it wished to sign the Tripartite Pact and enter the war on the Axis side. Though Ribbentrop was all for taking Stalin's offer, Hitler by this point had decided that he wanted to attack the Soviet Union. The [German–Soviet Axis talks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German%E2%80%93Soviet_Axis_talks) led nowhere.

As World War II continued, Ribbentrop's once-friendly relations with the [SS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS) became increasingly strained. In January 1941, the nadir of SS-*Auswärtiges Amt* relations was reached when the [Iron Guard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Guard) attempted a [coup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legionnaires%27_rebellion_and_Bucharest_pogrom) in Romania; Ribbentrop supported Marshal [Ion Antonescu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ion_Antonescu)'s government and [Himmler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himmler) supported the Iron Guard. In the aftermath of the failed coup in [Bucharest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bucharest), the Foreign Office assembled evidence that the [SD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicherheitsdienst) had backed the coup, which led to Ribbentrop sharply restricting the powers of the SD police attachés. Since October 1939 they had operated largely independently of the German embassies at which they had been stationed. In the spring of 1941, Ribbentrop appointed an assemblage of [SA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sturmabteilung) men to German embassies in eastern Europe, with [Manfred von Killinger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manfred_von_Killinger) going to [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania), [Siegfried Kasche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siegfried_Kasche) to [Croatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatia), Adolf Beckerle to [Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria), Dietrich von Jagow to Hungary, and [Hans Ludin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanns_Ludin) to [Slovakia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovakia). The major qualifications of all these men, none of whom had previously held a diplomatic position before, were that they were close friends of Luther, and a way to split the [SS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schutzstaffel) (the traditional rivalry between the SS and SA was still running strong).

In March 1941, Japan's Foreign Minister [Yōsuke Matsuoka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y%C5%8Dsuke_Matsuoka), a Germanophile, visited Berlin. On 29 March 1941, during a conversation with Matsuoka, Ribbentrop as instructed by Hitler told the Japanese nothing about the upcoming [Operation Barbarossa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barbarossa), as Hitler believed that he could defeat the Soviet Union on his own and preferred that the Japanese attack Britain instead. Hitler did not wish for any information that might lead the Japanese into attacking the Soviet Union to reach their ears. Ribbentrop tried to convince Matsuoka to urge the government in Tokyo to attack the great British naval base at Singapore, claiming the [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy) was too weak to retaliate due to its involvement in the Battle of the Atlantic. Matsuoka responded that preparations to occupy Singapore were under way.



[Poglavnik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poglavnik) [Ante Pavelić](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ante_Paveli%C4%87) of the [Independent State of Croatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_State_of_Croatia) and Joachim von Ribbentrop in Salzburg, 6 June 1941

In the winter of 1940–41, Ribbentrop strongly pressured [Yugoslavia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslavia) to sign the Tripartite Pact, despite advice from the German Legation in [Belgrade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgrade) that such an action would probably lead to the overthrow of [Crown Prince Paul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Paul_of_Yugoslavia), the Yugoslav Regent. Ribbentrop's intention was to gain transit rights through that country, which would allow the Germans to invade Greece. On 25 March 1941, Yugoslavia reluctantly signed the Tripartite Pact; the next day the Yugoslav military overthrew Prince Paul in a bloodless coup. When Hitler ordered invasion of Yugoslavia, Ribbentrop was opposed, because he thought the Foreign Office was likely to be excluded from ruling the occupied Yugoslavia. As Hitler was displeased with Ribbentrop over his opposition to the invasion, the minister took to his bed for the next couple of days. When Ribbentrop recovered, he sought a chance to increase his agency's influence by giving [Croatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_State_of_Croatia) independence. Ribbentrop chose the [Ustaša](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usta%C5%A1a) to rule Croatia. He had [Edmund Veesenmayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Veesenmayer) successfully conclude talks in April 1941 with General [Slavko Kvaternik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavko_Kvaternik) of the Ustaša on having his party rule Croatia after the German invasion. Reflecting his displeasure with the German Legation in Belgrade, which had advised against pushing Yugoslavia to sign the Tripartite Pact, when Germany [bombed Belgrade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Belgrade_in_World_War_II) on 6 April 1941, Ribbentrop had refused to have the German Legation withdrawn in advance. They were left to survive the fire-bombing as best they could.

Ribbentrop liked and admired [Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin), and was against the attack on the [USSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) in 1941. He passed a word to a Soviet diplomat: "Please tell Stalin I was against this war, and that I know it will bring great misfortune to Germany." When it came to time for Ribbentrop to present the German declaration of war on 22 June 1941 to the Soviet Ambassador, General [Vladimir Dekanozov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Dekanozov), [Paul Schmidt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Schmidt_(translator)) described the scene:

"It is just before four on the morning of Sunday, 22 June 1941 in the office of the Foreign Minister. He is expecting the Soviet Ambassador, Dekanozov, who had been phoning the Minister since early Saturday. Dekanozov had an urgent message from Moscow. He had called every two hours, but was told the Minister was away from the city. At two on Sunday morning, von Ribbentrop finally responded to the calls. Dekanozov was told that von Ribbentrop wished to meet with him at once. An appointment was made for 4 am  
  
Von Ribbentrop is nervous, walking up and down from one end of his large office to the other, like a caged animal, while saying over and over, "The *Führer* is absolutely right. We must attack Russia, or they will surely attack us!" Is he reassuring himself? Is he justifying the ruination of his crowning diplomatic achievement? Now he has to destroy it "because that is the *Führer'*s wish".

When Dekanozov finally appeared, Ribbentrop read out a short statement saying that the Reich had been forced into "military countermeasures" because of an alleged Soviet plan to attack Germany in July 1941. Ribbentrop did not present a declaration of war to General Dekanozov, confining himself to reading the statement about Germany being forced to take "military countermeasures".



Ribbentrop with Marshal [Ion Antonescu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ion_Antonescu), in 1943

Despite his opposition to [Operation Barbarossa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barbarossa) and a preference to concentrate against Britain, on 28 June 1941, Ribbentrop began a sustained effort, without consulting Hitler, to have Japan attack the Soviet Union. But Ribbentrop's motives in seeking to have Japan enter the war were more anti-British then anti-Soviet. On 10 July 1941 Ribbentrop ordered General [Eugen Ott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugen_Ott_(ambassador)), the German Ambassador to Japan to:

"Go on with your efforts to bring about the earliest possible participation of Japan in the war against Russia…The natural goal must be, as before, to bring about the meeting of Germany and Japan on the [Trans-Siberian Railroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Siberian_Railroad) before winter sets in. With the collapse of Russia, the position of the Tripartite Powers in the world will be so gigantic that the question of the collapse of England, that is, the absolute annihilation of the British Isles, will only be a question of time. An America completely isolated from the rest of the world would then be faced with the seizure of those of the remaining positions of the British Empire important to the Tripartite Powers".

As part of his efforts to bring Japan into Barbarossa, on 1 July 1941, Ribbentrop had Germany break off diplomatic relations with [Chiang Kai-shek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Kai-shek) and recognized the Japanese-puppet government of [Wang Jingwei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Jingwei) as China's legitimate rulers. Ribbentrop hoped that recognizing Wang would be seen as a coup that might add to the prestige of the pro-German Japanese Foreign Minister [Yōsuke Matsuoka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y%C5%8Dsuke_Matsuoka), who was opposed to opening American-Japanese talks. Despite Ribbentrop's best efforts, Matsuoka was sacked as Foreign Minister later in July 1941, and the Japanese-American talks began.

After the war, Ribbentrop was found to have had culpability in [the Holocaust](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust) based on his persuading the leaders of [satellite countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satellite_nation) of the Third Reich to deport Jews to the Nazi extermination camps. In August 1941, when the question of whether to deport foreign Jews living in Germany arose, Ribbentrop argued against deportation as a way of maximizing the Foreign Office's influence. To deport foreign Jews living in the Reich, Ribbentrop had Luther negotiate agreements with the governments of Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia to allow Jews holding citizenship of those states to be deported. In September 1941, the Reich Plenipotentiary for [Serbia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbia), Felix Benzler, reported to Ribbentrop that the SS had arrested 8,000 Serbian Jews, whom they were planning to execute en masse. He asked for permission to try to stop the massacre. Ribbentrop assigned the question to Luther, who ordered Benzler to co-operate fully in the massacre.

In the fall of 1941, Ribbentrop worked for the failure of the Japanese-American talks in Washington and for Japan to attack the United States. In October 1941 Ribbentrop ordered General Ott to start applying pressure on the Japanese to attack the Americans as soon as possible. Ribbentrop argued to Hitler that a war between the United States and Germany was inevitable given the extent of American aid to Britain and the increasingly frequent "incidents" in the North Atlantic between U-boats and American warships guarding convoys to Britain. He said that having such a war start with a Japanese attack on the United States was the best way to begin it. Ribbentrop told Hitler that because of his four years in Canada and the United States before 1914, he was an expert on all things American; he thought that the United States was not a serious military power. On 4 December 1941, the Japanese Ambassador General [Hiroshi Ōshima](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroshi_%C5%8Cshima) told Ribbentrop that Japan was on the verge of war with the United States; in turn, Ribbentrop promised that Germany would join the war against the Americans. On 7 December 1941, Ribbentrop was jubilant at the news of the Japanese [attack on Pearl Harbor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack_on_Pearl_Harbor), and did his utmost to support declaring war on the United States. He delivered the declaration to the American *Chargé d'Affaires* [Leland B. Morris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leland_B._Morris) on 11 December 1941. In the winter and spring of 1942 following American entry into war, the US successfully pressured all of the Latin American states, except for Argentina and Chile, to declare war on Germany. Ribbentrop considered taking declarations of war from such small states as Costa Rica and Ecuador to be deeply humiliating, and he refused to see any of the Latin American ambassadors. He had Weizsäcker accept their declarations of war.

In April 1942, as part of a diplomatic counterpart to [Case Blue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_Blue), Ribbentrop had assembled in [Hotel Adlon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel_Adlon) in Berlin a collection of anti-Soviet émigrés from the [Caucasus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasus), intending to have them declared leaders of governments in exile. From Ribbentrop's point of view, this had the dual benefit of ensuring popular support for the German Army as it advanced into the Caucasus and of ensuring that it was the Foreign Office that ruled the Caucasus once the Germans occupied the area. [Alfred Rosenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Rosenberg), the German Minister of the East, saw this as an intrusion into his area of authority, and told Hitler that the émigrés at the Hotel Adlon were "a nest of Allied agents". To Ribbentrop's disappointment, Hitler sided with Rosenberg.

Despite the often fierce rivalry with the SS, the Foreign Office played a key role in arranging the deportations of Jews to the death camps from France (1942–44), Hungary (1944–45), [Slovakia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Slovak_Republic), Italy (after 1943), and the [Balkans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans). Ribbentrop assigned all of the [Holocaust](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocaust)-related work to [Martin Luther](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_(diplomat)), an old crony from the *Dienststelle* who represented the Foreign Ministry at the [Wannsee Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wannsee_Conference). In 1942, Ambassador [Otto Abetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Abetz) secured the deportation of 25,000 French Jews, and Ambassador [Hans Ludin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanns_Ludin) secured the deportation of 50,000 Slovak Jews to the death camps. Only once, in August 1942, did Ribbentrop try to restrict the deportations, but only because of jurisdictional disputes with the SS. Ribbentrop halted deportations from [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania) and [Croatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatia); in the case of the former, he was insulted because the SS were negotiating with the Romanians directly, and in the case of the latter, he learned that the SS and Luther had pressured the Italians in their zone of occupation to deport their Jews without first informing Ribbentrop. He had required being kept updated on all developments in Italo-German relations. In September 1942, after a meeting with Hitler, who was unhappy with his Foreign Minister's actions, Ribbentrop changed course and ordered the deportations to be resumed immediately.

In November 1942, following [Operation Torch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Torch), Ribbentrop met with [Pierre Laval](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Laval) in Munich. He presented Laval with an ultimatum for Germany's occupation of the French unoccupied zone and Tunisia. Ribbentrop tried unsuccessfully to arrange for the Vichy French troops in North Africa to be formally placed under German command. In December 1942, he met with the Italian Foreign Minister Count [Galeazzo Ciano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galeazzo_Ciano), who carried Mussolini's request urging the Germans to go on the defensive in the Soviet Union in order to focus on attacking North Africa. Ribbentrop joined with Hitler in belittling Italy's war effort. During the same meeting in East Prussia with Count Ciano, [Pierre Laval](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Laval) arrived. He quickly agreed to Hitler's and Ribbentrop's demands that he place French police under the command of more radical anti-Semitics and transport hundreds of thousands of French workers to labor in Germany's war industry.

Another low point in Ribbentrop's relations with the SS occurred in February 1943, when the SD backed a Luther-led internal *putsch* to oust Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister. Luther had become estranged from Ribbentrop because Frau Ribbentrop treated Luther as a household servant. She pushed her husband into ordering an investigation into allegations of corruption on Luther's part. Luther's *putsch* failed largely because Himmler decided that a Foreign Ministry headed by Luther would be a more dangerous opponent than the Ribbentrop version. At the last minute, he withdrew his support from Luther. In *putsch'*s aftermath, Luther was sent to [Sachsenhausen concentration camp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sachsenhausen_concentration_camp).

In April 1943, during a summit meeting with Hungary's Admiral Horthy, Ribbentrop strongly pressed the Hungarians to deport their Jewish population to the death camps, but was unsuccessful. During their meeting, Ribbentrop declared "the Jews must either be exterminated or taken to the concentration camps. There is no other possibility".

**Declining influence**



Joachim von Ribbentrop detention report and [mugshots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mugshot).

As the war went on, Ribbentrop's influence waned. Because most of the world was at war with Germany, the Foreign Ministry's importance diminished as diplomacy was extremely limited. By January 1944, Germany had diplomatic relations with only Argentina, Ireland, Vichy France, the [Salo Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salo_Republic) in Italy, Occupied Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Switzerland, the Holy See, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Thailand, Japan, and the Japanese puppet states of [Manchukuo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchukuo) and the [Wang Ching-wei régime of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Ching-wei_r%C3%A9gime). Later that year, Argentina and Turkey severed ties with Germany; Finland, Romania, and Bulgaria all joined the Allies and declared war on the Reich.

Hitler found Ribbentrop increasingly tiresome and avoided him. The Foreign Minister's pleas for permission to seek peace with at least some of Germany's enemies—the Soviet Union in particular—played a role in their estrangement. As his influence declined, Ribbentrop spent his time feuding with other Nazi leaders over control of anti-Semitic policies to curry Hitler's favor.

Ribbentrop suffered a major blow when many old Foreign Office diplomats participated in the [20 July 1944](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20_July_plot) [*putsch*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Putsch) and assassination attempt on Hitler. Ribbentrop had not known of the plot, but the participation of so many current and former Foreign Ministry members reflected badly on him. Hitler felt that Ribbentrop's "bloated administration" prevented him from keeping proper tabs on his diplomats' activities. Ribbentrop worked closely with the [SS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schutzstaffel), with which he had reconciled, to purge the Foreign Office of those involved in the *putsch*.

On 20 April 1945, Ribbentrop attended Hitler's 56th birthday party in Berlin Three days later, Ribbentrop attempted to meet with Hitler, but was rejected with the explanation the Führer had more important things to do.

The following month, after Germany's surrender, Ribbentrop was arrested by Sergeant Jacques Goffinet, a Belgian citizen who had joined the Belgian SAS and was working with British forces near Hamburg. Found with him was a rambling letter addressed to the British Prime Minister "[Vincent Churchill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill)" criticizing British foreign policy for [anti-German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-German_sentiment) [bias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bias), blaming the British for the Soviet occupation of eastern Germany, and for the advance of "[Bolshevism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevism)" into central Europe.

**Trial and execution**



17 October 1946 newsreel of [Nuremberg Trials](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_Trials) sentencing



Joachim von Ribbentrop's body after his execution.

Ribbentrop was a defendant at the [Nuremberg Trials](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_Trials). The Allies' [International Military Tribunal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Military_Tribunal) convicted him on all four counts: crimes against peace, deliberately planning a war of aggression, war crimes, and [crimes against humanity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_against_humanity). According to the judgment, Ribbentrop was actively involved in planning the invasion of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. He was closely involved in the "[final solution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final_solution)"; as early as 1942 he had ordered German diplomats in Axis countries to hasten the process of sending Jews to [death camps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extermination_camp) in the east. He supported the lynching of Allied airmen shot down over Germany, and helped to cover up the 1945 murder of Major-General [Gustave Mesny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Mesny), a French officer being held as a prisoner of war. He was held directly responsible for atrocities that took place in Denmark and Vichy France, since the top officials in those two occupied countries reported to him. Ribbentrop claimed that Hitler made all of the important decisions, and that he had been deceived by Hitler's repeated claims that he only wanted peace. The Tribunal rejected this argument, saying that given how closely involved Ribbentrop was with the execution of the war, "he could not have remained unaware of the aggressive nature of Hitler's actions." Even in prison, Ribbentrop remained loyal to Hitler: "Even with all I know, if in this cell Hitler should come to me and say 'Do this!', I would still do it."

[Gustave Gilbert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Gilbert), an American Army psychologist, was allowed to examine the Nazi leaders who stood trial. Among other tests, he administered a German version of the [Wechsler-Bellevue IQ test](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wechsler_Adult_Intelligence_Scale). Joachim von Ribbentrop scored 129, the 10th highest among the Nazi leaders tested. At one point during the trial, a US Army interpreter asked [Baron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baron) [Ernst von Weizsäcker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_von_Weizs%C3%A4cker) how Hitler could have promoted Ribbentrop to high office. Weizsäcker responded, "Hitler never noticed Ribbentrop's babbling because Hitler always did all the talking."

On 16 October 1946 Ribbentrop became the first convicted political appointee to be [hanged](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging). (Göring had committed suicide before his scheduled execution.) He was escorted up the 13 steps of the gallows and asked if he had any final words. He said: "God protect Germany. God have mercy on my soul. My final wish is that Germany should recover her unity and that, for the sake of peace, there should be understanding between East and West. I wish peace to the world." Nuremberg Prison Commandant [Burton C. Andrus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burton_C._Andrus) later recalled that, immediately before the hood was placed over his head, Ribbentrop turned to the prison's Lutheran chaplain and whispered, "I'll see you again." Members of the US Army cremated Ribbentrop’s remains.