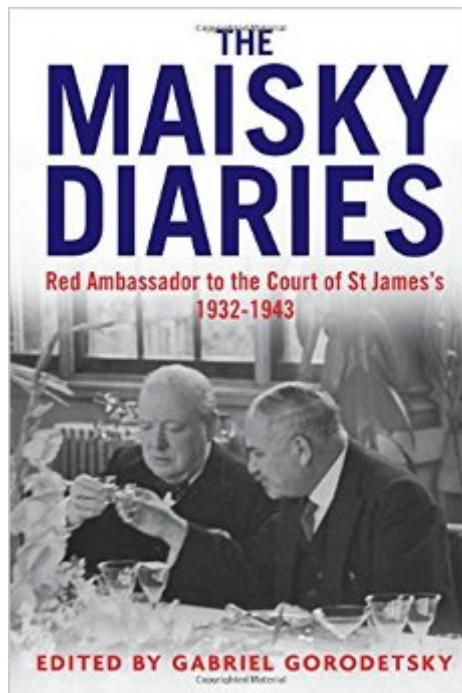


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# The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador To The Court Of St James's, 1932-1943



## Synopsis

Highlights of the extraordinary wartime diaries of Ivan Maisky, Soviet ambassador to London. The terror and purges of Stalin's Russia in the 1930s discouraged Soviet officials from leaving documentary records let alone keeping personal diaries. A remarkable exception is the unique diary assiduously kept by Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to London between 1932 and 1943. This selection from Maisky's diary, never before published in English, grippingly documents Britain's drift to war during the 1930s, appeasement in the Munich era, negotiations leading to the signature of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Churchill's rise to power, the German invasion of Russia, and the intense debate over the opening of the second front. Maisky was distinguished by his great sociability and access to the key players in British public life. Among his range of regular contacts were politicians (including Churchill, Chamberlain, Eden, and Halifax), press barons (Beaverbrook), ambassadors (Joseph Kennedy), intellectuals (Keynes, Sidney and Beatrice Webb), writers (George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells), and indeed royalty. His diary further reveals the role personal rivalries within the Kremlin played in the formulation of Soviet policy at the time. Scrupulously edited and checked against a vast range of Russian and Western archival evidence, this extraordinary narrative diary offers a fascinating revision of the events surrounding the Second World War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

By Larry E. Holmes, October 14, 2015 The Maisky diaries, written by the Soviet Union's

ambassador to London from 1932 to 1943, is obligatory reading for anyone interested in Soviet and British politics, diplomacy leading up to the outbreak of World War II, and the relationship between the USSR and Great Britain during the war. Gabriel Gorodetsky, a fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, and emeritus professor of history at Tel Aviv University, has masterfully selected for this publication about one-fourth of the extended diary kept by Maisky. The author of acclaimed studies of Soviet foreign policy, Gorodetsky has provided throughout this volume critical context for developments covered by Maisky and for the ambassador's interpretation of them. We learn from Maisky's account much about the political and diplomatic world in which he moved. The diaries provide new insights and information on the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the German invasion of the USSR, and the formation of the Grand Alliance. We also learn much of value about the personality of those with whom Maisky so frequently met. Maisky cultivated relations with many important people, including Churchill, Eden, Beaverbrook, Lloyd George, Joseph Kennedy (the US ambassador to London from 1938 to 1940), and Beatrice Webb. The diaries thereby emphasize over and over again the significance of the individual's knowledge, emotions, and idiosyncrasies. And we discover how Maisky's own behavior defied the stereotype of the alternately aloof, boorish, then aggressive Soviet diplomat. The diaries also dismantle the notion that Soviet officials were devoid of humanity. Maisky's telling of what he experienced and Gorodetsky's presentation of that story frequently make for dramatic reading. This book will be of interest to specialists and non-specialists alike.

Twenty-two years in the making, Gabriel Gorodetsky's latest tour de force is not to be missed. As articulated in the uniformly positive reviews to hit news stands over the last few weeks, *The Maisky Diaries* manages to do no less than "rewrite some history which we thought we knew." Maisky's first hand account of the all important years 1932-1943 in the Court of St. James - by turns delightful, revealing, and shocking - complemented by Gorodetsky's characteristically comprehensive research and analysis and incisive commentary, is a quintessential page turner and will leave you wanting more.

Gabriel Gorodetsky has done an enormous public service in editing the diaries of Ivan Maisky, Stalin's ambassador to London from 1932-43. The diaries bring to life the interwar diplomacy of Britain and Russia as they attempt to deal with the rise of Nazi Germany. It will be referenced in all future books on foreign policy of the interwar years. However, for the lay reader it is a very long book (633 pages in the print edition). Maisky working under Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim

Litvinov became one of the architects of Moscow's policy of collective security to contain the Nazi menace. Unfortunately that policy failed and after Munich when Stalin turned towards Germany to make a separate peace. He highlights the degree of mistrust both Russia and Britain had for each other. Each feared, correctly as it turned out, that the other would make a separate deal with Hitler. What the diaries highlight is that Maisky was among the first of the modern ambassadors who dealt with more than official government to government relations. He established a broad range of contacts outside official channels. He was very close to the then backbencher Winston Churchill and Lord Beaverbrook. Those two contacts would become extremely important after the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1940. He was also close to such Bloomsbury group personages as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the Shaws and H.G. Wells. On an official basis he was very close to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, perhaps too close in the sense he probably learned stuff that would normally have been more secure. Through his Marxist eyes he sees the rot of the British upper classes and their infatuation with appeasement and the Nazi sympathizers among more than a few of them. However, he fails to see the contradiction of his high living and numerous shopping trips when compared to the privation the Russian people were going through in 1930s Russia. Although not directly mentioned in the diaries, he must have been living under constant stress as Stalin's purge enveloped all of the old Bolsheviks and Mensheviks who were in positions of authority. This was exacerbated by the replacement of Litvinov with Molotov in 1939 which completely recast the Soviet diplomacy that was in place since 1920. Simply put the professional diplomats were moved out and replaced with party apparatchiks.

This work "a condensation of a three volume complete edition" has been reviewed in all the British press with such acclaim that I had to look for myself. The reviews are justified. Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London, writes fluently not only about the diplomacy of the 1930s and the Second World War but also as the ultimate outsider (a Russian and a Communist) observing the British upper class in its incompetency and idiotic prejudices as it struggled to play a role in international affairs. Churchill, and the British public, saved Britain (and, for a while, the world) from the worst consequences of the politics of the British elites. This was a deadly serious matter to the Soviet Union, and Maisky was a keen observer of everything that took place in London during his 11 years there. Gabriel Gorodetsky has done a marvelous job in bringing this material to the English-language reading public with exactly the right editorial touch. Gorodetsky provides the necessary contexts and explanations while always allowing Maisky to speak for himself. This is a marvelous read and a real contribution to the historical writing on the 1930s and the war years.

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